

Gleanings of Major Robert Thompson **(also known as Major Robert Thomson)**

Namesake of Thompson CT

Assembled December 25, 2016
Thompson CT

Editor: Joseph Iamartino

On Behalf of the Thompson Historical Society

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Foreward by Joseph Iamartino:

In Book I, Professor Alan Thomson has assembled a remarkable biography of Major Robert Thompson. The Major was involved in many of the principal events in one of the most dramatic centuries in recorded history. However, the information about Robert Thompson had to be found, piece by piece, like a jigsaw puzzle scattered after a tornado. In our Internet age, it is easy to “Google up” information on a person but Prof. Thomson’s effort came the old fashioned way, laboriously finding and then reading the dusty texts, with one clue leading to another, assembling piece upon piece of a puzzle.

The challenge for readers is to understand that many elements of the life of such a complex man as Robert Thompson, with activities in the American colonies, on the European continent, even in India, remain hidden to us even with Professor Thomson’s insights. It is up to us to assemble the story knowing there are huge gaps but, at least we now have a chance of understanding his story thanks to Professor Thomson’s labor of love.

My son Christian, who was attending college in the UK at the time, and I visited Professor Thomson in London when Alan so generously donated his text to the Thompson Historical Society. I had caught a terrible infection and wanted nothing more than to go to the nearest hospital and throw myself at any doctor who would take my carcass. My son Christian insisted that this was a chance of a lifetime to meet Professor Thomson and that I could hold out a bit more. Not sure which lifetime he was referring to, his or the one that was likely nearing its end near the Thames River that day, I was half-carried to the meeting and once there, thoroughly enjoyed myself discussing the Major’s life with Alan and Christian. I am sure I infected half of London with whatever disease I had carried with me from China. I did end up at the hospital with pneumonia but, I had the priceless compact disk containing the Professor’s text in my pocket.

Finally, I would like to explain the structure of this book. Book I is the Prof. Alan Thomson text in its entirety. Book II is a collection of articles written by me or others clarifying some of the Major Robert Thompson story. There has been no attempt to harmonize any of the articles in Book II with the text in Book I. Some of the articles pull from similar sources. Book I even points to certain elements in the articles in Book II, but we have been careful to avoid a circular reference problem. While I have attempted to clarify any confusing sections, this document needs more scholarly work in the future to better flesh out the real Major Robert Thompson. May some researcher decide to do so!

I am sure the Major is very pleased to be remembered by the town or people who carry his name to this day.

Christmas Day - December 25, 2016

Joseph Iamartino

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Robert Thompson 1622 -1694

Bestride three worlds: London, New England, and the East Indies

By Alan Thomson

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Robert Thompson 1622 -1694 bestride three worlds: London, New England, and the East Indies

Forward

A reader of this book might ask why study the life of the fifth son of a minor country gentleman from Hertfordshire, UK, of whom few have heard except those who live in the town of Thompson Connecticut and who have seen and remembered a programme about the ancestors of the actor Kevin Whately? One answer is that he, like the eponymous hero Forrest Gump, happened to be there at key moments in History. For example he was in Boston Massachusetts in the first few years of its existence; he fought in the English Civil War; he knew Oliver Cromwell and attended his funeral; he met the British King Charles II and negotiated with him on behalf of the East India Company; he and other Company members founded modern Mumbai when they planned and established the fort and port at Bombay; he and members of the political elites of Massachusetts and Connecticut helped expand those colonies by engaging in speculative deals in Indian land; and he and other members of his family helped bring about the Glorious Revolution both in England and in the American Colonies.

An academic researcher might ask some other key questions to which the reader might want to find answers. For example: what is significant about his life and achievements; what contribution did he make to the history of Britain, The East India Company and the American colonies; what do his life and activities reveal about the nature, ideas and relationships generated between the American colonies and the British Government; and what does an analysis of his activities reveal about other people with whom he came in contact: the bureaucrats, the speculators, the nonconformist clerics, the international traders, merchants, politicians and even the Kings of England? Further questions also arise such as: does knowledge of him help to explain events the causes of which we would otherwise not know? Could some of his activities be seen as morally reprehensible today whereas at the time they seemed normal and acceptable? And finally what were his failings as well as his achievements, and was he in any sense typical of his age?

I hope in this book to answer some of the questions and to link together his activities across three continents and two oceans and to see what kind of impact he had on the last three quarters of the 17th century and to explain why a small town in the north east corner of Connecticut, which he never visited, was named after him.

Introduction

In the middle of the 17th century, it would normally have been difficult for a fifth son of a minor landed gentleman from a village in Hertfordshire in England to make his way in the world. He would have inherited little if any property, money or prospects, and the most he might have hoped for was marriage into a wealthy family. Not so Robert Thompson, who came to bestride three worlds, that of Cromwellian and Restoration London, the East India Company and the developing colonies of New England. How did he do this and what risks did he take and what commitments did he make to become an influential member of the post civil war non-conformist community and a major land speculator in North America? One answer is family. His eldest brother was Maurice Thomson, international entrepreneur, trading interloper and by 1658 Governor of the reorganized

East India Company. Another brother George was MP for Lambeth in the 1640s and '50s who provided an opening in naval administration for his youngest sibling. A third brother William was MP for London at the Restoration, thus easing the transition for his brothers, who had supported the Republican regimes and Protectorates of the 1650s. A second answer was the colonial 'big bang', the opportunities that arose across the world in the second half of the 17th century, not only for opening up trade across the Indian Ocean but also for acquiring land overseas and establishing colonies in the Caribbean and in the North East of the North American continent.

Historians on both sides of the Atlantic have rightly focused their attention on Maurice Thomson, as the quintessential merchant interloper and international entrepreneur of the mid 17th century, and ever since Robert Brenner's seminal work *Merchants and Revolution*¹, Maurice has taken centre stage. However Maurice had four younger brothers, one Paul, died young and, of the others, George made a name for himself domestically in the Commonwealth, and William after the Restoration, but the youngest, Robert, has been neglected. Eighteen years Maurice's junior, Robert's career covered nearly 55 years from his emigration to Boston in the late 1630s to his death in 1694. Returning to England by 1642 he fought for Parliament in the First Civil War, rising to the rank of Major by 1645, a title by which he was known for the rest of his life. He always signed his surname without a 'p' as did Maurice, but his brothers and his contemporaries and the later founders of Thompson, Connecticut, whose town was named after him, often inserted it and it was spelt as such in the register of baptisms. As spelling was not standardized until the next century it did not matter.

He was involved in Maurice's *Additional Sea Adventure* to Ireland before the start of the Civil War in England, became a Commissioner for the Navy by 1649, the year the *New England Company* was founded, of which he later became Governor. He was active in the Guinea trade, then the East India Company, rising to be Deputy Governor, to a number of Governors, including his elder brother William. From the Restoration he bought up property around Boston and later speculated in a variety of lands schemes in New England and Pennsylvania, acting as arbiter in disputes between the colonies over their boundaries. He not only helped spread the gospel among the Indians, but also helped shape the boundaries of the English colonies on the east coast of North America, as well as being their friend in London during the traumatic days of the late 1680s and early 1690s, when they lost their charters and were forcibly united under Governor Andros. He is a fascinating example of the youngest son who used family connections to carve out his own career in the period of the colonial 'big bang' of the second half of the 17th century.

Chapter 1 England and New England and back again

The Hertfordshire Origins of the Thomson family

The family from which he came had relatively humble origins. His grandfather Maurice's ancestors were said, by the heralds in their visitations, to have 'come out of the North',² which

¹ Brenner, R, *Merchants & Revolution: commercial change, political conflict and London overseas traders, 1550-1653*, (Cambridge, 1993)

² Metcalfe, WC, (ed.) *The Visitations of Hertfordshire*, (1886) 97-8; Howard, JJ, (ed.) *The Visitations of London 1633-4*, Vol. II, (1883) 282; Armytage, GJ, (ed.) *A Visitation of the County of Kent begun 1663 and finished 1668*, (1906) 164

could have meant anywhere from Lincolnshire to Dundee, but the latter is more likely given the predominance of the surname in that region of Scotland. Maurice senior, his grandfather, was a successful yeoman farmer* and tenant of the Cecil family at Cheshunt, in the Lea Valley in Hertfordshire, where his father was born. In the 1570s Maurice senior acted as an agent for the Gresham family of Tickenote near Stamford in Lincolnshire, obtaining the wardship of Francis Wilkinson heir of William Wilkinson of Boulton upon Derre, Yorks. and a lease of the land during his minority.³ In 1594 John Gydney, maltman, son of Robert Gydney of Cheshunt, maltman, granted to Maurice all the four acre croft called Millrace Field.⁴ He probably also held the manor of Baas in Cheshunt from the Cecils, as, after his death, his son, Robert, is listed as holding it from the first earl of Salisbury.⁵ It appears that he was accumulating property and income through his connections with William Cecil, Lord Burghley first minister of Queen Elizabeth I, whose mansion was at Theobalds in Cheshunt and whose patronage extended to the Court of Wards and the area around Stamford in Lincolnshire.⁶

Maurice senior had at least four children including Robert's father, also Robert, baptized 10 December 1570, Mary baptized 1567, William (1575) and Walter (baptized 1577, died 1578).⁷ Maurice senior himself may have been descended from one of the following who held land in Cheshunt between 1532 and 1549, Christopher, John or William Thomson. However he could also have been descended from Robert Thomson of Hoddesdon End, Great Amwell, who was recorded by the vicar of the parish, when he was buried on 10 July 1618, as being "the most antient of our inhabitants of Amwell, a man aged above an hundred years." This Robert's wife may well have been the Elizabeth Thomson, who died 9 years later, aged over 80, "being one of the most antient inhabitants of Amwell in Hoddesdon."⁸ The alternate naming of Robert and Maurice from one generation to the next would support this as would the evidence from the Subsidy Roll* for Great Amwell, for 1545, when Robert Thomson paid £1-1d and the Feet of Fines* which listed Robert Thomson as holding a messuage* in Amwell in 1569 and two messuages and land in Hoddesdon and Broxbourne in 1571.⁹

Robert's grandmother, Katherine Harvey (buried at Cheshunt 22 November 1620), came from the parish of Watton-at-Stone, between the towns Hertford and Stevenage, and may have been descended from William Harvey, who in 1552 held lands in Watton and neighbouring Benington, or was possibly the daughter of a former parson, George Harvey, who had died in 1571, as she was literate, complaining that Robert Cecil had not found a lucrative post for Robert's father, Robert Senior. He had been the godson of Robert Cecil, son of Lord Burleigh, who was made first earl of Salisbury by King James I of England, whom he served as first minister. By 1606 Robert Thomson senior had served Salisbury for seventeen years and Katherine was particularly concerned about

³ The National Archives England (Henceforth TNA) SP46/58 ff. 244, 265, 275

⁴ Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (Henceforth HALS) Misc. I: 1095 Grant Gydney to Thomson 1594

⁵ Hatfield House Archives: Accounts 113/14

⁶ Wallace T. MacCaffrey, 'Cecil, William, first Baron Burghley (1520/21–1598)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* –(Henceforth *NewDNB*)

⁷ HALS D/P29/1/1 Cheshunt Parish Register 1559-1610

⁸ HALS D/EIn M6, M7, M9 Manor of Cheshunt St Andrews Le Mote: Court Rolls 1532, 1548, 1570; M10 Rental of 1545; Doree, SG, *The parish register and tithing book of Thomas Hassall of Amwell*, (Hertford, 1989) 99, 115

⁹ Brigg W (ed.) *The Herts. Genealogist and Antiquary*, Vol. 1, (Harpenden, 1895) 268, Vol. 2 35, 80

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unlicensed printers who produced Catholic books, which were printed abroad then sold in England. That there were problems of a black market in books by the end of the sixteenth century and over the sale of books by drapers, rather than by stationers, is clear from research by FR and GD Johnson, so Katherine's request for a job for Robert to investigate this scandal was not just a money-making scheme.¹⁰ By this time Robert senior resided at a house called *Harveys* in Watton High Street and he and John Halfhide of Watton, father of his wife Elizabeth, (baptized in Watton 20 December 1579), both held lands from the local landowning family, the Botelers of Watton Woodhall, as well as holding some land in their own right. John Halfhide had been admitted tenant to a cottage and two acres of meadow in the court rolls of Watton Woodhall Manor in 1535 and was listed as a yeoman on 6 December 1575.¹¹ Robert Senior and Elizabeth were married at Watton on 26 September 1597, and his grandmother Dennis (Denise) Halfhide died the following January. John died in 1602, and in 1603, Sir Philip Boteler, Lord of the manor, granted the tenancy of the farm, house and garden called *Harveys* in Watton Village Street to Robert Thomson senior. This was presumably property originally held by the ancestors of Robert's mother, as a relative John Harvey also held land from the Botelers.¹² Robert Senior always styled himself 'gent' but was probably only just in that category as he appeared to have no heraldic arms and was called to perform a very ordinary role as a member of a local jury at Bengeo, near Hertford, to inquire into the death of Robert Swan.¹³

Robert senior had perhaps not altogether been a law-abiding young man. On 11 January 1602, Richard Kympton, the bailiff of the Hundred* of Broadwater, in which the parish of Watton lay, was directed by the sheriff, Thomas Bowles Esq., to arrest Robert and his wife on a charge of felony. A writ had been taken out at Westminster by John Stratford and his wife Anne against them, and though they had been arrested on 1 January and taken into custody by the bailiff, they and others had assaulted him and escaped and refused to obey the warrant, beating and wounding him. Robert may have had support from the Cecils, as later in May, although they were fined 20d; the writ was deleted from the file.¹⁴ By then Robert Senior already had two daughters (Marie baptized 21 January 1599 and Elizabeth baptized 30 September 1602) and Maurice was born in 1604. Subsequently Robert senior with a growing family: George baptized 12 April 1607; Denise on 14 March 1609; Paul on 25 March 1611; William on 21 March 1613, and Anna 23 January 1620; was unlikely to have been able to live off his rental income alone, so probably also acted as a local attorney, though his legal training has not been located. It is possible that he was the Robert Thompson who had been employed by the city of London to search out illegal weights and measures in 1611 and who, according to a letter of Sir Francis Bacon had not received much recompense in

¹⁰ HALS D/P118/1/1 Watton at Stone Parish Register; D/P 29/1/1 Cheshunt Parish Register; G Dyfnalt Owen (ed.) *Historical Manuscripts Commission* (henceforth *HMC*), *Salisbury (Cecil) Mss*, Vol. XXIV, (1976) 108-9; Brigg *The Herts. Genealogist*, Vol. 1 209; Johnson, FR, 'Printers 'Copy Books' and the black market in the Elizabethan book trade', *The Library*, 5th Ser. 1, n2, (Sept 1946) 97-105; Johnson, GD, 'The Stationers versus the Drapers: control of the press in the late sixteenth century', *The Library*, 6th Ser. 10, 1, (March 1988) 1-17.

¹¹ HALS D/EAS 3230-1 Estate papers of the Abel Smith family

¹² HALS D/P118/1/1 Watton at Stone Parish Register; HALS D/EAS 4221-2: Court Roll of the Manor of Woodhall 28/4/1603

¹³ Cockburn, JS, (ed.) *Calendar of Assize Records: Hertfordshire Indictments* (1975) 76

¹⁴ HALS HAT/SR 14 ff 31, 33, 122; 38 f 86 Hertford Quarter Sessions January & May 1602
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1617.¹⁵ A 'Robert Thomson, attorney' was drowned in the River Lea at the neighbouring town of Ware in 1648, and as he had already ceased to hold parochial office as churchwarden in 1636 in Watton, and his burial is not recorded in the Watton register, he may then have moved to Ware.¹⁶

Emigration to the New World

His father's relative poverty and large family may well have been the reason why Robert's elder brothers and one sister Mary emigrated to Virginia before he was born. Mary married the influential early colonizer, Captain William Tucker, who had helped transport Maurice to Virginia in 1617, when he was barely 13. Tucker became notorious in 1622 when he poisoned a group of Powhatan Indians who had come to parley, following conflict with the colonists.¹⁷ Maurice prospered, rapidly acquiring ships, a tobacco plantation and establishing trading links along the east coast from Virginia to Maine. Robert was baptized on 21 February 1622 in the parish church at Watton at Stone, but it is not known where he went to school. His elder brother William had been to Merchant Taylors, but by the time Robert was born, there were three local grammar schools to choose from, one each at Hertford (Richard Hale), Ware and Stevenage (Thomas Alleyn), and it is possible that he either attended one of those or shared a private tutor with another local gentry family. It is possible that he was the 11 year old boy who matriculated Sizar at Magdalene College Cambridge in 1633 and obtained his BA in 1637. By 1639, when Robert had emigrated to Boston, Maurice was, by modern standards, a multi-millionaire, having infiltrated a variety of trades in Africa, the Caribbean and Canada. It is possible that Robert was established in Boston by his elder brother to act as his agent or partner in Massachusetts. In the notebook of Thomas Lechford, a lawyer in Boston, he referred on a number of occasions to Maurice, with whom he had dealings. In a letter to his wife in England he referred to his partner in the fishing trade and how they were to deal with Maurice and that she was to send him a letter, and Maurice would send her the money before she joined her husband in Massachusetts. Maurice had already been engaged in trading supplies up and down the east coast of the newly emerging colonies and had attempted to establish a fishery at Cape Anne, north of Boston in 1639. Edward Gibbons of Boston and Mrs Elizabeth Glover of Cambridge agreed to sell their shares in the ship the *Planter* to Maurice via Thomas Hawkins, shipwright of Dorchester, who confirmed the sale on 22 February 1641. A month earlier, Robert had leased a twenty ton lighter for £16 a year to Joseph Armitage of Lynn, Innholder, Robert being then described as a merchant.¹⁸

A young man of 17 would have been unlikely to have found the ready cash to buy the Old Meeting House in Boston, which a 67 year old former deacon claimed in 1660 that Robert had

¹⁵ TNA 'Weights and measures', Analytical index to the series of records known as the Remembrancia: 1579-1664 (1878), 562-564.

¹⁶ HALS D/P116/1/1: Ware Parish Register; D/P118/1/1 Watton at Stone Parish Register; 3/1/1 Churchwardens Accounts 1586-1656

¹⁷ Troy O Bickham, Tucker, William (b. c.1589 d. Before 1640), *NewDNB*

¹⁸ Hale, EE, *Note-book kept by Thomas Lechford Esq., lawyer in Boston, Massachusetts Bay June 27 1638 to 29 July 1641*, (Cambridge, 1885) 112-3, 374, 386, 387-8; Shurtleff NB (ed.) *Records of Massachusetts, I, 1628-41: Records of the Governor of Massachusetts Bay in New England* (Boston MA, 1853) 256; Henning, BD, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1660-1690*, 3 Vols. (1983) Vol. III, 555-6; Venn J & JA, (eds.) *Alumni Cantabrigienses to 1900 Pt. I*, 4 Vols. (Cambridge 1922-7) I, 227

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bought in 1639, from the then church elders of the First Church of Christ. The property was situated on the main street (later State Street) where the Town House was built and was 66 feet long by 26 feet broad and adjoined the land previously held by Thomas Leverett, one of the elders of the church. Robert paid £160 for it and it was still in his possession in 1660.¹⁹ Maurice probably therefore provided the cash. Robert remained in Boston until at least late 1641 as, at a quarter court held there in January, the differences between him and Mr William Tynge were referred to others to arbitrate,²⁰ and in the records of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County Massachusetts, there is a lease dated 25 October 1641 given by John Humfrey of Lynn to Mr Increase Nowell of his farm and house, which was witnessed by Robert Thomson and John Bulkley, indicating that Robert left Boston after that date.²¹

Apart from Massachusetts, Robert also had interests in Connecticut. George Fenwick wrote to Sir Thomas Barrington on 10 October 1642 about his late brother's property in Saybrooke, Connecticut. In the letter he said 'Robert Thomson, Maurice Thomson's brother is to give you an account of what concerns the business.' This confirms not only that Robert had returned, or was returning to, England at this time, but may also have developed property interests in the new colony of Connecticut, in which he later certainly had influence. On 24 May 1643 Fenwick wrote again to Barrington from Saybrooke via Boston, about the Irish Adventure which he said 'is wholly in Mr Maurice Thomson's or his brother, Robert Thomson's, hand. He then referred to debts that had arisen in Connecticut and 'Maurice was the merchant that ordered all and sent over what he thought fit to his brother Robert, and he sold and received all.' Robert therefore seems also to have acted as Maurice's agent in building up supplies for the new colonists in Connecticut, some of whom, like Samuel Stone, came from their home county of Hertfordshire.²²

Return to England

Some genealogists have speculated that before 1642 Robert had married the sister of Governor Edward Hopkins, as he refers in his will to his good friend Robert Thomson etc...²³ However there is no firm foundation for this story, and even if he had married at a young age, his wife must have died by 1646 when he married Frances Chambers in the Church of St Dunstons in the East, Stepney, where Maurice was by then an influential member of the local vestry and a trier* of the Ninth London Classis*.²⁴ The basis of Robert's friendship with Hopkins was probably from a later date, when they were fellow naval commissioners under the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s. What is clear is that by September 1640 Maurice had returned to London, and was

¹⁹Hassam JT, (ed.) *Suffolk Deeds*, 12 Vols., (Boston MA 1880-1902) Vol. III, (Boston MA, 1880) 386-7; *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, Vol. 52 (Boston MA, 1898) 441

²⁰Noble, J, (ed.) *Court of Assistants Record 1630-41 Colony of Massachusetts Bay 1630-1692*, II, 1630-1644 (Boston 1904) 104

²¹Anon, *Records and files of the Quarterly Court of Essex County, Massachusetts*, III, (Salem MA, 1913) 8-9

²²Anon, *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society*, Vol. XXIV, (Hertford, CT, 1932) pp 1-3, 4-5; for Stone see Tom Webster, 'Stone, Samuel (bap. 1602?, d. 1663)', *NewDNB*

²³Savage J, *A Genealogical Dictionary of the first settlers of New England*, Vol. 4, (Repr. Baltimore, MD, 1977) 287-8; Waters, HF, *Genealogical Gleanings in England*, 2 Vols. (Boston, MA, 1901)

²⁴TNA SP16/492/83 Subscriptions from St Dunstons in the East towards the £30,000 loan; *The Journals of the House of Lords 1628-1666*. Vols. IV – IX of Series (nd) (Henceforth LJ) 7, 613-6 : Ordinance to appoint the Tryers for the Elders of the Classes of London

responsible for taking the City of London's petition to the King, Charles I, at York. Although not active in the field, he became a member of the Honourable Artillery Company and in January 1642 was appointed to the London Militia Committee.²⁵ George, who had also established a plantation in Virginia, had become a lieutenant in the local militia there and a representative for Elizabeth City in the Virginia House of Burgesses, and, on his return to England, used his military experience to become a captain in the Earl of Bedford's Parliamentary regiment.²⁶ William also re-crossed the Atlantic and became a captain in a foot regiment of the London Trained Band*.²⁷ Robert seems to have followed William's example as he was recorded as being an ensign* in the White Trained Band which joined General Skippon's new parliamentary army under Colonel George Langham.²⁸

The Irish Expedition

However, before the outbreak of the Civil War in England, all four Thomson brothers were involved in organizing or participating in a military and naval expedition to Ireland, to start putting down the Irish rebellion which had broken out in the autumn of 1641. Maurice invested money and ships, and Robert at least £100. Hugh Peter's account of the *Additional Sea Adventure to Ireland* as the expedition was called, lists the members of the Committee of fifteen merchants who organized the expedition among whom were Maurice, George and William. Also the commanders of the fleet were listed, including the Rear Admiral, Captain Thompson of the Good-hope, and another Captain referred to as "Captaine Thompson the younger." The former was probably Richard Thompson (no close relation) and Robert who was barely twenty, would have fitted the description of the latter. The chairman of the Committee was Sir Nicholas Crispe and Maurice was treasurer for the expedition, both he and George having subscribed considerable funds for the voyage. Hugh Peter reported in his pamphlet an incident as follows on 7 July 1642: "The next day we had the winde west, and west and by North; much winde we lost part of our fleet, viz. Captain Richardson, and Captaine Thompson the younger." Then on 11 July they arrived at Kinsale and "there we found Captaine Zacahary, Richardson, and young Thompson of our fleet".²⁹

This adventure, which set sail on 29 June and returned to England on 29 September, had been privately subscribed and involved ships attacking towns and garrisons of the Catholic Irish Confederates, and relieving the Protestant strongholds that were being besieged. On their return, the army and ships that had been sent became involved in the domestic English conflict, and the subscribers hoped to be repaid in both plunder and Irish land, to be confiscated from the Irish rebels

²⁵ Pearl, V, *London and the outbreak of the Puritan Revolution: City Government and national politics 1625-1643*, (Oxford, 1961) 174; Greaves R & Zaller RL, *The biographical dictionary of British radicals in the seventeenth century. Vol.3, P-Z*, (1984) 233-5

²⁶ McIlwaine, HR, (ed.) *Minutes of the council and general Court of Colonial Virginia*, (2nd Ed. 1979) 85, 156, 193; McCartney, MW, (ed.) *Virginia immigrants and adventurers: A biographical dictionary*, (Baltimore MD, 2007) 689-90; Peacock, E, *The army lists of the Roundheads and Cavaliers*, (1863) 49; Alan Thomson, 'Thomson, George (bap. 1607, d. 1691)', *NewDNB*

²⁷ Henning, BD, *House of Commons 1660-1690, Vol. III*, 555-6

²⁸ Nagel, N, 'A great bouncing at everyman's door: The struggle for London's militia in 1642', in Porter, S, (ed.) *London and the Civil War*, (1996) 81.

²⁹ Peters, Hugh, *A true relation of the passages of Gods providence in a voyage for Ireland*, (London 1642); Bottigheimer, KS, *English Money and Irish Land: The Adventurers in the Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland*, (Oxford, 1971) Appendix A

when the land had been conquered. It is not surprising therefore that both Maurice and Robert by the 1650s secured titles to various acres of Irish land. Private enterprise and land speculation involving the confiscation of land from those against whom the godly had fought, was to be repeated again when Robert benefitted from the confiscation of Indian land following King Philip's and King William's War in New England in the 1670s and '80s.

The Civil War in England

Back in England, Robert was early on employed to seize Royalists in the West Country which he reported to the House of Commons on 21 October 1642. It was said he had "done good service for the Parliament in Somersetshire" and had with much difficulty and danger seized "Sir Edward Radgar, Sir Edward Berkly and certain others of those that were the principal incendiaries of discord in that county." Later in 1643 he gave evidence in the case brought by the local parliamentary sequestration committee against Sir John Boteler of Watton Woodhall, his father's landlord. From the evidence given by Robert, it seems he had been in Sir John's house the year before in about September 1642, when he had been invited for dinner. The words of Robert recorded by the clerk to the local Sequestration Committee* were: "He heard Sir John Butler speake in defence of the Commission of Array but it being about twelvemonth since he remembreth not what perticuler words he spake; and that he spake in a fighting manner of the militia, but knoweth not in perticuler what words he used." Robert, who had clearly been unsure of what Sir John had said, was careful not to condemn him outright, though the Committee were able to sequester his property at Watton on the grounds that he had tried to implement the Royalist Commission of Array* and seek a pardon from the King for Hertfordshire as a whole.³⁰

In March 1644, Sir William Balfour, Major-General of Horse under the Parliamentary General Sir William Waller, was at Petersfield in Hampshire with 4000 cavalry and dragoons. He then occupied Newbury in Berkshire and, from there, Robert and Captains Dalbier and Turner were sent towards Basing House with about 200 horses, where, in a confrontation, they killed twenty royalists and took supplies destined for Basing House, a Royalist stronghold. Twelve days later this London brigade approached West Mean in Hampshire, five miles from Alresford and nine from Winchester. Hopton's royalists had occupied West Mean and, in a skirmish, had been forced to abandon it, but then, with rumours of 600 royalists approaching, the parliamentarians withdrew. After a few shots were fired "Captain Robert Thompson bravely led a forlorn hope* of musketeers and secured the possession of West Mean for Waller." Four days later at the battle of Cheriton, Robert's brother, Colonel George, had a leg amputated after it was smashed by a cannon ball.³¹

The daring deed at West Mean may have led to Robert's promotion from Captain to Major, the title he used for the rest of his life. Robert was also keen not only to use the money of Catholics and delinquents* (such as Boteler who had supported the King) or those who had fought against Parliament, but also to help wounded soldiers with it. Three days before the decisive Battle of Naseby in June 1645 he and six others petitioned the House of Commons of the English parliament

³⁰ TNA: SP23/82 ff775-782: The charges against Sir John Boteler 29/8/1643-12/9/1643, transcribed in Thomson, A, (ed.) *The impact of the first civil War on Hertfordshire 1642-1647*, (Hertford, 2007) 153

³¹ Goodwin, GN, *The Civil War in Hampshire 1642-1645*, (2nd Ed. Alresford, 1973) 170, 176, 180-1
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that half of the income from the estates of Catholics and delinquents be employed “for sick and maimed soldiers in and about London, and for the payment of the apothecaries and surgeons employed in healing them for their provisions and pains.” This was one of a number of occasions when Robert showed sympathy for those less well off in society.³²

Robert was deployed towards the end of the First Civil War in rounding up the remains of the Royalist forces. On 13 November 1645, Robert was listed, with his brother Maurice, on a committee at Goldsmith’s Hall in London to deal with those who had deserted the Royalist army and had come to the capital. The following April he was appointed to a commission to execute martial law on those royalists who had violated the peace terms. It was designed to arrest any such men, set up courts martial, appoint judge advocates and provost-m Marshals and hear cases against them.³³ By March 1648 he and Robert Boyle, later one of the founders of the Royal Society, and fellow supporter of spreading the gospel among the Indians, were petitioning parliament as creditors of Lord Goring to try and get their money back, before this former royalist general was punished.³⁴ On 3 July 1648, during the Second Civil War, a warrant was issued to Robert to seize the house and arms of Mr James Harrison ‘lately in arms against Parliament’ in the service of the earl of Holland at Windsor. This may well be a son of Sir John Harrison of Balls Park Hertford, whose sons took different sides in the conflict, and whom Robert may well have known before the war.³⁵ Robert’s exploits as a member of the parliamentary army were therefore quite dramatic and involved considerable risk. He also had come to the attention of the Parliamentary regime both as a naval captain and as an army major.

Robert as Naval Commissioner

As well as Robert performing military and political roles on behalf of parliament during the Civil Wars, following the Second Civil War in 1648 and the execution of the King, Charles I in 1649, Robert’s naval expertise was recognized when the new republican government promoted him to be a navy commissioner. This may have been aided and abetted by his brother George, who had become the recruiter MP for Southwark in 1647 and who was active on a number of important parliamentary committees.³⁶ Maurice was also active behind the scenes in government on the Merchants Committee, the High Court of Justice and other extra-parliamentary bodies such as Trinity House.³⁷ Although never an MP, Maurice, partly through his brother George, but also through his own connections, interests and wealth, was able to influence events in dramatic ways, which also involved Robert.

³² Green, MAE, (ed.) *Calendar of the Proceedings of the Committee for the Advance of Money, 1642-1656*, 3 Vols. (1888) 1, 45

³³ Firth CH & Rait RS (eds.) *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum 1642-1660* 3 Vols. (1911) (Henceforth F&R, A&O), Vol. 1, 802, 842

³⁴ *LJ*, 7, 700-1; 8, 249-53; *The Journals of the House of Commons 1640-1666*, Vols. 1-VIII of series (1803) (Henceforth *CJ*) VI, 158-60; F&R, A&O, I, 802-3, 842-5;

³⁵ Bruce J, Green MAE and Hamilton WD, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic Series 1623-1665*, 45 Vols. (1858-97) Vol. 1648-9, 188 (Henceforth *CSPD*)

³⁶ Alan Thomson, ‘George Thomson’ *NewDNB*

³⁷ Greaves & Zaller, *Biographical Dictionary* 234

Once the republic had been declared, Robert's activities therefore switched from the military to the naval. Both Robert and his brother Maurice were on what came to be called 'The Committee of Merchants', set up to investigate and regulate the navy. This was authorized on 16 January by an act "Touching the regulating of the officers of the navy and customs", which appointed the committee, which, with the commissioners of the Navy who had not been disabled by disloyalty, were to meet in Mincing Lane in London and form a new commission to put the act into force. They were to remove from their place any disloyal officials at whatever level in the naval administration, require an inventory of naval provisions, examine the naval and customs accounts, receive the accounts from the treasurer of the navy and provide merchant ships for convoy duty.³⁸

John Holland and William Willoughby were two members of this committee who replaced two of the Commissioners. A third former Commissioner, Captain Roger Tweedy, was not confirmed, so on 16 February he was replaced by Robert. One of the first jobs he had to perform was to get an agreement with foresters over the disposal of the rest of the wood in the royal forests, once the main tree trunks had been cut for naval use. This proved to be far from simple because of local custom and the rights claimed by local people living in the forests. In May he also had a tricky situation as he and his fellow commissioners had felt it was necessary to increase the wages of the rope-makers at Woolwich dockyard by 2d a day. The Admiralty Committee objected, but the commissioners claimed they had "cause to resent that we are so misunderstood as to be inhibited by you to do our duty. We never intended to attract any odium upon you much less to innovate any increase of charge to the state, unless of great necessity, as this is."

Part of the argument Robert and his fellows used was that they were protecting the welfare of the 'poorer sort' in society, an interesting argument at this early stage in the life of the republic, given the activity of the Diggers* at St George's Hill in Surrey the month before, and the suppression of the Leveller* uprising at Burford four days later. The situation was partly the result of the heavy rains the previous summer, which had ruined the harvest, resulting in dramatic increases in bread prices and widespread hunger. The Commissioners needed rope-makers and other skilled craftsmen to keep the navy supplied, and may have been affected both by Christian conscience as well as the by the more egalitarian mood of the times. They said the Admiralty Committee should "move the parliament, whose tender regard to poor men well deserving of the commonwealth we are fully assured is such that they will not suffer them to want sustenance in these necessitous times; especially seeing that in the sweat of those men's brows consists, not only their particular living but also that of the republic; and the charge is not particular, but common also, wherein we bear a share with the rest. What interpretation soever may be made of our actions by those that have the supervision of them, we shall not fail to represent the grievances of those under our charge when they represent them to us, and doubt not but they will receive a candid acceptation from you."³⁹

On 17 April 1649, Robert and Maurice were appointed to a commission for the sale of prize goods, seized by the navy at sea. Robert, John Holland, Thomas Smyth and William Willoughby had been working on estimates for the whole of the charges and expenses of the navy for the following year when they presented them to the House of Commons in early June. Their estimates came to

³⁸ F&R, A&O, 1257-60

³⁹ CSPD 1648-9, 96, 133

£283,000 of which £160,000 was to come from the customs revenue. The Commons in discussing these estimates decided the rest would come from the excise*, and they extended the duty to include foreign salt. Robert and his colleagues produced detailed estimates for the cost of keeping ships, 3000 men, with their supplies, food, wages, stores, etc. for 6 months and as a result of their endeavours, on 25 July the Commons confirmed him as one of the commissioners of the navy.⁴⁰

Robert's role as a negotiator, judge and arbitrator were called upon, early on in his new post. The Council of State, the new executive body in the government that replaced the Privy Council, asked him and Holland as commissioners on 8 August to go to Yarmouth and examine the differences between the Captain, Master and men of *The Tiger*, and to endeavour to settle them. They were also given money and credit to pay off those men who were fit to discharge. In private instructions they were also told "to receive such of the mutineers for justice as they shall judge most guilty", and others were given instructions to assist them. These included not only the military officers of the town and garrison of Yarmouth, but also the captains of two ships which had been on convoy duty to Germany. The Captain of *The Lioness* was told to go to Yarmouth "and ride by *The Tiger* until further order" and that of *The Fellowship* to signify his arrival there to Robert and Mr Holland and receive orders from them. Colonel Barkstead, who presumably was in charge of the garrison, was thanked "for your care concerning the distemper aboard *The Tiger* frigate, and hope the business be either composed or kept from coming to extremities until some further course of action be taken in it." Clearly the Council of State was concerned that a little local difficulty might flare into a full scale mutiny which would affect more than just one ship. *The Lioness* was specifically instructed to "anchor as near to *The Tiger* as you can and in case the company should weigh anchor contrary to Captain Peacock's order, to use your best endeavour to hinder it." Robert and Holland seem to have used this overwhelming show of force to get what they wanted, and they bailed the master, boatswain and those sailors who had mutinied. Their wages were held back until the affair was sorted out, the ringleaders being retained until they acknowledged their error. The Council of State and the Admiralty Committee then concurred with Robert and Holland's judgement that before the master and boatswain were to be employed again they would have to "give caution for their fidelity".⁴¹

Contemporary reports in the State Papers in the National Archives in Kew reveal the day to day concerns of the commissioners in relation to wood for ships, the exact location of ships and the payment of bills. The latter was no doubt helped by the fact that at this time Robert's brother, George, was Chairman of the Parliamentary Navy Committee, whose responsibility it was to oversee the activities of the naval commissioners.⁴² In this capacity, Robert and his colleagues worked in the Navy Office, from which they wrote in December specifying the number of trees and the timber that were to be used for the navy from the trustees for the sale of the King's lands. These included trees from Cheshunt and Enfield Parks in the Lea Valley and mentioned oak, ash, beech, pine and hornbeam as suitable trees. Robert may well have ridden in these woods as a teenager.

⁴⁰ *CJ VI*, 232: 12 June 1649; Oppenheim, M, *A history of the administration of the Royal Navy and of merchant shipping in relation to the navy from 1509 to 1660 with an introduction treating of the preceding period*, (New ed. Aldershot, 1988) 347 & n3

⁴¹ *CSPD 1648-9*, 267, 285, 301-2

⁴² *CSPD 1649-50*, 96, 133, 267-8; *CSPD 1650*, 135 403

Robert remained a naval commissioner for over ten years, drawing up an evaluation and inventory of a frigate *The Merchant* to be adopted by the navy and writing to Colonel Edward Popham from the Navy Office in January 1650, in which he mentioned a Captain Goslin who “wholly declines to be made commander of any merchant ship over another man’s head, who has more right to it than he.” He also made the sound remark “I fear that if you do not give leave to masters to go as commanders of their own ships you will lack fitting men to command more than ships.” Over 1650 he carried out a series of routine tasks, keeping the Admiralty committee informed of the movement of ships, issuing payment for arrears for services performed and drawing up an estimate of the charges for setting forth the ships for the next year. He also put forward propositions to parliament in May 1651 and seemed to have a secure grasp of detail as well as the psychology of sea captains. According to Capp, apart from Willoughby, who died in 1651, most of the commissioners remained in office for years and were loyal, hardworking and efficient.⁴³

Routine business over 1651-2 involved Robert in a variety of activities, having to respond to three different masters. Firstly, Colonel (later General, then Admiral) Blake sent the commissioners orders on behalf of the Navy Committee on a variety of topics including paying off sailors, fitting ships out for the summer and winter guards, providing more men for particular ships, making appointments to posts as clerk and boatswain, making out contracts for building new ships or hiring ships, giving gratuities for good service and reimbursing captains for money spent by them in repairing their ships. The Admiralty Committee meanwhile required the Commissioners to obtain timber for making butts* at Woolwich, to confer on building new vessels, to provide estimates for the Southern and West Indian ship guard, to survey a ship to see if it could carry more guns, to certify if a captain had received his wages or not and to provide a list of private men of war with their burthen, number of guns and the names of their commanders. At the same time the Council of State was sending them orders to convert a ship into a different kind of vessel, to order the shipwrights to build a ship, to fit out ships and order the victuallers to provide food for 8,000 men. Though there was overlap between the subject matter dealt with by each of their three masters, it was the Council of State which had the highest ultimate authority, and Robert and his colleagues were clearly kept extremely busy.⁴⁴

Robert was also responsible for preparing the navy for the growing conflict with the Dutch, which culminated in the First Anglo-Dutch War. In April 1652 they were specifically told by the Council: “To order the press-masters to discontinue pressing men out of outward-bound ships, the masters and owners having petitioned that the shipping is thereby endangered by the enemy at sea.” In May their orders included: to survey all the provisions in the stores, and if found insufficient to contract for a further supply; to contract for two ketches* to be employed off the Land’s End to warn English ships homeward-bound of the Dutch fleet, so that they may put into Plymouth; to hasten down the gunners and boatswain’s stores for furnishing the fleet under General Blake; to order the hastening the *Golden Dove* and *Convert*, taken on for the summer guard to sea; to order the fitting out the *Old Warwick* or *Marigold* as convoy to ships with provisions to Scotland; to

⁴³ *CJ VI*, 6, 229-31; 269-70; 342; 580-1; *F&R, A&O*, II, 75-8; *HMC 13th Report, Appendix I: Portland MS Vol. 1* (1891) 517; *CSPD 1650*, 40, 135, 503; Capp, B, *Cromwell’s navy: The Fleet and the English Revolution 1648-1660*, (Oxford, 1989) 48-9; *HMC Leyborne Popham Mss* (1899) p 98

⁴⁴ *CSPD 1651-2*, 554-77

provide two fire ships* for General Blake, “as the Dutch much rely on their skill in that way of execution”; also to impress the five merchant ships they refer to and hasten the fitting out of the others. In June the Commissioners were told to supply the seamen required by Blake for manning the fleet, to take up four more ships and fit them as fire ships, to report what guns etc. were required by the merchant ships hired for the service, to attend the ordnance committee re supply of guns, and to see that the merchants ships taken up for service were sufficiently manned.⁴⁵

The impact of the First Dutch War meant that the workload of the Navy Commissioners increased dramatically. This did not abate over the summer of 1652 as can be seen in the flow of orders which came from the Council of State. In July Robert and the other commissioners had to return a list of the Dutch ships which had been seized with the guns and men they carried and then fit out these prizes for service in the Royal Navy. To get more ships available for the fleet in August they had to fit out more merchant vessels as men of war and order the press-masters to impress 300 men for two ships, *The Sovereign* and *The Antelope*. They also had to commandeer eight smaller boats to attend *The Sovereign* “so as to prevent her being fired.” In September they were building yet more ships getting timber from Windsor Forest to Deptford, and making contracts with new victuallers for supplying 8,000 men for the winter guard. The frigate *The Advice* had to be repaired at Harwich having been damaged in a storm while gaining intelligence for Blake. They also had to deal with the inter-departmental issue of not paying the soldiers on the ships, which was the responsibility of the Treasurers at War, but ensuring that they were supplied with hammocks and clothing. In August Robert specifically attended the Council of State over the appointment of a master shipwright, and in October was ordered to the Downs to take account of the defects of every ship, get them a speedy supply of victuals and give an account to the Council.⁴⁶

As administrators within the Navy Office, the Commissioners acted as middlemen between their political masters and the ordinary men in the navy and dockyards, the shipbuilders, suppliers and the captains of the ships under the command of the Admiralty. As such they received regular letters and reports from the latter. They supplied the data for the surveys of provisions, lists of musters of men and necessary victuals required. As part of the in-tray for Robert and his colleagues were bills and receipts for supplies such as candles, contracts for the hire of ships, reports on the movement of ships, storekeepers’ accounts on the stock of powder and shot available in coastal forts, requests from the treasury to pay bills, and recommendations for employment for sea captains. Many of these involved mundane activities such as dealing with receipts from a bricklayer for repairing the range and furnace on a ship, or signing a ticket for wages to be paid, while others involved matters of judgement such as certifying to the Ordnance Office when frigates would be ready to have guns fitted. Sometimes they heard information they probably did not want to hear such as that from William Burton from Yarmouth who wrote to Robert on 16 September that “neither the *Bunch of Blackberries*, *The Hope* nor *The Star of Rotterdam*, are fit to be converted into men of War.” Richard Field wrote to him from Portsmouth on 24 September, giving details of embezzlement on board his ship, *The Dolphin*, and requesting he be moved to another ship. In October Captain John Sherwin of *The Primrose*, which had sailed from Liverpool, had a sorry tale to

⁴⁵ CSPD 1651-2, 522, 522-3, 523-4,

⁴⁶ CSPD 1651-2, 363, 431, 525-9

tell, claiming that he “wants pay, clothes and necessaries for his sick and naked men, being kept out by an order of the Council of State, on account of a company of barking whelps that mind their prey more than the welfare of their dam; hopes he may not hang like Mahomet’s tomb, or between hope and despair for want.” In November Robert received a letter from Captain Henry Hatsell from Plymouth which said: “There are ugly things committed here and at Falmouth by private men-of-war, to the dishonour of our nation and the prejudice of those in amity with us.” Robert must have needed a pretty thick skin to have coped with these issues that necessarily would have reflected on the Navy Office.⁴⁷

On the death of William Willoughby, his son Francis was appointed in his place, taking up his post at Portsmouth. Glimpses of the kind of work Robert and colleagues engaged in can be seen from surviving letters and orders. On 25 March 1652 Admiral Blake wrote to the Committee of the Navy that “According to your desire signified by Major Thomson, I have ordered the commander of the ships and frigates here belonging to the state to take on board their additional number of men”. On 3 November 1652 Robert wrote to Parliament concerning Mr Christopher Pett, the recently appointed Master Shipper at Deptford, seeking suitable accommodation in the Steelyard so that he was able to perform his duties appropriately stating: “We hold it absolutely necessary that his dwelling house should be there.” Also appointed on 20 December 1652 were Major Nehemiah Bourne and Captain Edward Hopkins, former governor of Connecticut who also, two years later, became a Commissioner of the Admiralty. Both were New England colonists who had gone out to Massachusetts about the same time as Robert. On 6 June 1653 Blake on board *The Resolution* wrote: “We hear not yet of the hammocks, nor of the wood and candles, although you mention that Major Thomson informed you they were sent us by the ships that came along with Captain Strong.” On 17 June 1653, Robert, Smith and Hopkins wrote to the magistrates at Ipswich in Suffolk requiring them to provide for sick and wounded men arriving there and to spend up to 7 shillings a week per man and send their bills to the Navy Office. A month later Robert and Hopkins wrote again requiring they obtain money for this from the sub-commissioners of prize goods in the area. After the end of the war, on 7 July 1654, Robert and colleagues again wrote to parliament about two ships, *The Hector* and *The Indian*, which both needed officers, one also needing investigation for maladministration. On 5 August 1656 Robert and Willoughby were told to go aboard the ship *The Hopewell*, of which William Watts was the master, and “see her speedily dispatched to Jamaica with the men and provisions for the state’s immediate service”. On 4 October 1659 Robert and two others carried out a survey of a small prize ship which had been seized and commented that it was “a good and fitting vessel to be a man of war” and would cost only £40 to repair her hull and masts. Robert clearly worked closely with both Willoughby and Hopkins, as the latter dying in 1657, left legacies both to Robert and Francis Willoughby, who acted as executors of his will. After his wife’s death, Robert and Francis paid over £500 to Harvard University on Hopkins’ behalf.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ CSPD 1651-2, 529-41

⁴⁸ British Library (henceforth BL) Add Mss 22546 ff 71, 177, 215; Sainsbury WN (ed.) *Calendar of State Papers Colonial 1574-1660*, (1860) (Henceforth CSPC 1574-1660), 447; Powell, JR, (ed.) *The Letters of Robert Blake*, (1939) 153, 219; Chaplin, WR, ‘Nehemiah Bourne’, *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* (Henceforth PCSM) *Transactions 1952-1956*, (Boston, 1964) 68-71; James P. Walsh, ‘Hopkins, Edward (c.1602-1657)’, *New DNB*; Ipswich Record Office, HD/A/194, 201

The naval commissioners therefore had a vast range of tasks to carry out and accumulated an array of knowledge and skills concerning all things to do with the construction and deployment of naval shipping. Robert, along with Bourne and Willoughby, received £150 from parliament in June 1655 “for extraordinary services” as naval commissioners, and two years later were receiving an additional salary of £250 each for their services as victuallers. In October 1654 it had been decided to put the victualling department immediately under the navy commissioners and by 1657 they concentrated work on the Victualling Office, successfully obtaining adequate funds to feed the sailors of Blake’s navy. After Cromwell’s death in 1658, Robert, Bourne, Willoughby and other members of the Committee of the Navy were allotted their places in the Protector’s funeral procession, and later that year it was decided to mothball some of the ships of the line and Robert and Bourne went to the Medway to report on how far the ships could be taken up river and how they could be securely moored. They provided a long report which was approved by the Admiralty and they carried out the plan.⁴⁹

Political conditions however deteriorated over 1659. In the permutations of military rule and the revival and removal of the Rump Parliament*, the Wallingford House army generals nominated Robert to a new Committee of Safety in October 1659, but there is no evidence he acted in that capacity. Robert and Francis Willoughby were still hard at work in late January 1660, both at the Navy and at the Victualling Office, writing to the Council of State about naval affairs, but the situation was becoming desperate. It appears from their letters that money was drying up and there was insufficient cash to pay the victuallers to ensure the sailors were fed and that the ships could put to sea. The victualling contractors were unpaid and customs revenue had to be diverted in the southwest to pay them at Plymouth. One contractor, Dennis Gauden, who had supplied 4,000 men with butter and cheese, was no longer able to do so as he had not received any money. They were being put in an impossible position as on 23rd they wrote: “the Petty Warrant victuallers have, as they inform us, run out so much money that they are unable to proceed any further without a supply, so that we expect their total declining the service every day.” and that “such is the condition of all your stores in reference to timber, plank, cordage, etc. in the respective yards, that in case of any sudden emergency for speeding away the fleet, we fear it could not possibly be accomplished.” Two days later further gloomy information revealed that “they since heard from Plymouth that the contractors for victualling there had refused to furnish more provisions because the bills of exchange formerly drawn by them on the Navy Office were unpaid.” As late as 9 June 1660, the day Maurice received his pardon from the King, Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, wrote to Robert and the rest of the Admiralty Commissioners requesting them to pay an outstanding bill of over £244. With no taxation yet coming in they were powerless until the full change of government. However despite the three republican Commissioners, Robert, Bourne and Willoughby being replaced by Admiral Penn, Peter Pett and Samuel Pepys, the new Treasury Commissioners authorized the new naval commissioners to pay Robert in December 1667 ‘in regard of special service done’ and in August 1670 for the repayment of a loan of £351. What exactly this was for is not clear, though later his brother George was involved in an investigation into the navy following

⁴⁹ Chaplin, ‘Nehemiah Bourne’, 102, 104, 106, 109; 516-30; Oppenheim, *A history* 326; The Life of Major Robert Thomson by Prof. Alan Thomson

the fiasco of the Second Dutch War.⁵⁰ Before examining his position following the Restoration, it is necessary to see how far he was successful in acquiring land in Ireland, both before and after the Irish rebellion, which may later have wetted his appetite for acquiring land in America. Also Robert was settling down and had become a family man, a magistrate, and an assessment commissioner. He also stood for election as an MP and became involved in spreading the gospel in America.

Robert and Irish Land

On 23 November 1637, presumably before he went to Boston, Robert and 60 others, all citizens of London, had become sureties for Randall, Marquis of Antrim, for payment of large sums which they advanced to the Marquis to the value of £42,000. For these they were given the rents and profits of the Barony of Cary and the Island of Ruthlyn for 99 years as security. In 1656 these lands had been given to soldiers in lieu of wages by Cromwell, despite the citizens making clear their claims. On 31 October 1660 they sought restitution and the removal of the soldiers, though it is unclear whether they obtained any.⁵¹ On 14 May 1651 the parliamentary Committee for the Affairs of Ireland identified £10,488 which had been used for the defence of the ports and garrisons of Munster between 1644 and 1646 as belonging to Maurice, Robert and the other investors. Of this Robert put in claims for two others plus one for himself of £1323 which on 3 July were to be met by allotting to all the claimants, including his brother Maurice, the town of New Rosse in Leinster. This was to satisfy their debts, but they were encouraged to settle English families there, to increase trade and fortify it against the rebels.⁵²

This scheme may not have got anywhere as on 4 January 1653 Robert, Maurice and others petitioned the Parliamentary Committee asking for a grant in land in compensation for their expenses in the recovery of Ireland. In February he asked his nephew, William Hawkins, another merchant, to draw his share for a Barony in County Down. On 21 January 1654 William Wade assigned his £600 share in Irish land to Robert and 17 May 1654 Robert assigned his share in the Barony of Dunluce to John Brookhaven.⁵³ On 20 December 1654 the Lord Deputy and Council for Ireland wrote to Robert, Maurice and others saying that they had lately received a petition from Joseph Avery on their behalf. They had received debentures from the committee for clearing claims at London on the public faith for debts, and desired that they receive Irish land for the debentures they held. The Deputy referred to the Act of Parliament of 26 September 1653, and said that could not proceed with the claim as they were adventurers before 1649.⁵⁴

After the 1660 Restoration of the monarchy and the installation of Charles II as King, in June 1661 a draft from the King to the Commissioners for executing the declaration for Maurice, Robert and others stated that through the petition of Herbert Price Esq., he understood that they had

⁵⁰ BL E1010 [24] *A True narrative of the Proceedings in Parliament, Council of State, General Council of the Army and Committee of Safety* (1659) p 41; Chaplin, 'Nehemiah Bourne' 116; *HMC Portland Ms*, I, 695-6; *Calendar of Treasury Books (henceforth CTB) 1667-1668*, 2, (1905) 148-58' 1669-72, 3, (1908) 642-60

⁵¹ Mahaffy, RP, (ed.) *Calendar Of State Papers Ireland, 7 Vols.1625-1669, (1900-1908)*, (henceforth *CSPI*), Vol. 1660-1662 (1905) 70, 697

⁵² *CJ VI*, 3 July 1651: Report from the Committee of Irish Affairs; *CSPI 1647-1660 and Addenda (1903)*, 281-2

⁵³ *CJ VII*, 242-3: Petition re lands in Ireland; *CSPI Adventurers in Ireland 1642-1659 (1903)* 171, 388, 513

⁵⁴ Dunlop, R, *Ireland under the Commonwealth*, (2 Vols., Manchester, 1913) Vol. 2, 465-6 & n1
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delivered money goods and artillery to the Protestant forces in Munster between 1644 and 1646, as well as equipping and maintaining at sea ships for the defence of the Irish coast, to the value of £5,519, and for payment thereof they were to have Irish lands. Though the certificates were duly signed, sealed and registered they still had not received any land and they had assigned the claims to Price “for valuable consideration“. The King said he was ready to grant the petition, but this was only a draft.⁵⁵ It is therefore doubtful if much compensation or land was obtained by any of the brothers from Ireland, and Robert is also believed to have purchased former Bishop and Dean and Chapter lands, but probably lost all of those back to the Church, without compensation, at the restoration of the Church of England.

Robert, Family Life & Living in London 1642-60

On 23 July 1646 Robert had married Frances Chambers at St Dunstons in London. His son William, probably born between 1647 and 1656 pre-deceased him in 1691, but William’s son, also William, was baptized at Stoke Newington, then a village north of London, on 27 February 1680. Robert’s other son, Joseph, was baptized at Saint Olave Hart Street in London on 27 February 1657. He was to become a wealthy merchant, living in Hackney. He married Mary Glover about 1678 and their son Joseph became a successful lawyer and Director of the Bank of England. Unmarried Joseph left his property to his sister Mary, who married the merchant and fellow director, Thomas Whately (1685-1765). This property included disputed land claims to some of Robert’s property in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.⁵⁶ Robert had four daughters: Elizabeth who married William Ashhurst; Mary who married Samuel Clarke; Susan(na), born at his estate in at Culpho in Suffolk in 1659, married Robert Duckenfield, son of the parliamentary officer Colonel Robert Duckenfield on 7 August 1683 at St Leonards Shoreditch in London, being buried on 7 July 1742 at Duckenfield in Lancashire; and Anna (Hannah) who married a Mr Miller, probably Thomas Miller, at St James, Dukes Place, London on 18 February 1693. Thus a year before his death Robert had launched both his sons on successful careers and married his daughters into families, at least two of which were to prove successful in the next generation.

In April 1653, under the republic, Robert was recorded as acting as a justice of the peace at the Middlesex Sessions when he received recognisances* from a Thomas Beza, a scrivener* of St Botolphs, Aldgate, and from Henry Hutton, a merchant from Limehouse, for £8 each, for the appearance of Henry Cotton and Thomas Bird at the next sessions, they being suspected "of stealing certain clamps of brasse belonging to the furnaces of the States Ship called *The Hampshire*".⁵⁷ In June 1657 he was appointed to the Assessment Committee for Surrey to raise £60,000 a month for 3 months thus serving the Protectorate in at least two capacities.⁵⁸ After Oliver Cromwell’s death Robert continued as a naval commissioner and when the writs were sent out for Richard Cromwell’s parliament, a double return was made for a Burgess for the Borough of Clifton-Dartmouth-Hardress. A question was raised in the Commons as to whether the election should have been made by the Mayor, Bailiffs and freemen only, or by the inhabitants as well. However the decision was not

⁵⁵ *CSPI 1669-1670 & Addenda 1625-70*, (London, 1910) 411

⁵⁶ Rory T. Cornish, ‘Whately, Thomas (1726–1772)’, *NewDNB*

⁵⁷ Jeffreson JC, (ed.) *Middlesex County Records*, Vol. 3: 1625-67 (1888) 212-220

⁵⁸ *F&R A&O*, II, 1058-97

confirmed and it was referred to a committee. However, in Burton's diary it was recorded on 1 March 1659 that the Committee of Privileges considered the case of Dartmouth between Major Thompson and Mr Burne. Burton records that Burne was chosen by the Commonalty, but the issue was: "between the Aldermen and the Commonalty, which had most right to elect." Whatever the case it appears that Robert never took his seat in parliament.⁵⁹

In January 1660, as the republican regime was collapsing, Robert was appointed to the Assessment Committee for Middlesex to raise £100,000 a month across the whole of the British Isles, a rather hopeful sum, given the circumstances.⁶⁰ In April 1659 he and his brothers had attended the funeral of Katherine Wittewronge, Maurice's eldest daughter, at Harpenden church in Hertfordshire not far from Sir John Wittewronge's family estate at Rothamstead. In Sir John's accounts are revealed the amount he spent on the funeral, which was a grand affair, with black outfits being provided for all four brothers, listed as Governor Thomson (Maurice), Colonel Thomson (George), Alderman Thomson (William) and Major Thomson (Robert). This was in many ways the height of their power, but it was the dying days of the restored republic, soon to be replaced by the different world of the Restoration.⁶¹

Robert and the New England Company

The Thomson brothers kept their connections with America during the Commonwealth period, either through helping the governments of the republic and protectorate regain control of those colonies, which had attempted to retain allegiance to the King, but also through the New England Company, (later re-founded as The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Indians). This had received its first charter on 27 July 1649, though missionary work had been going on before under John Eliot in Massachusetts and Roger Williams in Rhode Island. Edward Winslow was active in getting an ordinance through the Rump Parliament and Robert and William Thomson were involved from the start, Robert being one of the original fourteen Assistants, who with the President and Treasurer made up the corporation of the company.⁶² This is clear in a contemporary pamphlet which justified the proposal and listed those involved.⁶³ The Commissioners of the United Colonies of New England, who had been established to protect them, agreed to act for the time being in America to dispose of the money collected and sent to them by the Treasurer, which they were to use for the propagation of the gospel, to maintain schools and to educate the Indians. Money was to be raised by general collections throughout all the parishes of England and all the missionaries were to be members of the New England congregational churches. Several members of

⁵⁹ Anon, *Return of members of Parliament Part I Vol. II England 1213-1702*, (Kraus Reprint, 1980) 508; *CJ VII*, 618-9; Rutt, JT (ed.) *Dairy of Thomas Burton*, 4 Vols., (1828) Vol. 2, 516-30; Vol. 3, 549-578

⁶⁰ F&R, A&O, II, 1355-1403

⁶¹ HALS D/Elw Z21: Accounts of Sir John Wittewronge

⁶² Weis, FL, 'The New England Company of 1649 and its missionary enterprises', (*PCSM*) Vol. 38, *Transactions 1747-1951*, 134-9, 142-3; An Act for the promoting and propagating the Gospel of Jesus Christ in New England.' F&R A&O, I, 197-200

⁶³ Caryl, J, *Of the conversion of five thousand and nine hundred East-Indians on the Isle of Formosa... with a postscript of the Gospels good success also amongst the West-Indians in New England*, (1650) 32-3
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the Company had held office or had served on the East India and Levant Companies.⁶⁴ Harvard College had been founded in 1636 and the new Company granted it funds for Indian education which was acknowledged in the College Charter of 1650 as the “necessary provision for the education of the English and Indian youth” of the land. The Company also gave money to construct the Indian College building in Harvard Yard in 1655 and to print the first bible in native Algonquian between 1660 and 1663. However because of the lack of Indian students the college building was dismantled in the 1690s.⁶⁵

The legal existence of the Company automatically ceased when Charles II was proclaimed King and a new charter had to be sought. This was granted on 1 February 1662 and the name changed to ‘The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and parts adjacent in America’. The membership of the Society was increased to 45 and Robert Boyle, brother of the Earl of Cork, and one of the founders of the Royal Society, became the first Governor. The existing property belonging to the Company in America was retained as were the Commissioners of the United Colonies until 1686 when they were dissolved.⁶⁶ On 17 May an order of the King in Council established a Committee for the Government of New England, on which the Earl of Anglesey (Maurice’s relative) sat, which framed a proclamation for the Society. Robert, as an existing member of the society had his name withdrawn, but Henry Ashhurst (Robert’s relative), the treasurer, continued in Office, and Robert Boyle with Robert’s brother, William, were added as new members. In September 1668 an election was held at the *Vulture* in Winchester Street in London when nineteen new members, including Robert, were elected to replace the twelve who had died and those who did not turn up. There was a strong non-conformist element including Robert, and William Moses, a colleague on the East India Company Directorate, as well as others, who had avoided the office of Aldermen in London by paying the fine.⁶⁷

Boyle, writing to the Commissioners on 28 April 1669, mentioned money which had been left to the society, part of which was to be paid through Robert’s relative, the merchant Thomas Glover, via the latter’s brother, to John Leverett in Boston. The rest was to be paid via Robert to his agent in Boston, John Richards. The money was to be paid “to some godly able man for preaching to the Indians”. In 1674 Robert wrote to Governor Leverett saying that he had heard that the Commissioners “did not incoredge the sending any stock into the country”, but that nevertheless, “If you please to advise with them and others and find a way of certain improvement by buying lands, mortgages or other security, I am confident the corporation may be inclined to goe in debt here to remitt a good some over”. The promise of further funds, if they invested in lands and mortgages in and around Boston, reflects exactly what Robert had been doing himself in the Boston area, through his agent John Richards. In 1681 the company followed up this idea and borrowed money from

⁶⁴ Kellaway, W, *The New England Company 1649-1776: Missionary Society to the American Indians*, (1961) 50; Weis, ‘New England Company’, 142-3

⁶⁵ ‘Early Native American Resources in the Harvard University Archives: Education and Harvard’s Indian College <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~amciv/HistoryofIndianCollege>

⁶⁶ Weis, ‘New England Company’, 143-4

⁶⁷ Ford JW, (ed.) *Some correspondence between the governors of the New England Company*, (1896) xxviii; Sainsbury, W. Noel, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series (Vol. 5), America and West Indies, (henceforth CSPC Am & WI) 1661-1668*, 30-1, 71-2; Kellaway, *New England Company*, 60
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William Ashhurst, Robert's son in law, paying him 6% on the loan, and by January 1682 the Indian Stock had risen to £2,230 and the Company became optimistic that it might be self-financing.⁶⁸ By 1680 the affairs of the Society in America were largely in the hands of William Stoughton, Samuel Sewell and Adam Winthrop, and the General Court of Massachusetts appointed the superintendent of the Indians. These in turn were Humphrey Atherton, Daniel Gookin and Thomas Prentice, the first two having dealings in land with Robert. Stoughton was still acting as a Commissioner in 1693 when he wrote to Robert, as Governor of the Society, about cashing a bill of exchange which had been sent over.⁶⁹

Boyle had resigned as Governor in 1689 but it was not until after his death, that the company unanimously elected Robert as his successor on 25 March 1692. He was a popular choice as he had been constantly active on the Company's behalf, often sending part of the Company's annual revenue to the commissioners by Bills of Exchange, an arrangement advantageous to both parties. On his death in 1694, he was succeeded by his son in law, William Ashhurst, and subsequently by other relatives until 1759. His Ashhurst relatives were Treasurers from 1681-1702, and his own son Joseph from 1702-4. The Society thus became run in England largely by his relatives and in America largely by those with whom Robert had had commercial dealings.⁷⁰ "One of the concerns of the leaders of the Royal Society during the first decade of its existence was the mercantilist exploitation of the American colonies and especially New England."⁷¹ According to Jacob, both organizations preached the 'work ethic', as the Indians would have to be converted from being 'lazy' before they could be religiously converted. Also it was common practice for Eliot and Gookin to set up communities of 'praying Indians' who would leave the tribe and take advantage from the providential benefits of work. This fitted in well with the company's aims, one of which was to find useful employment for any native it converted. Presumably Robert, as a supporter of the Society, agreed with these sentiments.⁷² They also fitted into the original aims of the Massachusetts Charter, which stated that: "The principall Ende of this Plantacion" was to "wynn and incite the Natives of [the] Country, to the Knowledg and Obedience of the onlie true God and Savior of Mankinde, and the Christian Fayth."⁷³ Thus Robert was a key link between the Company/Society, The Royal Society, The Commissioners and the Government of Massachusetts, but also acted as a link to the East India Company.

In 1677 Robert Boyle wrote to Robert from Pall Mall about the idea of spreading the gospel in those countries where the East India Company had flourishing factories, "remembering ourselves to be Christians as well as merchants, we should attempt to bring those countreys some spiritual good things, whence we so frequently brought back temporal ones". Not only would this potentially

⁶⁸ Hunter M *et al* (eds.) *The correspondence of Robert Boyle*, 6 Vols., (2001) Vol. IV, 133: Boyle to Commissioners of the United Colonies 28/4/1669; Ford, *Correspondence*, 9; Kellaway, *The New England Company*, 78

⁶⁹ Weis, 'New England Company', 145; Ford, *Correspondence*, 79-80: Stoughton to Thomson, 14 April 1693

⁷⁰ Kellaway, *The New England Company*, 168; Weis 'New England Company', 212

⁷¹ Jacob, JR, 'The New England Company, the Royal Society and the Indians', *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Nov., 1975), 451,

⁷² Jacob, 'New England Company', 452

⁷³ Jennings, F, 'Goals and Functions of Puritan Missions to the Indians', *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Summer, 1971), pp. 197-8

expand the remit of the Society, but it would also help to solve the moral dilemmas which Christian merchants may have felt when they made rather too much profit out of their trade. They had discussed that men were to be prepared in the University to be sent into India “and furnished not only with the Arabic tongue, but if it were desired with arithmetick and other parts of the mathematics and other qualifications fit to recommend them.”⁷⁴ The Company certainly sent out chaplains to their factories, but how successful the Society actually was at converting American Indians was queried at the time, when both Gookin and Eliot admitted they had made few real converts, and later when some of the praying Indians attacked the settlers in King Philip’s war. The Puritans themselves were unsure whether civilizing the Indians came before or after Christianizing, and some of their early activities became mixed up in the attempted expansion by Massachusetts into Narragansett country. Once the society had effectively taken over the missionary activity of disparate groups across New England, the situation improved, at least temporarily. However, many among the Naticks, for example, were unwilling to move to a praying town, and Indians engaged in only piecemeal adoption of the Gospel, while Eliot felt he had to ‘civilize’ the Indians first before he could convert them. The success of both these ventures was therefore somewhat limited, at least in the short term.⁷⁵ Robert’s activities however in relation to America, were not just concerned with religion, but after the Restoration with the purchase of land.

Robert and the Restoration

The Thomson brothers would clearly have been apprehensive about the Restoration. However, fortunately for them, Robert’s brother William was one of the MPs for London at the time of Charles II’s return, and he was knighted for his services in taking the news to the King at Breda in the Netherlands. Sir John Wittewronge, Maurice’s son-in-law, also seems to have been instrumental in obtaining a pardon for him from the King. However there is no evidence available that either George or Robert actively sought or obtained a pardon. Both had been involved in politics and naval administration under the Republic and the Protectorate, and George had been nominated to the Council of State in 1659. All four brothers were tainted with Republicanism, but their religious affiliation differed by 1660. Maurice was probably an Independent (Congregationalist), William a Presbyterian, and Robert also a Congregationalist. However, at the end of October 1661, a warrant was issued for George’s arrest, presumably, as an ardent Baptist; he was potentially associated with the Fifth Monarchist rising of that year. However there is no indication what happened to him. He and Maurice at that time were both living at Lee in Kent, then outside the metropolis. Robert however was clearly under suspicion, as in April 1663 Samuel Wilson gave evidence that “Major Thompson delivered him severall letters to carry to New England and two days after came to him and asked him where he had put those letters because he had heard there would be a search of

⁷⁴ BL Sloane Mss 4293 f45 :Thompson to Boyle 5/3/1677; Hunter, *The correspondence of Robert Boyle*, IV, 436-8

⁷⁵ Jennings, ‘Goals and Functions’ 198-202; Harold W. Van Lonkhuyzen, ‘A Reappraisal of the Praying Indians: Acculturation, Conversion, and Identity at Natick, Massachusetts, 1646-1730’, *The New England Quarterly* (henceforth *NEQ*), Vol. 63, No. 3 (Sep., 1990),404-6

letters. That he knowe not Major Thompson only meets him in the Exchange and that he ther received his letters from him.”⁷⁶

Greaves warned about the danger of assuming that after the Restoration the terms, Dissenters and Nonconformists were equivalent to ‘radicals’ and that “the ‘radical community’ was coextensive with neither nonconformity nor specific non-conformist groups” and that Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists and Quakers all had radicals in their midst. There is no indication that Robert was party to any of the insurrectionist radical schemes of the early 1660s that related to concerted action with a Dutch invasion, despite erroneous reports of spies to the contrary. Following the Four Days Battle off North Foreland in the first week of June 1666, it was suggested that the Dutch intelligence about the English fleet had been provided by Maurice and Robert, presumably because of their previous Dutch connections both in trade and through Maurice’s fund raising in the Netherlands for the victims of the 1641 massacre of Ulster Protestants.⁷⁷

The report that implicated both Robert and his brother Maurice was that of Hugh Squier on 24 June 1666. He claimed to have overheard three people talking, one of whom had a Dutch accent. He claimed that “They much rejoyced that the Dutch had done so well and attributed much of their good success to the care and diligence of Maurice Thompson and his brother Major, for that they gave them such tymely intelligence of the dividing of our English fleet with all the motions thereof, and an account of how they were fitted out etc.” There then followed a rather inaccurate history not only of the two brothers but also of George and the following related to Robert: “I hear hee is as likely a man for this mischief as any in England for he is Maurice Thompson’s own brother and was so great with Cromwell that he was like to have maryed his daughter. That he began with nothing, like his brother Maurice, but rayseed himself by the tymes so high that he had purchased £2,200 in Bishops’ lands and last of all braggs publicly, saying that he hateth not the persons but the office of the Bishops. That he is a discontented person and full of malice against the King s government. That he is of a bould temper ready to adventure it all and he is the fittest man of all for such a work, having bin for 6 or 7 years a commissioner of the navy for the protector, by which meanes he knows all the ways and proceedings of the Navy and how to performe such a treason and more.”⁷⁸

However although Greaves points out there was a hard core of discontent in the 1660s, which was reinforced by opposition to the weakened Triennial Act* and the imposition of the Conventicle Act* of 1664, the interests of the English East India Company were largely anti-Dutch and the brothers were increasingly involved in the Company’s activities.⁷⁹ In fact, rather than the Thomson brothers being implicated in supporting the Dutch during the second Anglo-Dutch War, Robert acted as one of the East India Company’s representatives at the negotiations for the Treaty of Breda that ended it, and George was appointed to the Brooke House Committee that investigated the failures in naval administration that were part and parcel of the navy’s difficulties during that war. Robert was rewarded by the Navy Commissioners in December 1667 ‘in regard of special

⁷⁶ TNA SP29/71/24: The Examination of Samuel Wilson

⁷⁷ Greaves, RL, *Enemies under his feet’: Radicals and Nonconformists in Britain 1664-1677*, (Stanford CA, 1990) 1-3

⁷⁸ TNA SP29/159/108: Information of Hugh Squier 24/6/1666

⁷⁹ Greaves, *Enemies*, 6-7, 20

service done', which suggests that Robert may have provided intelligence to the British navy about the Dutch, rather than the reverse.⁸⁰

One of the 'radicals' identified by Graves, who was involved with plots, was Colonel Robert Duckenfield, who was responsible for raising Cheshire against the King but was arrested, put in detention in Hull, then in the tower on the eve of the Northern revolt in August 1665 and subsequently kept in his castle by Sir Geoffrey Shakerley. Despite the latter's protests that Duckenfield had been a leader of the 1665 Plot; the Privy Council ordered his release after he provided security, three years later in 1668. His son, also Robert, however had been made a Baronet in the year of his father's arrest, and later married Robert Thompson's daughter, Susan, in 1689, but there is no indication that in the 1660s Major Robert and Colonel Robert had any communication or direct connection.⁸¹ In fact the connections between the Thomson brothers and the ministers of Charles II were however strengthened again through family ties after 1667. Arthur Annesley, 1st earl of Anglesey and Lord Privy Seal under Charles II, has been seen as a moderate Anglican who hated Catholics but was sympathetic to non-conformists. On 14 July 1668 his daughter, Lady Frances, widow of Sir John Windham, married John Thompson (later Lord Haversham) Robert's nephew. As a non-conformist sympathizer and a relative of Robert's, Anglesey was able to protect his kin to a certain extent until his own fall. He was a strong parliamentarian but also a supporter of the King for most of his life.⁸²

Robert does not seem to have had any property in the City of London that was directly affected by the Great Fire of London in 1666, though his brother Maurice had considerable building plots on which new edifices arose following the Miller and Oliver surveys of the City of London. However, at this time, he was increasing his property holdings in and around Boston Massachusetts, and still considering possible re-emigration. As some of these properties included wharfs and warehouses, it is possible he was building up a base for the import and export of commodities to and from London and Boston.⁸³ However he was also establishing himself in a Dissenting community to the north of London at Newington Green.

Robert and Religious Dissent

De Krey has claimed that from 1667 to 1673 there were a series of challenges to authority by non-conforming Dissenters. The established church was challenged by dissenting preaching and dissenting meetings. The domination of London politics by Anglican Royalists was challenged by Dissenters and former Commonwealth office holders. Magistrates attempting to enforce the Conventicle Act were actually challenged in the streets, and the Act itself in the courts and House of Commons. Printed pamphlets challenged the ideology of non-resistance and wealthy Dissenters

⁸⁰ Shaw, *CTB 1667-8*, 2, (1905) 148-58

⁸¹ Greaves '*Enemies*', 34, 43, 109, 264; J. Mason, 'Duckenfield, Robert (1619-1689)', *NewDNB*

⁸² M. Perceval-Maxwell, 'Annesley, Arthur, first earl of Anglesey (1614-1686)' *NewDNB*; Alan Thomson, 'Thompson, John, first Baron Haversham (1648-1710)', *NewDNB*; Patterson, A, & Dzelzainis, M, 'Marvell and the Earl of Anglesey: A chapter in the history of reading', *Historical Journal* (henceforth *HJ*), 44, 3 (2001) 703-26.

⁸³ Mills, P & Oliver J, *The survey of the building sites in the City of London after the Great Fire of 1666*, (Repr. 1962) ; Hassam, *Suffolk Deeds*, Vol. IV, 1, 83-5, 86, 97

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attempted to turn the financial embarrassment of the crown to their advantage through the lending of money. What started as political demonstrations in support of conscience became a campaign to prevent the state from persecuting Protestants. In the summer of 1670 a financially embarrassed King asked the City magistrates for a loan of £60,000. The Corporation's response was half-hearted and only £20,000 was raised. London Dissenters then organized their own loan for the remaining £40,000. This was to be a challenge to the King who had just agreed to a renewal of the persecution of Dissenters. Subscribers included William Kiffin, John Owen and William Pennoyer, all known to Robert. Did he subscribe? The purpose of the loan was to drive a wedge between the King and a persecuting parliament, and to challenge him to put conscience before persecution. It resulted in the 1672 Declaration of Indulgence. The fear of further persecution might well explain Robert's purchase of Indian lands, but the temporary success of these efforts might be the reason that, despite reports that he intended to emigrate, he decided not to go permanently to the New World.⁸⁴ Although the latter would have affected Robert's freedom to worship openly, he later took advantage of the King's Declaration of to establish meeting Houses in and near his dwelling at Newington Green, in 1672, where he lived for the rest of his life. One was for Mr Samuel Lee "teacher in his house" and two others in the same parish one for Mr Barker and one for Mr Thwing.⁸⁵

Newington Green

Robert was part of the dissenting community centred round Newington Green then a village north of London. As Acosta argued the Dissenters' view that freedom of conscience and worship was a private and individual matter was opposed by the Anglicans and Tories* and became a fundamental tenet of the early Whigs*. Robert therefore can be seen as a Whig in politics, partly because of his religious position. Also many of the wealthy merchants, who made their homes in the then rural villages of the north-eastern suburbs of London, were professed Dissenters or had dissenting sympathies. About a quarter of the late Stuart London merchants were Dissenters, and they controlled about 37% of the colonial trade and 2/3 of the New England Company. Robert was active in both. No doubt Robert would have attended some at least of the series of lectures by well-known ejected ministers including, Philip Nigh, John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, that were held at nearby Hackney in 1669. From 1678 Thomas Rowe, pastor of the Independent Church at Girdler's Hall in London, ran an academy at Newington Green. Another was run by the Congregationalist Charles Morton, Daniel Defoe being one of his pupils, and in 1685 Morton migrated to Massachusetts where he became pastor of Charlestown and Vice-President of Harvard. Undoubtedly known to Robert, he would have strengthened his ties with his American friends. Robert may well have been involved in the academies, which, because of their clientele and sponsors, also offered access to the commercial, political and professional networks of which Robert was a member. They were also funded by gifts, as a result of pleas by the ministers or by yearly grants.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ De Krey, G S, 'The first Restoration crisis: Conscience and coercion in London, 1667-1673', *Albion*, 25, (1993) 565-80

⁸⁵ Turner, GL, (ed.) *Original records of early Nonconformity under persecution and indulgence* 3 Vols. (London 1911) Vol. 1, 301

⁸⁶ Acosta, A M, 'Spaces of Dissent and the public sphere in Hackney, Stoke Newington and Newington Green', *Eighteenth Century Life*, 27, 1 (2003) 1-8

According to Cone, Newington Green was already a Puritan community before the Restoration and was a congenial haven for Dissenters between 1662 and 1688, after which date the Congregationalists met in Church Street, Stoke Newington, half a mile away, while the Presbyterians met at Newington Green itself. Sir Thomas Abney, alderman, then Lord Mayor of London, was a Dissenter and Lord of the Manor of Stoke Newington. In 1691 he had been chosen a manager of the Common Fund for the support of Independent and Presbyterian clergy, and, on its collapse, manager of the 1694 Presbyterian fund. Not long after Robert's death Abney became a member of the New England Company. John Owen, who may have been a distant relative of Maurice Thomson's first wife, was friends with Arthur Annesley, Maurice's son-in-law and, with other Independent ministers, participated in a lecture at the house of Robert's relative, Alderman Henry Ashhurst. From 1664 Owen's family lived mainly at Stoke Newington, where at Charles Fleetwood's house he ministered to a congregation which included former army officers and Annesley's wife and daughter. He was also friends to the Principal Secretary of State, Sir William Morrice. Robert knew the latter from the negotiations at Breda, and may well have attended Owen's meeting.⁸⁷ Thus Robert became fully integrated into the Dissenting community north east of London.

From 1659 to 1679, Robert's brother William was one of the City of London MPs, having been an Alderman for Bread Street Ward in the 1650s, until his resignation in 1663. He was a proponent of the reformed Protestant principles, being a Presbyterian rather than an Independent. His death removed him from the politics of the late 1670s and there is no information as to whether Robert was involved in the politics of the Exclusion Crisis, though his Ashhurst relatives were. Henry Ashhurst junior was one of the eight chosen to present the monster petition to the King in December 1679 and his kinsmen John Lane and Henry Cornish were the most notable Presbyterians active in the emerging Whig leadership in London politics. By the 1680s De Krey argued that William Ashhurst (1647-1720) was the most prominent of the younger Whig leaders in London and remained so after the Glorious Revolution of 1688.⁸⁸ He was a member of the Mercers Company, was knighted on 29th October 1687, was Lord Mayor in 1694 and MP for the city of London 1689-90, 1695-1702 and 1705-10. He had houses in Paternoster Row and at Highgate.⁸⁹ Thus as part of the dissenting community of merchants, clergy and their supporters in London, Robert prospered through his family and other connections and through his activities in the East India Company, which then brought him audiences with the new King Charles II and opportunities both diplomatically and for speculation in American land.

⁸⁷ Cone, CB, 'Newington Green: a study of a dissenting community', *The Catholic Historical Review*, 54, 1, (Apr 1968) 1-10; Gary S. De Krey, 'Abney, Sir Thomas (1639/40-1722)'. *NewDNB*; Richard L. Greaves, 'Owen, John (1616-1683)', *New DNB*

⁸⁸ De Krey, GS, *London and the Restoration 1659-1687* (Cambridge, 2005) 77, 81-2, 185, 193 n.42, 283, 311, 315, 322

⁸⁹ Anon, 'Ashurst House and St Michaels church monuments', *Survey of London Vol. 17: The parish of St Pancras part I: The village of Highgate* (1936) pp. 54-62

Chapter 2 Robert and the East India Company

Robert was one of the Court of Committees (Directors) of the East India Company from 1666 to 1669, was Deputy Governor under Sir Andrew Riccard in 1670 and '71, Deputy again under Sir Nathaniel Herne in 1674-1675, and 1678, acting Governor when Herne died in August '79 and until his brother William Thomson took over as Governor, and then Deputy under him until 1680, when he was replaced by Thomas Papillon, only to become Deputy again in 1682 under Josiah Child. In between holding this office, he was permanently on the Committee of Directors. His eldest brother Maurice was one of the committee of directors from 1652 until 1674, being Governor from December 1657 until replaced by Thomas Andrews in 1659. For most of the post -Restoration period Maurice was the chairman of the Company's Economic (Treasury) Committee. Robert's elder brother William was on the Committee of Directors from 1657 to 1679, serving as Governor four times, 1664-6, 1668-70, 1677-8, 1679-81. Between them, these three brothers had a major influence on the policy and direction of the company for almost thirty years and Robert played a pivotal role at certain key points in the company's history.

Robert Thompson and the Assada adventure

Before the Thomson brothers got into the directorate of the East India Company, Robert's elder brother, Maurice, led a group of independent adventurers who attempted to trade with the East Indies. Maurice had in the 1630s been engaged in interloping exercises against the monopoly of the Canada Company, which had landed him in prison, but in the mid 1640s the future of the East India Company's monopoly was in doubt. Maurice and his colleagues were first of all part of the Courten Association, which had obtained rival letters patent to trade in the East, and then part of the Fourth Joint Stock and Second General Voyage, both of the latter being interim arrangements for managing the East Indies trade. Robert, like his brother William, was an adventurer in the Fourth Joint Stock. Maurice and colleagues wanted to trade with the East and take advantage of the fact that the monopoly of the East India Company was impossible to enforce. Maurice successfully outmanoeuvred the Old East India Company and managed to get his own involvement in the East Indies trade legitimised by the House of Lords, in the last few weeks before its own abolition in 1649. By August a General Court of all freemen and adventurers appointed committees from the 'Generality' and the 'Joint Stock', including Maurice for the 'Generality', on how to carry on the trade to the best advantage of all. His other relatives were also involved in the Second General Voyage as his brothers William and Robert and his son-in law William Corselis signed a letter sent to the Committees of the 'Voyage' suggesting that all goods from Bantam ought to be added to the accounts of the 'Voyage' as the 'Joint Stock' had not provided its own shipping. All three Thomson brothers had been investors in the 'Joint Stock' in 1647 and now wanted to put an end to the 'Voyage' to reach a settlement between the Adventurers in the 'Stock' and those in the 'Voyage' at a joint meeting of committees of both groups held in September, the result of which was that Maurice and two other 'Voyagers' were allowed to examine all the accounts and letters.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Brenner, *Merchants & Revolution, passim*; Sainsbury EB (ed.) *A Calendar of Court Minutes of the East India Company (henceforth CCCMEIC) 1644-49*, (Oxford 1916) 341-2, 342-3 & n., 353
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Though Maurice looked as though he was seeking a compromise, a major conflict loomed over the proposed plantation of the island of Assada in the Indian Ocean. In 1645 William Smart with three ships of the Courten Company had landed 140 settlers at St Augustine's Bay, who then moved to Nossi Be (Assada) after a year and then to Mayotte before being dispersed, the few survivors being picked up and taken to India or the Comoro islands. Robert Hunt, the first Governor of Assada, clearly had an evangelical zeal to spread Christianity and this link to religion is mirrored concurrently in the missionary activities of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, two of whose initial supporters in 1649 were William and Robert Thompson.⁹¹ Maurice, his brothers and their associates were concerned to ensure that their adventure, which was a colonising as well as a trading adventure, became permanent, and avoided some of the shortcomings of the trade. The launching of the prospectus for the Assada colony took place in 1648, when the Company was trying to raise more capital, and in October 1649 Maurice tried to obtain parliamentary approval for their scheme. However some in parliament and the Company saw the expedition as a ruse, not only to get access to the privileged trade, but also as an opportunity to pillage and get back the money that Maurice had lost when his ship *The Ruth's* cargo had been seized.⁹²

Maurice had developed plans for a trans-Indian Ocean trade in which he hoped to establish a base at Assada (Nosse Be), an island off the coast of Madagascar in the Eastern Indian Ocean, and to wrest from Dutch control the island of Pulo Run in the East Indies. Plans were for a settlement on both islands, with African slaves being used on plantations on Assada and a factory for eastern products being established on Pulo Run. Maurice, representing the Assada Merchants, managed to get an agreement with the East India Company on 21 November 1649. This was then presented to the Rump Parliament in 31 January 1650. This resolved that "the East India Trade be carried on by One Company, and with One Joint Stock; and the Management thereof to be under a Regulation in such manner, as the Parliament shall think fit." And that "the East India Company do proceed upon the Grounds of the Articles of Agreement made between them, and the Adventurers to Assada."⁹³

Eventually Maurice gained most of what he had originally sought.⁹⁴ In November 1650 it had been intended that Maurice and his brother William would, with others, organize the settlement of 600 acres at Assada, each contributing £1,000 to the enterprise. George managed to get his son in law, William Moore, the lease of an estate of 300 acres from the company on the island of Assada, but because the company "was so much engaged" to the Colonel, Moore was to be offered a salaried job at Surat if he didn't like living at Assada. Over 1650 Maurice and William planned to send men out to Assada, and even obtained a small chariot that had once belonged to Queen Anne of Denmark as a present for the King of Assada. However over the next two years these plans came to

⁹¹ Pincus, S. *Protestantism & Patriotism : Ideologies & the making of English Foreign Policy 1650 -1668* , (Cambridge, 1996) 49 ; Kellaway, W, *The New England Company*, 17 n. 1; Newitt, "The East India Company", 24-5; Jenson, JR, (ed.) *Journal and Letter Book of Nicholas Buckeridge 1651-1654*, (Minneapolis, Minn., 1973) 10

⁹² Arasaratnam, S, 'The Coromandel-southeast Asia Trade 1650-1740: Challenges & responses of a commercial system', *Journal of Asian History*, 18, (2), (1984) 119; *CCCMEIC 1644-49*, 360-361; Newitt *The East India Company*, 9, 25

⁹³ *CJ VI*, 353

⁹⁴ Bassett, DK, 'The Trade of the English East India Company in the far East, 1623-84'; *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (1960) 44; *CCCMEIC 1644-49*, 369-373, 374-6, 377-9
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nothing. Thus in the four years 1647-51 all four brothers became involved in the Old East India Company's adventures and overseas projects. They also ensured that they obtained increasing political control over their wealth through the Council of State. What also tied them to the government was their trade in saltpetre which linked to the arms trade.⁹⁵

An interesting issue is whether the Robert Thompson, who was to be the expedition commander on board the Ship, *The Assada Merchant*, which was employed by the Assada Adventurers, was in fact the brother of Maurice or another individual with the same name. Historians have assumed incorrectly that Captain Edward Thompson was Maurice's brother, and it is therefore difficult to assume that this commander was also. He may have been a relative of Edward, who in turn may have been a cousin of the Thomson brothers. However, piecing together the records of the English Factories in India and the references to Robert's activity as a naval commissioner in 1650-2, it is physically possible for Robert to have been in England up until sometime in late 1650, to have then been the commander of *The Assada Merchant* until March 1651, when he was in Gambroon, then back again in London by May 1651, when he put forward propositions to the Commons. By 12 December Jeremy Rayman was listed as Captain, but Nicholas Buckeridge was in command. However in Buckeridge's letter book is one letter which states on April 8th 1651 the *Assada Merchant* was the only ship which had not returned from her current voyage. When it did return Buckeridge was to be on board "for the merchandizing affaires" and in another that the *Assada Merchant* traded in Mozambique and returned on 12 October 1651 to Surat and was then sent down the coast of India on a short trip to Ceylon. It is therefore just about possible that Robert was the commander for the first part of the voyage but not the second.⁹⁶

The fate of the former Assada settlers is mentioned in a report to the Company on 14 January 1652: "Wee have already menconed what fortune befallen such Assada planters as were sent us from Bantam, we had also four more brought us by *The Aleppo Merchant*, and eight entertained out of *The Welcome* here for soldiers, which are all but one at present in health, though some few others have bin arrested by the grim serjeant Death; and six more lent the Nabob are still in the Campe." The report refers to wars going on locally so it was not possible for them to get back easily but listed those who there "together with three young men, servants to Mr MT, named Gustavus Denny, Daniell Denny and John Bridge. They were entertained here at 15s a month and dyet. They have been employed in copying out of books too enable their experience. The last is at present very sick and, in reference to man, his recovery is disputable."⁹⁷ The Assada adventure was therefore a failure, and one Robert would not want to repeat.

The next surviving record of Robert's activity in England is not until June 1653, which would have given him plenty of time to return to England by another ship, if he had returned to the Indian Ocean in 1652. If this was indeed the case, why he chose to take this command, or why Maurice

⁹⁵ Sainsbury EB, (ed.) *A calendar of Court Minutes of the East India Company (henceforth CCMEIC) 1650-54*, (Oxford, 1913) n4, 5-6, 10, 11, 12, 15, 27, 32, 34, 40, 49, 84, 96; *CJ VI*, 443; Newitt, 'East India Company', 25

⁹⁶ Jenson, *Buckeridge*, 6

⁹⁷ Jenson, *Buckeridge*, 19-35, 47; Love HD, *Vestiges of Old Madras 1640-1800*, 2 Vols., Vol. I, (1913) 107-8

asked him to command the ship has no certain answer, but it may have been that the whole operation was so fraught with difficulties that Maurice wanted a loyal younger brother to oversee the whole operation. There may also be a distinction between the commander of the expedition and the Captain or Master of the ship. Robert appears to be 'in command', in that he had total control of the trade and policy, whereas others carried out the physical running of the vessel. Letters sent from England in June 1652 that arrived in Gombroon in early November, advertised the probability of war between England and Holland, that a large number of Dutch ships had already been taken and that the factors in the East were therefore warned to be on their guard and send home ships at once. The *Assada Merchant* sailed on 13th November 1652, no longer under Robert's command, the first Anglo Dutch war having broken out in June as predicted. Robert presumably had returned home previously to help organize the navy for war. After this point, Robert appears to have given up seafaring and concentrated on his role as navy commissioner, though there are glimpses in the 1650s when the two came together.⁹⁸

On 20 October 1652 it was reported that Robert,⁹⁹ intended to buy the Company's stores at Sandwich, Margate and Deal, presumably in his role as a navy commissioner. Following a petition to the Council of State in December 1656 he was allowed to ship and transport to the East Indies thirty-six pieces of ordnance, which were Flemish prize pieces bought specifically for that purpose. In February 1659 he sold sails for two ships to the Company, whose Governor was then his brother Maurice and in October the Company wrote to Joshua Child, having been assured by Robert that Child would take special care in buying and shipping provisions for them.¹⁰⁰ Robert's role in the 1650s was therefore not an active one in the Company, but one where he interacted with it as an investor and as a Navy Commissioner. He had however been engaged in a minor way in the Guinea trade with merchant associates of his brother Maurice in the previous decade, and Maurice was keen to get control of the Guinea Company and eventually the East India Company itself.

The Thomsons and the Guinea trade

Trade between England and the Guinea coast had been controlled by royal letters patent until Charles I gave a monopoly in 1631 to Sir Nicholas Crispe and the Guinea Company for thirty one years. It continued to function during the 1640s, when Maurice and Robert tried to infiltrate it. There is evidence from a High Court of Admiralty case dating back to 1646-7, that a boat *The Swallow*, owned jointly by William Pennoyer, Robert, his relative Elias Roberts and others, all merchants, was used for trading slaves from Africa to Barbados. The Captain, Francis Crover, had died and his widow was attempting to recover the value of the slaves transported, to which he had been entitled to 1% of their value. She claimed at least one hundred slaves had been transported while he was master of the ship. Each slave was sold at between £25 and £30, which was the sum she claimed.¹⁰¹ Thus Robert, with others, was an interloper into a trade still technically under a

⁹⁸ William Foster (ed.) *The English Factories in India 1651-1654: A calendar of Documents in the India Office, Westminster*, (Oxford, 1915) 6,11,28, 34,40, 41, 55, 136, 146; BL India office Library, Original Correspondence E/3/19 No 2228

⁹⁹ *CCMEIC 1650-4*,199

¹⁰⁰ Sainsbury, *CCMEIC 1655-9*, (Oxford 1916) 137, 313, 350; For Child see Richard Grassby, 'Child, Sir Josiah, first baronet (*bap.* 1631, *d.* 1699)', *NewDNB*

¹⁰¹ TNA/HCA 24/108/362: Allegations by Alice Crover, widow
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monopoly. However in 1651 the Council of State allowed the monopoly to continue for another fourteen years, but restricted the area in which it could operate and by this time Maurice had managed to become a member of the Guinea Company. In September 1651 Maurice, Rowland Wilson and John Woods, as members of the Company, granted to James Pope a Commission to proceed in *The Friendship*, to the River Gambia to trade in hides, wax teeth (ivory) gold, ambergris and other merchantable commodities, to establish factories (trading posts) and to buy and bring home fifteen or twenty young negroes of about fifteen years of age. The same day they wrote to Captain Blake, as Captain of the ship, to go to Gambia, touch in at the Cape Verde Islands on the way and any other places Pope wished to visit and to be careful of being surprised by the French. By 6 October Blake had arrived in the Downs* and was ready to sail. The East India Company, spurred on by Maurice was keen to get hold of gold and ivory to trade with the East, as this meant less bullion needed to be exported directly from England. In 1649 the East India Company had agreed with Maurice and the Assada Adventurers that the Guinea and East India Trades should work together, and negotiations took place, which in December 1657, led to the East India Company getting the monopoly of the Guinea trade by purchasing the remainder of the 1651 lease for £1300, raised from the New General Stock following the new charter of the previous October under which Maurice became Governor. The company sent ships out between January 1658 and December 1663, by which point it had been replaced by the new Company of Royal Adventurers, run by Prince Rupert and James Duke of York.¹⁰² One of the first ships which sailed from the Downs on 21 January 1658 was the 200 ton *Marigold*, which carried 42 men and journeyed to Guinea and Madras, carrying a variety of merchandize including goods to the value of £2765 from England to Guinea provided by Maurice as Governor, and picking up 140 marks of gold in Guinea. The previous interloping voyages by Maurice and Robert had thus not only become legitimate, but Maurice had got control of both the East India and Guinea trades, albeit only for a few years.¹⁰³

The East India Company after the Restoration: Robert and the Treaty of Breda

After the Restoration, although Maurice was no longer Governor, he became Chairman of the Economic (Treasury) Committee, on which his brother William also sat. Both served as Directors on the Court of Committees of the New General Stock and Robert was elected to the Court in April 1666 and all subsequent courts until just before his death.¹⁰⁴ Eleven months after his election, on 12 March 1667, the Lord Chancellor asked the Company to send two representatives to attend the peace commissioners at the negotiations at Breda to try and conclude an end to the second Anglo-Dutch War, which was still in progress. It was decided by a majority of votes in the Court on 22 March that Robert and Thomas Papillon should act as the representatives. On 5 April Robert was added to the Committee for Dutch Affairs to prepare instructions for them and on 10th it was decided that the Deputy Governor John Jolliffe should also attend. The Commission under which they operated which was dated the 27 April said they were persons “in whom they repose especial trust and confidence, being well satisfied with their judgement and ability”. Thus with strict

¹⁰² HMC 13th Report, *Appendix Part I: Portland Mss* 3 Vols. (1891) Vol. II, 28, 29; Margaret Makepeace, ‘English Traders on the Guinea Coast, 1657-1668: An Analysis of the East India Company Archive’, *History in Africa*, Vol. 16 (1989), 237-8

¹⁰³ Makepeace, ‘English Traders’, 254 Appendix I

¹⁰⁴ Sainsbury, *CCMEIC 1664-7*, (Oxford, 1925) 31, 113n

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instructions and with Jolliffe and William Moses, the company's solicitor as legal assistant, they set out for Breda on the ship *Concord*, promising to correspond with the Governor, Sir Andrew Riccard, whilst they were there.¹⁰⁵

Unfortunately for Robert and Papillon, the British Government's approach to the treaty was rather different from that of the Company. The latter wanted the return of two islands captured by the Dutch, Pulo Run and Damm. They also wanted compensation for the seizure of two of Courten's ships and for attempts by the Dutch to hinder English trade in the East Indies, as well as an agreement on the regulation of trade on the basis of the diplomat, Sir George Downing's previous proposals. To help them, they went armed with duplicates of former treaties, lists of losses sustained and depositions on them from the High Court of Admiralty. The commissioners for the British government, led by Lord Holles and Henry Coventry (later Secretary of State), were however more concerned to modify the 1662 treaty in their interest rather than press for the return of the islands or for specific compensation for Courten's ships. On arrival they requested more papers in support of the Company's case which were sent out via Ostend. According to Venetian reports, as well as Robert and Papillon, "we hear that the English deputies are taking with the not only deputies of the India Company but all the merchants who consider themselves interested in the reprisals made by the Dutch". This may account for some of the difficulties that followed.¹⁰⁶

On 17 May Jolliffe was excused from attending, and by the end of the month, even though Robert and Papillon felt that they were wasting their time and would not get any compensation, the directors suggested they remain at Breda to try and protect the Company's affairs and continue to press for the return of the islands. They also requested that they supply the government's commissioners with any material to the company's advantage. The Swedish ambassador was acting as an intermediary between the two parties, and Robert was able to see international diplomacy at work at the highest level. This was to serve him in good stead later when he acted as arbiter in inter-colony disputes in America. Robert and Papillon were keen to get back home, but the Company wrote to them, saying their expenses would be duly met and that they hoped "there will be no occasion to detain them long from their relations and affairs", asking them to be patient and to continue to advance the company's interests. One reason for this may have been that Charles II, in order to fight the war, borrowed a total of £120,000 from the Company in 1666-7 and they needed to ensure that this sum was returned.¹⁰⁷

A week later, having agreed to stay at Breda, they were told of the Dutch attack on the Thames and Medway, in which not only were a number of ships burnt at Chatham, but also Dutch soldiers temporarily occupied the Isle of Sheppey. To make matters worse, sickness affected some of the British delegation at Breda including Lord Holles and Secretary Morrice. Robert and Papillon continued to send reports back to the directors, on what papers they had put forward, and on how

¹⁰⁵ *CCMEIC 1664-7*, xxii, 305, 310, 311, 316, 319-22, 330; Hinds AB (ed.) *Calendar of State Papers relating to English Affairs in the archives of Venice (Henceforth CSPV) Vol. 35 1666-1668*, (1935) 35, 151-163 n.5; For Papillon see Perry Gauci, 'Papillon, Thomas (1623-1702)', *NewDNB*

¹⁰⁶ *CCMEIC 1664-7*, xxii, 319-22, 330; *CSPV*, Vol. 35, 151-163

¹⁰⁷ *CCMEIC 1664-7*, xxii, 330, 336-7, 339; Papillon, AFW, *Memoirs of Thomas Papillon of London, merchant, 1623-1702*, (Reading, 1887) 93-4; Nichols, GO, 'English government borrowing, 1660-1688', *Journal of British Studies*, 10, 2 (May 1971) 85

the negotiations had progressed. However they had to report in July that they were largely excluded from influencing the final treaty and that the company's demands were 'out of doors'. The Company said they were sorry that they had been given so much trouble, which had entailed such long attendance, but thanked them for their patience and agreed to their request to return. According to Morrill, Holles was much criticized at the time, but in fact the negotiation with the Dutch was an exercise in damage limitation, and was quite well managed in its outcome, if not in its 'too punctilious manner'.¹⁰⁸

On their return, Robert and Papillon reported to the directors on 12 July 1667. They related what had happened, their relationship with the commissioners and ambassadors, and the role played by Secretary Morrice, to whom they had offered the freedom of the Company. Having however found their stay at Breda "no waies serviceable, but rather matter of charge to the Companie", they agreed with Holles that they could return home. The directors thanked them for their great care, and desired them to write to Morrice, who was still at Breda, to request details of the peace that had been worked out so that the Company's ships could carry a copy with them for their own security and save them from any hostility from Dutch ships. Having done this the directors decided to give them each £250 as a bonus, taking into consideration their management of affairs at Breda and the prejudice and inconvenience their own affairs suffered in their absence. Having been out of the country for over two months, from early May to the second week of July, this was a not unreasonable recompense.¹⁰⁹

The extent of the damage done to England's military reputation by the Second Dutch War, as well as the fear accompanying the invasion by Dutch troops in Essex and Kent has been analysed by Coox. The fact that the English were able to retain what had been New Amsterdam, and re-name it New York in exchange for Surinam, might well have been partly due to the influence that Robert and other colonial merchants had on the proceedings, as well as the Interests of James, Duke of York, with whom Robert was rumoured later to have had dealings over New York, over a possible sale to a syndicate organized by Robert.¹¹⁰ One of the clauses of the Treaty was that the King restored to France the coast from Cape Breton to the Penobscot, which had fallen into English hands during the rule of Cromwell. A group of French merchants formed in June 1669 the Compagnie du Nord, but this had been dissolved before 1682. A key member of this organization who traded with the area three times between 1672-4 was Henri Brunet from La Rochelle. On his third voyage he ended up in Boston, having been attacked by a Dutch ship. While in Boston he appears to have had amicable dealings with English merchants including the wealthy Mr William Taylor, who acted as a financial agent for him and owned considerable property in the area. These connections would prove useful to Robert later in his dealings in land in New England, which he helped provide for Huguenot refugees from La Rochelle.¹¹¹

Robert and Bombay

¹⁰⁸ *CCMEIC 1664-7*, 341, 344, 349-50; John Morrill, 'Holles, Denzil, first Baron Holles (1598–1680)', *NewDNB*; For Secretary Morrice see Paul Seaward, 'Morice, Sir William (1602–1676)', *NewDNB*

¹⁰⁹ *CCMEIC 1664-7*, 354, 355

¹¹⁰ Coox, AD, 'The Dutch invasion of England: 1667', *Military Affairs*, 13, 4, (Winter, 1949) 223-33

¹¹¹ Vigneras, L-A, 'Letters of an Arcadian Trader, 1674-1676', *NEQ*, 13, No.1, (March 1940) 98-110
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In the period following the peace treaty, Robert found his status enhanced and further demands were made on him. His and Papillon's expenses were scrutinized the following April, and shortly after, his brother William was re-elected Governor despite his protests that he did not want the post. Maurice and Robert were again elected as directors and in the September, Maurice no longer wishing to act as an arbiter in the case of Sir Francis Clarke, Robert took his place. Two weeks later he reported on the company's shipbuilding activities stating that no shipwright could be found to build a new ship in the time fixed by the Company but that there was a 150 ton ship, *The Richard and Elizabeth*, which was to have been sold, but which he had bought it for £950, giving £100 down with the rest to be paid the next day. The company agreed to the deal, authorized payment and ordered the name be changed to *George*.¹¹² As well as these activities, Robert had also become involved in establishing the new company fort at Bombay, which had been given to the King, Charles II, as part of the dowry of his new Portuguese Queen, Catherine of Braganza. According to Refai the local authorities in Bombay had resisted the handover although George Oxinden had been pressing for some time for its fortification by the Company and to use it as a strong naval base to control Surat.¹¹³

On 21 November 1667, he with his brother William, Sir Francis Clarke and Mr Jolliffe attended the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury about the sale of Bombay. The King felt he should offer it first to the Company out of respect for them. The next day the Court of Committees agreed the same four should treat with the Commissioners about purchasing it from the crown. Five days later a deal was proposed whereby if the Company lent the King £50,000 at 6% interest p.a., then the Company could have Bombay for free. Later in September 1668, Robert was given further responsibility, with Willoughby and Houlblon, to prepare rules for all military affairs relating to government and military discipline in Bombay. They also had to produce rules and plans for the town, its fortifications, munitions required and the provision for the soldiers and their wives that were to be sent there. On 3 November they presented their draft laws and constitutions for the government and the port, with six articles on religion, and an article on the administration of justice, which were accepted, but the article on the property and privileges of the inhabitants was referred back to the committee.¹¹⁴

At the end of December Robert and his associates on the Bombay Committee presented details on the fortification of the town, the number of soldiers to be kept there and the cost. It was decided that the town would be under the control of the commander of the fort, was to be laid out in brick and stone and follow the model used for the re-building of London after the Great Fire of the year before. Fifty soldiers and their wives were to be sent out, with as many as possible also being craftsmen. Twenty women of 'sober and civil lives', who were relatives of the soldiers, could also go out, and would be allowed to marry, but only English Protestants. It was also decided to send out canon, mortars and grenades to arm the soldiers, who were to initially be on half pay and engage in husbandry and manufacture. Ground for buildings etc. was to be allotted at low rents and all officers

¹¹² Sainsbury, *CCMEIC* (Oxford 1929) 51, 55, 92, 94-5

¹¹³ Refai GZ, 'Sir George Oxinden and Bombay, 1666-1668', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 93 No. 364, (Jul. 1977) pp 573-81

¹¹⁴ *CCMEIC 1664-7*, 401-2; *CCMEIC 1668-70*, 100, 112; For Sir James Houlblon, 1629-1700, Director of the East India & Levant Companies See H. G. Roseveare, 'Houlblon, Sir John (1632-1712)', *NewDNB*
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and soldiers were to be promoted on merit not by favour. Being involved in drawing up such plans would prove invaluable to Robert in his later designs to settle Huguenot refugees in New England.¹¹⁵

Robert as Deputy Governor

In 1669 Robert was, with his brother Maurice, appointed again to arbitrate in the case of Alderman Bathurst, who had bought and paid for goods which he had then not received. In the April elections of that year, Robert's brother William was elected as governor again and Maurice and he continued as directors. In January 1670 he and Joliffe were given permission to export cochineal and broadcloth. Also that year Robert acted as an arbitrator in Buckeridge's case against the company, which ended in Buckeridge paying £537 to the company, as a result of his Persian accounts being audited and found wanting. Robert's skills in administration, arbitration and diplomacy were recognized in the April elections of that year when he was elected Deputy-Governor for the first time, Sir Andrew Riccard being elected Governor. William and Maurice were elected both as directors and to the influential Treasury Committee, thus ensuring the family continued to have a major say over the direction in which the Company was heading.¹¹⁶

In his new role Robert had to deal with significant financial issues particularly the burden of the new Hearth Tax on the Company. He discussed the issue with the director and financier Sir John Banks, and how best to place the profits from the King for saltpetre. This relates to the fact that the Company made loans to the government after the Second Dutch War in the form of saltpetre supplied to the royal forces on credit. He also had to ensure that guns were sent to the Company's ally in the East Indies, the King of Bantam. At the same time he appears to have also been trading in Company stock on an increasingly large scale. In the April of 1669 he received £1,425 from his relative, Thomas Glover and £600 of stock from Thomas Papillon. In the April of 1670 he exchanged £1,000 of stock with his brother William and then received £1,100 from Thomas Sprigge, £850 from Joseph Denham, £1,300 from George Papillon and £300 from Fellowes. In the June he exchanged another £1,000 of stock with John Taylor, £200 worth from Thomas Sprigge in August and £600 worth in November. This appears to have increased his stock by £4,600, equivalent to a sum of about £1.7M in modern values. By 1670 he was clearly a wealthy man capable of realizing liquid capital when required. This would prove extremely useful when he came to purchase extensive lands in America later in the 1670s.¹¹⁷

The Company was always looking for new markets and in March 1671 his brother William reported that he had had a conversation with Lord Arlington about a Frenchman, M. Barron, who knew about the possibility of trade with Japan. Robert and two others were asked to discuss the

¹¹⁵ *CCMEIC 1668-70*, 134-6

¹¹⁶ *CCMEIC 1668-70*, 171, 187, 188, 189, 299, 316, 321-2

¹¹⁷ *CCMEIC 1668-70*, 360, 389-90, 399, 400, 402; For Banks see D. C. Coleman, 'Banks, Sir John, baronet (*bab.* 1627, *d.* 1699)', rev. *NewDNB*; Nichols, 'English government borrowing', 86; Joseph Denham was the husband of Katherine, the daughter of the Independent minister Sidrach Simpson: Tai Liu, 'Simpson, Sidrach (c.1600–1655)', *NewDNB*; John Taylor, merchant (1655-1729) was the son of Nathaniel Taylor the Cromwellian MP for Bedfordshire and the father of Brook Taylor, the mathematician: Lenore Feigenbaum, 'Taylor, Brook (1685–1731)', *NewDNB*; Nicholas Reynardson was probably one of the sons of the former Lord Mayor of London, Abraham; *NewDNB*

proposal with Barron, the outcome being that Barron agreed to serve the Company for five years at a salary of £120 p.a. and the Committee on Japan continued in negotiations with him. Re-elected as Deputy Governor again in April, Robert was asked to make enquiries on a secret matter of concern to the Company that related to charges made by Skinner that went back to the days when Maurice had been Governor.¹¹⁸

Robert and the Third Anglo-Dutch War

Despite no longer being Deputy Governor after April 1672, he was still used in negotiations on behalf of the Company, receiving a gratuity of £200 for his pains. In May he and Mr Paige were asked to investigate the qualifications of alternative candidates for the post of Governor of St Helena, following the removal of Richard Cony and allegations by the inhabitants against him. Robert, his brother William, Jolliffe and others were asked in September to prepare a memorial for presentation to the King for the more amicable carrying on of the trade in the Indies and for the prevention of future misunderstandings between the English and the Dutch. Boxer suggests that there was no enthusiasm among either merchants or non-conformists for the Third Dutch War. In analysing the background to the Third Anglo Dutch War he cited pamphlets by Slingsby Bethel as representing the views of many Non-conformists in England who were opposed to the War. In a pamphlet, *The present Interest of England Stated*, (1671), Bethel made a plea for the toleration of Protestant Dissenters, claiming that they formed the most industrious and socially useful section of the nation. He also sought the intensification of the penal laws against Catholics and highlighted the danger of French expansion into the Netherlands. His views were probably shared by Robert, who, like others, probably did not know about the secret Treaty of Dover that Charles had made with the French against the Dutch, behind Parliament's back. The war was unpopular among the London merchants in general, and there was hostility to the press-ganging of sailors reluctant to join the navy. The Stop of the Exchequer* in January was followed by the attack on the Dutch Smyrna Fleet in the English Channel, the publication of the Declaration of Indulgence in March then the official declaration of war on the United Provinces.

Despite this opposition, in late September and early October the Governor, Sir John Banks, agreed that the Company would loan the King nearly £30,000 to fight the Dutch, repayment being in the form of a remission of custom duties on Company imports. Banks and Robert were then asked on 13 November to meet with Charles II and Prince Rupert about the Commission and instructions, which had been presented to the Company. The failure of the naval campaign in the summer of 1673 created great disillusion with the war among a wider public and anti-French and anti-Catholic feeling rose at the apparent failure of French support, and James' Catholicism were well publicised. The Treaty of Westminster of February 1674 was apparently greeted with relief on both sides of the North Sea. Under this the British retained their control over the former New Netherlands in North America, renamed New York after the Duke of York, a man from whom Robert and a syndicate were

¹¹⁸ Sainsbury, *CCMEIC 1671-1673*, (Oxford, 1932) 18, 29, 42; For Arlington see Alan Marshall, 'Bennet, Henry, first earl of Arlington (*bap.* 1618, *d.* 1685)' *NewDNB*
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10 years later to offer to buy the territory.¹¹⁹ The whole episode highlights the Thomson brothers' attitude towards the Dutch, their Anglo–Dutch relatives, and their many trading links with Holland, which must have suffered as a result of the war.¹²⁰

Meanwhile, in March 1673 the Company was concerned to finalize their negotiations with Charles II over the regulation of their trade which they had proposed the previous October. The Governor, his deputy and Robert were asked to discuss with Lord Arlington, the Secretary of State or Sir Joseph Williamson, his deputy, for advice on what agreement could be reached with the King and report back the next day. Not only does this and his previous meeting with the monarch show the esteem in which Robert was held, but details of the attendances of different directors at meetings of the court revealed that he had one of the best records attending 99 out of the 117 courts held between April 1672 and 15 April 1673. He was given a further gratuity for the previous year's duties and the details of the transfer of stock in 1671-3 reveal that he was exchanging stock with Robert Boyle, Nicholas Reynardson, John Dashwood, Samuel Moyer, his brother William and Joseph Denham. He then sold a considerable amount of stock between April and September 1673 selling £500 worth to Captain John Brookhaven in April, £1,000 worth to James Ward in May, £500 to Nathaniel Herne, £1000 each to Sir John Moore and Christopher Tomlinson in July, £500 to Joseph Herne in September and a further £100 worth to Nathaniel Herne in November. He thus realized £4,600 (approximately £1.7 M in modern values), the value of the stocks he had purchased 3 years before. What this was used for, may well be related to his purchases in America.¹²¹

Robert as Deputy Governor again

On 14 April 1674, Robert was again elected Deputy Governor, to Sir Nathaniel Herne the Governor, and brothers, Maurice and Sir William, were chosen two of the 24 directors on the Court of Committees. The following month, Robert proposed building a 500 ton ship with three decks for the Company's service to be ready in September 1675. The Court of Committees agreed to employ her before any other and to allow her freight to the East Indies for the first two voyages and back at the rate of £1 per ton for each voyage, provided that the commander and mates presented to go in her were approved. Given that in 1676 a 250 ton merchant ship in England was reckoned to cost £7-2-6d a ton to build then this 500 ton ship would have cost Robert £3562-10s. However it would not

¹¹⁹ *CCMEIC 1671-73*, 122, 125, 174, 183, 191; Howat, GMD, *Stuart and Cromwellian Foreign Policy*, (1974) 133-6; Nichols, 'English government borrowing', 86; Boxer, CR, 'Some second thoughts on the Third Anglo-Dutch War 1672-1674', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, (Henceforth TRHS) 5th Ser. 19, (1969) 75

¹²⁰ Boxer, 'Some second thoughts' 67-94

¹²¹ *CCMEIC 1671-73*, 218, 224, 233, 306-7, 309-10, 312-14; For Herne, brother of Sir Joseph see in: D. W. Jones, 'Herne, Sir Joseph (*bap.* 1639, *d.* 1699)', rev. Anita McConnell, *NewDNB*; John Dashwood was probably a relative of the Turkey Merchant Francis Dashwood: Dorothy M. Moore, 'Dashwood, Sir Francis, first baronet (c.1658–1724)', *NewDNB* 2004; Samuel Moyer was the Republican merchant, Independent in religion, who would have known Robert since their collaboration in the Additional Sea Adventure to Ireland. He was one of the Directors of the East India Company 1672-82: Austin Woolrych, 'Moyer, Samuel (c.1609–1683)', rev. *NewDNB*; Captain John (or Jan van) Brookehaven was a colleague of Robert's with whom he had many dealings over his lifetime; For Sir John Moore the controversial merchant, moderate non-conformist and court aligned politician see: Richard Grassby, 'Moore, Sir John (*bap.* 1620, *d.* 1702)', *NewDNB*

¹²¹ Sainsbury, *CCMEIC 1674-76*, (Oxford, 1935) iii-iv, 46-7, 51, 66, 67-8, 58-9, 108-9; Barbour V, 'Dutch and English merchant shipping in the Seventeenth Century', *Economic History Review*, (*Henceforth ECHR*) 2, (Jan. 1930) 260-75; Coleman, DC, 'Naval Dockyards under the later Stuarts', *ECHR*, New Ser., 6, 2, (1953) 138 n2
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necessarily have had a carrying capacity of 500 tons, as the carrying capacity could be a third less than the estimated burthen or displacement. Two months later, he offered, as representative of the owners of the *Bombay Merchant*, to make her available for the Company's service again. This suggests that Robert was tying his own ships, or shares in ships, into the Company's regular trade to ensure his personal profit from the ventures. In August not only did Robert offer another new two-deck ship being built by Mr Castle at Deptford for the Company's service, but also the family involvement in the Company increased with the admittance of Samuel, Sir William's son, to the freedom of the Company, as a result of his own father's position. To further ensure his own family's influence, Robert persuaded the Court to admit his own son-in-law, William Ashhurst, free of charge, despite not being his direct heir and therefore being able to take the normal advantages of patrimony. Later on 13 September 1676 his nephew, Sir John Thompson, was admitted to the Company by patrimony, following his father, Maurice's death, selling £1200 of stock to Jeremy Sambrooke on 14 December 1677, presumably part of his father's legacy.¹²²

On 6 August 1674 Robert, the Governor Nathaniel Herne and Sir John Banks went to Windsor for an audience with the King and his brother, James Duke of York, and presented the narrative of the fight between the Company's ships and those of the Dutch off Pettapolie. This relates to the continuing conflicts associated with the Third Anglo Dutch war. Robert also became more involved in the Company's finances. He was paid on 9 October for saltpetre which he had sent to George Clifford in Amsterdam for the Company's use and he and the Treasury Committee were authorized to dispose of any sum not exceeding £1,000 for the Company's service. His brother William was meanwhile one of the Commissioners on behalf of the King who agreed a Marine Treaty with the Dutch, which was designed to prevent a further outbreak of hostilities. Thus, despite their being Non-conformists, Charles II, in the spirit of the Declaration of Indulgence, was happy to use the expertise of the Thomson brothers to help him achieve the diplomatic goals he sought.¹²³

On 16 April 1675 Robert was elected as Deputy yet again, taking the oath of office in the presence of the directors and members of the company. However both he and Nathaniel Herne had to combat rumours that had been spreading against them. In the list of those eligible to be elected as Directors that year, were other members of the Thomson family including Maurice, William, George and Samuel. However, in September 1675 the rumour was that Herne had received money for giving a person command of a new ship he proposed to build for the Company and Robert said he had heard the same report about himself, as well as others things objected against him by the Court of Committees. As a result, a five man committee of directors was established to enquire into the rumours, receive information from individuals and examine and report the truth of all such complaints. Nothing seems to have come of these accusations and Robert once again became involved in the affairs of Bombay. He was asked to recommend books to be added to the library at the fort and specifically to provide the second part of Dr Hamond's works and the fourth book of '*Mr Pooles Criticks*' as additions to the Company's library at Balasore. He also found himself with other directors going to the House of Lords Committee of Trade on 2 March 1676 to discuss obstruction by

¹²³ *CCMEIC 1674-6*, 97,102

the Portuguese of the Company's trade at Bombay, but further papers were required before anything could be decided.¹²⁴

The allegations of financial impropriety appear to have surfaced again in February 1676 when it was asserted that the Company had not obeyed the order of the Chief Baron (Judge) of the Exchequer Court for the inspection of their financial books. The Governor stated that there was no disrespect intended towards the Judge but the Company was awaiting the advice of their own legal counsel. The Governor, Robert and Sir John Banks were then requested to seek an audience with the Duke of Monmouth, the illegitimate son of Charles II and tell him of the proceedings of the Company in this particular matter. On 21 March, having prepared an address for presentation to the Duke, Robert and other committeemen planned to present it to him the following day. They apparently received a favourable reception and a draft reply, but this was unsigned by the Duke.¹²⁵

On 17 April 1676, Robert as Deputy and other directors met in the grand parlour of company house and were half way through taking the votes of the adventurers when the Governor arrived with a letter from Sir Joseph Williamson, the Secretary of State, in which he intimated that the King, as grantor of the Company Charter, was not in favour of the election of Josiah Child as Governor and Thomas Papillon as deputy, as had been planned. The reasons are not entirely clear, but four days later the Court called a second election in which Sir William, Robert's brother, was chosen Governor, and Sir James Edwards, Deputy Governor. Charles II said he was glad of the choice made the second time, as they were very worthy good men, implying those previously elected were not. Sainsbury suggested that it may have been because Child and Papillon were Whigs or because they were in dispute with the victuallers of the navy. Papillon was a Whig and led the attack on Lord Treasurer Danby as well as being very anti-Catholic, and it may have been this that meant he was temporarily out of favour, as he was later elected Deputy Governor in 1680. Child and Papillon had claimed £82,000 was owed to them as victuallers for the Navy in the Third Dutch War, but both were accused of abuses in the management of the stores. In 1675 Child, having lost the victualling contract, was accused of refusing to sell to the victuallers. It was probably these disputes which temporarily made them unacceptable to the King, or to his closest advisers, as Child was elected as Governor in 1682. Robert, though no longer Deputy, was elected as a director again on 27 April 1676.¹²⁶

Robert would have suffered a significant blow when his eldest brother Maurice died, his last recorded attendance being on 10 March. Though a warrant was issued on 26 May to pay him over £7879, Lord Anglesey recorded his death in his diary as midnight on 30 April¹²⁷ This unfortunately coincided with an assault by a consortium of critics of the company including clothiers, wool and silk merchants, bullionists and the Levant Company. The wool merchants petitioned the government to dissolve the East India Company, and a pamphlet was circulated criticizing it. This may have related to rumours which had been circulating in September 1675. However his brother William was elected

¹²⁴ CCMEIC 1674-1676, 174, 210, 249, 250, 281; Anon, *A list of the names who by their adventures are capable of being chosen committees for the year 1675*, (1675)

¹²⁵ CCMEIC 1674-1676, 279, 291, 292

¹²⁶ BL India Office Papers B34 ff3-5; CCMEIC 1674-6, 294, 300, 301, 302 ; Gauci, 'Papillon', Grassby, Child

¹²⁷ BL India Office Papers B23, f 206; B34 f 21; BL Add Mss 18730: Diary of the earl of Anglesey 1675-1684 f 10
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Governor again in April 1677 and he as a director at the same time. At this period Robert appears to have been involved in privately supplying arms and ammunition for the Company's forts in the East. In October of 1676 he reported that 93 cwt of iron shot had been taken out of the ship, the *East India Merchant* by the Company's President at Surat and, in exchange, he had purchased taffetas, of which Robert wished to dispose. He also, with Mr Dewey, had been transporting gunpowder under contract, for which the Company were late in paying, so he sought an additional allowance for this.¹²⁸

In the April of 1678, Robert was chosen as Deputy Governor for another time, and found again that the constituents of gunpowder were causing problems. In the November he reported that the Master of the King's Ordinance refused to pay more than 53 shillings per cwt for saltpetre, whereas the directors declared it could not be sold for less than 55 shillings a cwt, "that being the medium price given for it at the last sale in September." However a possible new venture was considered when Robert and four of the directors discussed the possibility of carrying on a trade in diamonds by means of a joint stock of interested adventurers, but later they decided it would be better to continue the existing arrangements within the company. Still carrying out his responsibility for Bombay, he and Colonel Clarke reported on the completion of the establishment of the factory* and fort at Bombay and discussed the number of soldiers required to complete the two companies to be kept there.¹²⁹

In the April elections of 1679 Robert was chosen Deputy Governor for the penultimate time and both William and Samuel Thomson were appointed directors, with Sir William taking over Maurice's previous post in charge of the Treasury. Robert had attended 105 out of a possible 112 meetings of the Court of Committees and was presumably seen as an assiduous director. After 6 August Sir Nathaniel Herne, the Governor fell ill and Robert became the Acting Governor for a month. Sir Nathaniel having died, Sir William was elected in his place, but in his absence, Robert continued to run the Company until 26 September. The Thomson brothers were now holding the top two posts in the Company and Robert announced that a dividend of 20% had been agreed by the directors to be made to the adventurers* on 1 October, any buying goods to be allowed it in payment, warrants for the dividend being available by 9 September. A few days later he was authorized to give 27 guineas* to those who "had been serviceable to the Company as regards convoys." On 1 October Sir William declared that a further dividend of 20% was possible "it having pleased the Lord to give a good success to their affairs." However the dividend would be paid in two instalments, half on 10th October and the rest at the end of the following March. This suggests that, while the Thomson brothers had been running the financial affairs of the Company it had done rather well, despite what critics might later say.¹³⁰

On 20 April 1680 Sir William was elected as Governor for the fourth time with Thomas Papillon, Robert's former colleague at Breda, as Deputy Governor. Sir William was given a £200

¹²⁸ *CCMEIC 1674-76*, 196, 210, 360; Sainsbury, *CCMEIC 1677-79*, (Oxford, 1938) iv, 28, 40, 121; Nichols, 'English government borrowing', 86-7

¹²⁹ *CCMEIC 1677-79*, iv, 175, 220, 235, 250

¹³⁰ *CCMEIC 1677-79*, 267, 268, 290-1, 293, 299; BL India Office Papers B35 245, 256; ; Anon, *A list of the names who by their adventures are capable of being chosen committees for the year 1679*, (1679)

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bonus and Robert one of £100 for their successful services the previous year. The following April Sir Josiah Child became Governor with Papillon continuing as Deputy, while Robert and Samuel Thomson were elected as directors. Sir William may have been ill, as he was not elected as a director, and he died later in the year, Robert acting as his executor and tying up his affairs within the Company. Surprisingly perhaps, Robert now 72 years of age, was elected again as Deputy Governor in April 1682, with Sir Josiah Child as Governor. However the following year they were replaced by Sir John Banks and Jeremy Sambrooke and these changes require some explanation, particularly as Robert was not elected as a director.¹³¹

According to Pincus, Sir Josiah Child was by then one of the most important merchants in the kingdom, who successfully took control of the East India Company in the last few years of Charles II's reign. In 1682 Child gave up his old friends, and took over the Director's Committee which elected him Governor. The old Whig friends he identified as Bernardiston, Papillon, Banks and Robert, and his new friends as Catholic and Tory courtiers who tied themselves closely to James II, James himself having at least £10,000 of stock.¹³² Davies suggested that in the 1680s there was pressure from investors on the company enabling it to keep its issued stock small and to trade extensively on borrowed capital. In July 1685 the company owed over £500,000 on its bonds, compared to a nominal share capital of under £750,000. The rate at which it could borrow was so low as to have the positive disadvantage that even a temporary hardening of the market caused considerable embarrassment to the extent that in 1682, payments had to be suspended for a few months. Their success depended on a stable or falling interest rate. The Company was extremely large and the value of the stock soared. Indeed in 1685 East India Stock with a nominal value of £100 was calculated to be worth £327 in net assets. In that year the market price fluctuated between £360 and £500, so that the investor valued the stock much higher than the company did. In the four years 1685-8, annual dividends of 25% were issued. Opposition to the Company arose to try and force an issue of new stock at par or to found a venture with a very much larger share capital. In 1681 a new company was projected with a capital of £3M, eight times the then paid up capital of the old company and £1M was subscribed before the attempt was abandoned. Whatever the reason, Robert seems to have retired from active duty in running the Company, leaving it to a new generation to take over the reins.¹³³

Robert's role therefore, both as a director and as Deputy Governor within the East India Company had been one of negotiator, arbitrator and planner as well as ship broker and trader. As such he had had to negotiate at the highest levels of government, had attended an international peace conference and had helped to plan all the details of the Company's new trading base at Bombay. He had audiences with the King and other members of the Royal Family and had to settle disputes within the Company and take over as Acting Governor. Clearly his trading and financial activities had borne fruit, as his stock increased and he was able to realize it in hard cash. Although he got little out of the negotiations at Breda for the Company, this was hardly his fault and he had

¹³¹ BL India Office Papers B/36 Court Book April 1680-April 1683 ff 1, 2, 111, 112, 196; B/37 Court Book April 1682- April 1684, ff1, 134

¹³² Pincus SA, 'Whigs, Political economy and the Revolution of 1688-89', 10,

¹³³ Davies, KG, 'Joint-Stock Investment in the Later Seventeenth Century', *ECHR* New Ser. 4, No. 3 (1952), 283-301

shown persistence and patience in the negotiations. His success in planning Bombay was to be seen by its later success as an entrepot for the company. However while he was engaged in all these activities he also was active on behalf of the American colonies in New England and in property speculation in former Native American Indian lands.

Chapter 3 - Robert and America

Largely independently of his brothers, Robert carved out for himself a variety of roles in relation to the American east coast colonies in the post-Restoration period. At one and the same time he was: an evangelical who supported spreading the gospel among the Indians; a land speculator who took advantage of the Native American Indians' defeat in wars against the colonists to seize or purchase former Indian land; an arbitrator between rival colonies over where their boundaries should run; and a representative of the interests of the colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut in England. Towards the end of his life he also helped the colonies obtain new charters, to secure their partial independence of central authority. Not all of these roles were compatible, and a number of them involved him in alliances with colonial politicians and speculators of controversial reputations and in extensive land development schemes from Maine to Pennsylvania. In the 18th century the town of Thompson in Killingly parish Connecticut was named after him, something none of his other brothers achieved.

Robert had established himself in Boston in the 1630s, had acquired property in Connecticut in 1657 then progressively bought land or mortgages on property from settlers in and around Boston in the 1660s and '70s. Also as an active member of the New England Company from 1649 and of its successor, The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, from the 1660s, he established important contacts with the Massachusetts authorities, and the clerics and others associated with Harvard College, particularly Increase Mather, Daniel Gookin and Samuel Sewell, that were to last to the end of his life. As a friend of both the Massachusetts and Connecticut governments he came into contact with a number of important politicians who were to shape the destiny of the colonies, but who also involved Robert in land speculation. These individuals included John Winthrop Junior, the Governor of Connecticut, Joseph Dudley, Richard Wharton and William Stoughton, all from Massachusetts. Spreading the gospel, local and colonial politics and land speculation were thus all intertwined and created tensions between his different roles. However initially Robert's involvement in New England did not involve massive land speculation but was largely the gradual purchase of property and involvement with spreading the gospel.

The English colonies were effectively independent during and after the British Civil Wars and some had made an arrangement for mutual defence, The New England Confederation, surviving into the 1650s. In 1649 the New England Company, or the Company for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Indians, had been founded in which he and his brother William were involved. As early as 1651, Robert acquired the estate formerly held by the evangelist Henry Whitfield at Guilford in Connecticut. Black has Robert purchasing the manse from Whitfield in 1659 whereas Smith argued that, although Whitfield had moved out, his wife continued managing the estate until 1659. It is not clear who actually lived in it after that date. Robert was probably able to purchase this, as on 14 May 1651 the republican government in England repaid him for money he had expended in the expedition to Ireland in the 1640s. He had also obtained land in Dunluce in Ireland which on 17 May 1654 was assigned to his colleague John Brookhaven.¹³⁴ Land speculation in Ireland may therefore have helped pay for land purchase in America. In March 1657 his interest in America was revived

¹³⁴ *CSPI 1647-60*, 382; *CSPI Adventurers*, 171; Black, RC, II, *The Younger John Winthrop*, (NY, 1966) 237; Smith, RD, *The History of Guilford Connecticut from its first settlement in 1639*, (Albany NY, 1877)
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again when he acted as executor for the will of Edward Hopkins and he also purchased land at Shawshin from Daniel Gookin.¹³⁵ Hopkins had been his colleague as a naval commissioner and Gookin was an active agent in New England for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Indians.

At various points after Robert's death his land at Guilford Connecticut was surveyed in terriers. He had a number of parcels which included "one parcel of third division land next above the grene Swamp land", which contained 139 acres and was measured between trees, stakes and piles of stones. This abutted on common land, a highway and land held by Joseph Dudley and William Stone. A second parcel of 104 acres of 'election land' at Rose Hill was bounded by a highway and common land and similarly marked with 'RT' being cut into the bark of trees. A further 83 acres had been bought from John Hobson senior and another 28 acres at Crambury Hill of 'fourth division land', also "one parcel cohabit land" near Green Swamp Hill of 29 acres. Another tract of 83 acres was tenanted by Mr Daniel Penfold in the first decade of the 18th century had also been purchased of Sergeant John Hobson. A further tract of 122 acres of land under Robert's claim was not measured and 'layd out' until 1730, when it was described as being a parcel of fourth division land at the north end of a hill called Race Hill and near Little Cedar Swamp. In total it appears from the surveying and re-surveying of land that Robert had held at his death about 600 acres in Guilford as well as owning the house etc. that had belonged to Whitfield.¹³⁶

As well as land in Connecticut, Robert also obtained land at Shawshin in Massachusetts through his agent Daniel Gookin. Gookin had been a settler in Virginia, then Maryland, migrating to Boston in 1644. For the next 4 years he lived at Roxbury, whose pastor was John Eliot, the Apostle of the Indians. According to Roger Thompson, 'then Cambridge offered a 500 acre farm in Shawshin, and the Gookins made the town their permanent home. He quickly became an important figure in town and colony, acting as selectman, captain of militia, deputy, speaker, and after 1652 as an assistant, one of the magistrates, and a member of the colony's senior legislative and executive body.'¹³⁷ He returned to England in 1657, presumably the occasion of his sale of Shawshin to Robert and, back in Massachusetts in 1660, Gookin was involved in the settlement at Worcester that also came to involve Robert. Their original contact was probably through the New England Company, of which Gookin was a member, and he was involved in the expansion of Harvard, becoming the permanent superintendent of the praying Indians in 1661. In that year Robert purchased a warehouse in Boston, Gookin acting as his agent.¹³⁸ What the initial purpose of this and subsequent purchases in Boston was is difficult to determine. It could be a form of investment *per se*, or could have been the building up of a possible bolt hole for Robert, given the difficult situation for Nonconformists after the Restoration.

As well expanding his ownership of property around Boston and keeping his land in Connecticut, Robert was drawn into three inter-related activities in New England: firstly as an agent

¹³⁵ Lovett RW, (ed.) 'Harvard College Records IV Documents 1638-1722', *CMHS*, 49, (Boston MA, 1975) 160

¹³⁶ Connecticut State Archives (henceforth CSA): Guilford Parish, Land Records: Terriers Vol. 2 1686-1747, p 14, ff 1-2 The terrier of land belonging to major Robert Thompson; p 40 Mr Joseph Thomson old England- Records of land inspected

¹³⁷ Thompson, 'Gookin', *NewDNB*

¹³⁸ Hassam, *Suffolk deeds*, Vol. IV, f 1

in London for the colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut in obtaining the renewal of their charters from the government of Charles II; secondly as part of an arbitration team set up to try and solve the boundary disputes between these two colonies and the colony of Rhode Island; and thirdly in the exploitation of, and speculation in, the land formerly held by the Narragansett Indians.

Robert and the renewal of the colonial charters

After the Restoration of King Charles II, it was necessary for the colonies to seek a renewal of their charters, which had been granted at various stages during the Commonwealth period. However this involved disputes between the colonies over claims to land in the area occupied by the Narragansett Indians. Both issues became inextricably linked. In 1661 the Massachusetts General Court sent Simon Bradstreet and the Rev. John Norton to act as their agents in London, and Robert Thompson and his relative, Henry Ashhurst, were asked to support them. The same year Nathaniel Mather wrote to his brother, Increase Mather, that he had left a letter for him at Mr Thomson's, who was clearly acting as a *poste restante* at the least. In March 1662, possibly because of the recently passed legislation against Non-Conformists, Robert was seriously contemplating moving either to Massachusetts, probably to Boston, where he had property, or to Connecticut.¹³⁹

Between 1661 and 1662, John Winthrop junior, the Governor of Connecticut, attempted to obtain a new royal charter for the colony. This claim extended the existing boundaries into areas claimed by other colonies including those of New Haven, Rhode Island and the then New Netherlands. However claims by Connecticut over the Narragansett Country impinged on those of Rhode Island and led to a long running dispute with John Clarke, the agent for the latter in London, the responsibility for which Dunn placed largely in Winthrop's hands. Although Massachusetts had a pre-Commonwealth charter, which the monarch initially recognized, neither Rhode Island, nor Connecticut, had, and both had agents to London in 1661 to secure new ones. Dr John Clarke had been representing Rhode Island for the past 10 years, and although Winthrop was new to the game as Connecticut's agent, this was a very different situation for both of them. The remit given to Winthrop was to claim as large an area as possible, which not only included New Haven and the Narragansett but also parts of Rhode Island and the New Netherlands.¹⁴⁰

Winthrop had three advantages over Clarke: firstly, being a scientist he had connections with some of the key members of the emerging Royal Society such as Robert Boyle, a colleague of Robert Thompson's in the New England Company. Winthrop was soon admitted to the Society himself, and secondly, being an old acquaintance of Lord Saye, he had an entry into government circles, Saye being Lord Privy Seal.* Through him he found a 1632 conveyance of land to Saye, Brooke and Company, which seemed to include Narragansett Bay within the early Connecticut River grant. He and Clarke both put in their requests for charters along with their claims, which were being considered by February 1662. Winthrop's third advantage was that he had the money to push his charter through the partially corrupt legal processes and get it confirmed on 10 May 1662. Clarke

¹³⁹ Thomas Hutchinson, *A collection or original papers relative to the history of The Colony of Massachusetts Bay*, (Boston 1769) pp 363-4; *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, (henceforth MHSC) 4th Ser. Vol. 8 (Boston, 1868) Mather Papers 5: Nathaniel Mather to Increase Mather, 189-90: Letter to Rutherford 27/03/1662

¹⁴⁰ Dunn, 'John Winthrop', 73-4

persuaded Clarendon, as Lord Chancellor, to review the charter and appealed to the King four days later. Robert Boyle attempted to act as mediator, but Winthrop sent a copy of his charter to Hartford, to outmanoeuvre Clarke. However they agreed that Boyle and Sir Thomas Temple, Governor of Nova Scotia, should act as arbitrators and, at their meeting, Clarke came with the lawyer, Samuel Maverick, and Winthrop with the land speculator, John Scott, and his own son Wait Winthrop, whose presence appeared to Dunn to have scuppered a partition deal. However the presence of John Scott was perhaps not very helpful to the proceedings. Son of a royalist colonel, he had been transported to the Americas in 1643, and came into conflict with the law, had a variety of occupations, traded in Long Island, where he bought a house and land at Southampton and became a tax commissioner. However he caused dissensions and ended up in gaol. He had returned to England by 1660 and why Winthrop chose him is obscure, but he managed to get an introduction for him to Joseph Williamson the under-secretary of state, with whom he struck up a friendship.¹⁴¹

The merger of New Haven with Connecticut was problematic, as Leete was one of the original founders of Guilford, where Robert had acquired Whitfield's property, being deputy governor of New Haven from 1658 to 1661, then governor until the merger of the two colonies in 1665. Winthrop obtained a charter in 1662 but New Haven was absorbed in the larger colony rather than being an equal partner, and Leete attempted to resist, until the arrival of a royal commission which threatened its entire existence forced his hand.¹⁴² As Robert was in London during this period he may well have been involved in negotiations at that end, between the representatives of Winthrop and Leete. On 27 March 1662, a letter, partly in code, which was found in the Mather Papers, states that "Mr Willoughby, Major Thomson with there families bound for Boston in the same shipp. Major Thomson is not resolved yet where to take up his dwelling, whether in the Bay or more southerly to Guilford."¹⁴³ What this implies is that Robert was actually contemplating either re-emigration to Massachusetts or to Guilford Connecticut, where, in both places, he had already acquired property. The reasons for this are probably related to the expected effects of the recently passed legislation against Non-Conformists, including the Corporations Act (1661) and the Uniformity Act which was formulated in Convocation before being passed through Parliament that year.¹⁴⁴

The conflict between Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island was partly religious, partly to do with whether land was sold, or gifted by the Indians, the validity of these purchases, of oral rather than written agreements and whether their legality would stand up in court. It was also connected with the previous pamphlet warfare between Williams, John Cotton and Thomas Weld on a number of theoretical issues.¹⁴⁵ The Narragansett Indians had occupied some of, and roamed over

¹⁴¹ Dunn, 'John Winthrop', 74-9; Alan Marshall, 'Scott, John (1632?-1704)', *NewDNB*

¹⁴² Walter W Woodward, William Leete (c.1613-1683) Colonial Governor, *NewDNB*.

¹⁴³ *MHSC*, 4th Ser. 8, 189

¹⁴⁴ Costin WC & Steven Watson J, (eds.) *The Law and working of the Constitution: Documents 1660-1914*, I (1952) 15-17, 20-29; Clark, GN, *The Later Stuarts*, (Oxford, 1934) 20 & n1

¹⁴⁵ Roger Williams, *A key into the language of America*, (1643); John Cotton, *A letter....to Mr Williams*, (1643); Thomas Weld, *An answer to W.R. his narratives*, (1644); Roger Williams, *Mr Cotton's letter lately published*, (1644); Roger Williams, *The bloody tenent...*(1644) John Cotton, *The bloody tenent...* (1647); Jeffrey Glover, 'Wunnaumwayean: Roger Williams, English credibility and the colonial land market', *Early American Literature*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 429-33

the rest of, an area to the south of Massachusetts, east of Connecticut and west of Rhode Island. Much of the land, except for Boston Neck, was poor for farming, yet all three overlapping claims from all three colonies emanated from patents issued by the Earl of Warwick as chairman of the former Parliamentary Commission on Foreign Plantations. Connecticut's grant went back to a deed of conveyance of 1632 and Massachusetts to 1643.¹⁴⁶ However apart from individuals attempting to obtain land, others founded speculative land companies, which also had designs on the land nominally held by the Narragansett. Such a one was the Atherton Company.

This was set up by Humphrey Atherton from Massachusetts and others to exploit land in the same area. These included in New England, the Governor of Connecticut, John Winthrop, Richard Smith and Richard Smith Jr. of Cocomcussuc, William Hudson and Amos Richardson of Boston and John Tinker of Nashua, and they took advantage of Indian difficulties to seize land. Atherton had been a captain in the Massachusetts militia, who had known the territory as part of his military role. He tried to persuade Roger Williams to get lands for him from the Narragansett by acting as interpreter, but Williams refused to play ball. The Company obtained land from the Indians for £120 in 1659, which resulted from the imposition of a fine on the Indians, in default of paying which, they had to mortgage the whole of their territory. The tribe were collectively fined 600 fathoms of wampum by the United Colonies, the then government for the area. Atherton then intervened, agreed to pay the Indians' fine on condition the mortgage was made over to his Company, and when they defaulted on payment, claimed ownership of all the Narragansett lands, a situation Williams refused to recognize. The land was technically 'gifted' to get round the law, and though not active, Winthrop benefited when Bostock Neck was divided into eight equal estates and then defended the company's interests against claims to control it by Rhode Island.¹⁴⁷

Disputes continued in London between agents of the various colonies over who owned the land until 7 April 1663, when five arbitrators, who had replaced Boyle and Temple, thought they had obtained agreement by making the Pawcatuck River the boundary. The river from henceforth was to be referred to as the Narragansett River. Robert Thompson was one of the five arbitrators, as was his colleague in the East India Company, John Brookhaven. The others were William Brereton, Dr Benjamin Worsley and Captain Richard Deane. However Winthrop had managed to protect his and the Atherton Company's interest by including two clauses in the agreement. Firstly all existing property holders were to be left undisturbed and those in the Narragansett were permitted to join the Connecticut jurisdiction, if they so chose. Specifically the lands claimed or purchased by Atherton, Captain Hutchinson and Lieutenant Hudson were mentioned in this respect. Secondly Winthrop's own personal property at Quinebaug and Fishers Island also came under Connecticut, as the agreement said "if any parts of that purchase at Quimbage doth lie along upon the east side of

¹⁴⁶ Dunn, RS, 'John Winthrop, Jr. and the Narragansett Country', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, (henceforth WMQ) 3rd Ser., 13, 1 (Jan 1956) 68-70

¹⁴⁷ Dunn, 'John Winthrop', 70-3

that river that goeth down to New London within six miles of the said river, that then it shall wholly belong to Connecticut colony, as well as the rest, which lyeth on the western side.”¹⁴⁸

Robert was involved in correspondence with a number of interested parties, as in 1663 John Davenport wrote a letter to John Winthrop Junior, the Governor of Connecticut, in which he referred to the fact that the new charter had united New Haven and Connecticut, but also referred to another letter to Major Mason “whether he hath that letter from Major Thomson or not.” Three days later, William Leete wrote a letter to Winthrop which referred to another letter sent to Mason by Robert and Mr Scott. From these it is clear that during the early 1660s Robert, as well as acting as part of an arbitration team, was in quite regular communication with authorities in New England and was establishing relationships with some of the key figures in the expansion of the colonies.¹⁴⁹

Those in the arbitration team included Benjamin Worsley, who, like Maurice Thomson, had been involved with the establishment of the earlier Council of Trade and the 1651 Navigation Act and was later Surveyor-General for forfeited estates in Ireland. Living not far from Robert at Tuthill Fields, he was also involved in the 1660 Council of Trade and in the revival of the Committees of Trade and Plantations 1668-73, becoming Assistant Secretary to the Council for Foreign Plantations in 1670. Captain Richard Deane, a former captain in Robert Lilburne’s foot regiment, had become a Treasurer for the Rump and joint Receiver-General for assessments, and as such would have been known to Robert. As a Republican he was imprisoned in 1660 but released the following year. William Brereton had come from a moderate Royalist family but spent the years 1646-52 at the Breda Academy. He married in 1657, Frances, the daughter of Francis Willoughby, fifth Baron Willoughby, then sat in Richard Cromwell’s Parliament and in parliaments from 1660, becoming chair of the public accounts commission in 1667, having inherited an Irish barony in 1664. The commission was thus a cross section of men from a variety of backgrounds, most of whom Robert would already have known.¹⁵⁰

Despite the fact that Winthrop and others signed the agreement in the presence of Robert, and copies were sent to Rhode Island, the dispute was not resolved. This was partly because the sting in the tail was the agreement engineered by Clarke, under which a royal commission would be sent out to New England to oversee the division. The agreement was also hampered by Scott’s activities in obtaining a royal letter to further protect land holding in the Narragansett, and Williams’ refusal to recognize it, when he obtained his charter on 8 July 1663.¹⁵¹ The situation however was not accepted by Connecticut, as copies of their grants from the Connecticut court to Atherton had been ignored by the commissioners, despite the Sachems declaring, on 28 December 1664, that they had made over their lands to Atherton and, despite further appeals to Nicholls, the dispute was not

¹⁴⁸ Agreement between the agents of Connecticut and Rhode Island, touching the Narragansett county, *CSPC Am & WI, Vol. 5 1661-1668*, 126-130; Brookhaven had been the master of *the Anne and Elizabeth* which had taken a party of Puritans to Providence Island in 1635; Black, *John Winthrop the Younger*, 241-2

¹⁴⁹ Dunn, ‘John Winthrop’ 70-3

¹⁵⁰ Charles Webster, ‘Worsley, Benjamin (1617/18-1677)’ *rev. New DNB*; G.E. Aylmer, Deane, Richard (*fl.* 1647-1661), *rev* Stuart Handley, *New DNB*; Anita McConnell, ‘Brereton, William, third Baron Brereton of Leighlin, (*bap.* 1631, *d.* 1680)’, *New DNB*

¹⁵¹ Dunn, ‘John Winthrop’, 79-82; The Agreement, *CSPC Am & WI, Vol. 5, 1661-1668*, 126-30

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finally settled until the 18th century.¹⁵² Why the advice of Robert Thompson and the original arbitrators was ignored can only be the result of the decision of the government in London to assert its control through a Royal Commission. This attempt at royal centralization and royal control over the Narragansett, as the King's Province, however did not seem to work,¹⁵³ especially when events took a new twist with the outbreak of King Philip's war in 1675.

However in 1674-5, before those events overwhelmed New England, and while he was Deputy-Governor of the East India Company, Robert was in correspondence with Governor Leverett of Massachusetts, letters which reveal something of Robert's trading interests at that time and his attitude towards them. In one letter (probably 27 April 1674) he complained that the colonial authorities had stopped his cousin, Peter Sergeant, from selling powder belonging to Robert, "when he had good opportunitys for my advantage by which means its like to prove a great lose to me." He was so annoyed he threatened to seek reparation from the colony, but also commented, "I think it good pollecy to incouredge your having store in your country of that commodity, in case of need, which the restraining the free dispose of it will hinder; though as a lover of your country, I must say it were your interest to make it there." Given the fact that the Indian war was soon to follow, this was sound advice. Robert also enquired on Leverett's views on Gorges patent, commenting that there had been "much discourse and complaint" about it, even suggesting that he might buy out the patent himself, as he "have binn often invited to it."¹⁵⁴

On 4 June 1674 he reiterated his concern expressed in his previous letter over the failure to sell his powder "in which I hope you will see me righted". However he was also concerned about sending money to Massachusetts for the propagating of the Gospel among the Indians, which the corporation had been reluctant to do. Having attended the meeting of the committee he appears to have persuaded it to do so, getting it sent funds to his friend John Richards and cousin Peter Sergeant. He wanted "improvement for that worke" i.e. building up a stock to finance the scheme by "buying lands, mortgages and other security", something he had previously done in case he needed to flee across the Atlantic. However again he clearly understood the situation in the colony and repeated his call for them to stockpile gunpowder. "I wish I may not be a prophet (as I have bin twice to some amongst you) in this, that I feare another warre." He said, as saltpetre was then cheap, he would have sent a quantity of powder over, but waited to hear from them.¹⁵⁵

On 3 August he sent a further letter to Leverett, having sent a previous one concerning the collection of customs duties in the colony, by which the colonists had been sending tobacco to other countries, rather than through England, thus breaking the terms of the Navigation Acts. He understood it was done by individuals and not by the colonial authorities, but said he had tried to represent their case to the British Government but said it would be in "your interest to be diligent to prevent the like in the future, and if any doe slip your hands to be the informer of it yourselves", as

¹⁵² Dunn, 'John Winthrop', 82-6; Carr etc. to Nicholls, Declaration of His Majesty's Commissioners & Names of the Chief Proprietors, *CSPC Am & WI*, 5, 1661-8, (1880) 284-9; Declaration of Scutupp and the other Narragansett Sachems; *CSPC Am & WI* Vol. 22, 1704-5 (1916) 685-98

¹⁵³ *CSPC Am & WI*, Vol. 7, 1669-1674 (1889) 417-424

¹⁵⁴ Thompson to Leverett c.1674 in Hutchinson, *A collection* pp 448-9

¹⁵⁵ Thompson to Leverett 4/6/1674 in Hutchinson, *A collection*, pp 449-50

he had heard that two of their ships had gone directly to Holland with tobacco. Robert was thus trying to protect his friends from a feared future of more direct control by England over the trade and income from the colonies.

Leverett, replying to Robert's letter of 27 April, which raised the question of his powder not being sold, said that there had been no restraint, but that Sergeant had sold some to a Guinea merchant and disposed of the rest, the various towns having been told to increase their stocks. Either Sergeant had been deceiving Robert or there had been some misunderstanding, as some of the powder had been seized, having been illegally exported. In relation to Gorges' patent he said if Robert did take up the patent it would be helpful to Massachusetts. He wanted Robert to see if he could secure the patent for £500 and ensure that Gorges gave up any claims to Massachusetts territory. Leverett said he knew that Robert loved Massachusetts and respected its welfare but he had received Robert's letter of 4 June before the April one, which had not arrived until 18th August.

Robert and the results of King Philip's War

The rising of the local Indians under Metacom (Philip) often referred to as King Philip's War, spread from Maine and New Hampshire to Connecticut and involved massacres on both sides during 1675-6. Philip and his supporters among the Pokanokets, a tribe within the Wampanoag Indian Federation, had previously been in possession of land between Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut, and once he had been defeated, each colony wanted a large share of the land he and his allies had owned. His headquarters was at Mount Hope. The Indians in the area were a mixture of those who had been Christianized, or at least half-Christianized, and those who had not been, or had resisted conversion. Tribal groups involved in the conflict in the summer of 1675 included the Wampanoags, the Nipmucks (or Nipmugs) of central Massachusetts, and, by the autumn, the Pocumtucks, Squakheags and Norwotocks who lived along the Connecticut River. In October they were joined by the Agawam tribe. Fearing that the Narragansett tribe of Rhode Island would join in, a pre-emptive strike was carried out on their homeland in southern Rhode Island. Thus most of the Indian tribes in the area became involved in the conflict. It was later possible to justify the seizure of this land after what was perceived by colonists, their supporters and by land speculators in England as a 'just war'. Thus each colony regarded the lands of hostile Indians as forfeit and available for sale to pay for the costs of the war.¹⁵⁶ The problem of course was which colony had done most in the war, and which could claim what territory.

Robert Thomson would have received news of this conflict from the various pamphlets printed in London, and probably from direct communications with his associates in New England. A number of contemporary accounts survive which give a vivid picture of the conflicts and of the attitude of the English settlers towards the Indians.¹⁵⁷ These narrate in some detail the conflict between June 1675 and the capture of Philip at Mount Hope in 1676. James Drake's analysis of the conflict included material on its effect and the results on the relationship between the colonies

¹⁵⁶ Springer, JW, 'American Indians and the law of real property in Colonial New England', *The American Journal of Legal History*, 30, 1, (Jan 1986) 49-50

¹⁵⁷ Anon, *News from New England, A true and last account of the present bloody wars carried on betwixt the Infidels, natives, and the English Christians and converted Indians of New-England...*, (London 1676); Anon, *A continuation of the state of New-England being a farther account of the Indian War...*, (London 1676)
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which had taken part and between the settlers and the surviving Indians.¹⁵⁸ He demonstrated that there was considerable loss of life and destruction of property on both sides, the number of praying Indians was reduced by nearly half and overall 56-69% of the native inhabitants of New England died either directly or indirectly from the conflict. This resulted in a number of changes in the power balance between natives and settlers. The reduction in the number of praying Indians must have been particularly bitter for Robert, given the effort and resources that he and his colleagues had put into their conversion.¹⁵⁹

Drake identified the changing role of the most prominent Puritans, such as Increase Mather, and Fitz-John Winthrop, as 'being reduced to working as brokers in a culture of self-preservation, mediating between the crown and the New England colonies'. Citing work by Breen, he came to the conclusion that these brokers mediating with central authority failed to meet the challenges posed and that the local inhabitants sought new men to mediate for them. Robert Thompson can be seen as one of these. One key result of the war was the reduction in the political and military influence of previously powerful native groups, such as the Wampanoags, Narragansetts and Nipmucks, who suffered a proportionately higher reduction in their population than those who had supported the settlers. This meant that the latter were able to exploit the power vacuum and move in to take over former land held by these tribes.¹⁶⁰ Robert Thompson became involved with a number of schemes to get hold of former Indian Territory, particularly in the Narragansett country.

The land however was still in dispute between the claims of the Atherton Company, and settlers from the colonies of Plymouth, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts, all of whose governments claimed their share as a result of the men and money which they had lost in the war. Individual settlers were already, over the post war period, settling lands previously occupied by Indians, without having any authority other than squatters' rights. The wilderness lands in between the settled colonies, over which Indians had roamed, were then up for grabs, and as frontiers between colonies had not been clearly defined, or were in dispute because of overlapping grants from different monarchs or aristocrats at different times, independent arbitrators such as Robert Thompson were required to make judgements on where the boundaries should be. However Robert, along with other speculators had a vested interest in acquiring land for themselves, which may well have influenced their judgement on such matters. The power vacuum created by the reduction in the military power of the dominant Indian tribes as a result of the war, therefore created contests over power and authority, not just between Indians and settlers, but between the settlers themselves and between the various claims of land speculators on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁶¹

On the eve of the war there had been fourteen towns with 1100 praying Indian inhabitants in Massachusetts Bay. These all had Indian constables, marshals and commissioners. Some then fought on the colonists' side and in the aftermath of King Philip's War, Gookin went out of his way to defend the part that the praying Indians had played in support of the settlers, despite hostility to the Indians in general. He was later to be involved in the defence of the Massachusetts Charter, again a

¹⁵⁸ James D Drake, *King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676*, (Amherst, 1999)

¹⁵⁹ Drake, *King Philip's War*, 168-70

¹⁶⁰ Drake, *King Philip's War*, 170-2

¹⁶¹ Drake, *King Philip's War*, 176-86

matter with which Robert concurred. Given their common religious and political interests and Gookin's visits to England, it is likely they met on several occasions and were friends as well as colleagues.¹⁶² However three years after the end of King Philip's War on 1 July 1679 the Governor and Council of the colony of New Plymouth wrote to the King concerning claimants to the Narragansett Lands and the Atherton purchase. They claimed the war had cost £100,000 that New Plymouth had suffered more than other colonies, that they had, with the agreement of the other colonies, obtained a 7000 acre area around Mount Hope, had put it up for sale at £3,000 but had not yet found buyers. They also were clearly hostile to claims made by Rhode Island.¹⁶³ A year later the Governor and Council of Rhode Island wrote to the King to defend their interests, reciting the history of the previous arbitration between them and Connecticut, of which Robert had been part. They also described later settlements by men from Rhode Island in the Narragansett lands and the conflict with Connecticut over settlements on the east side of the Pauquatuck River. They also related the conflict with Richard Smith junior who would not recognize their authority over his trading house in the Narragansett.¹⁶⁴ This conflict arose because of a larger problem of land speculation in the same area.

Land speculation and the Nipmuck purchase 1678-1687

According to Baker and Kences, for a ten year period from the end of King Philip's War in 1678 to the start of King William's War in 1688, there were "numerous land transactions, covering thousands of acres of Indian lands as part of a wild wave of speculative frenzy". In Rhode Island the Atherton Company, the Misquamicut Company, and the Pettaquamscut Company each tried to obtain lands between Connecticut and Narragansett Bay. Theodore B Lewis identified an interlinked group of land speculators in New England some of whom became involved in the Dudley Council of 1686. These included alongside Joseph Dudley: Richard Wharton, Wait Winthrop, Edward and Jonathan Tyng and William Stoughton. Robert Thompson became associated with a number of these men during the 1680s and became involved in some of their land speculation schemes. One of these was in the Nipmug lands, which were in central Massachusetts and north-eastern Connecticut, and were available for purchase or confiscation from the local tribes following King Philip's War. According to Daniels this was an area of hills, meadows and cedar swamps where about sixty Indians had formed a praying town at Manchaug, but had sided with King Philip. Dudley and Stoughton got permission from the Massachusetts court to enquire into Indian ownership and in October 1681 to purchase land from the Naticks. Uncas, who was the Sachem of the Mohegan tribe, claimed the title to some of the land, but other areas were open to purchase. The southern part of the Nipmuck country was claimed by a Christian Indian called Black James who had acted as constable for the region. Dudley and Stoughton, as the commissioners despatched there, persuaded the Indians to surrender the whole area to the Massachusetts Government, having obtained Black James' land for £20 and a coat, and on 10 February 1682 the Nipmuck country, from the north of Massachusetts to Nash-a-way in Connecticut, was sold to the government for £50. This was a massive area 50 miles by 20 miles, of which Black James was given a reservation of 5 miles square. It was not clear where the

¹⁶² Springer, 'American Indians', 52; Thompson, 'Gookin' *Oxford New DNB*

¹⁶³ *CSPC*, 10, 1677-1680 (1896) 384-403: The Governor and Council of New Plymouth to the King, 1/7/1679

¹⁶⁴ *CSPC*, 10, 1677-1680, 591-608: The Governor and Council of Rhode Island to the King, 4/9/1680

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frontier between the two colonies actually was, so this had to be surveyed. Dudley and Stoughton had already started to make purchases in the area in 1681 and sought authority from the Massachusetts General Court to do so in return for paying the costs of surveying. Lewis claimed that Dudley came to England, as an agent of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, in mid 1682 and there sold 2,000 acres to an unidentified English buyer, which was probably the sale of 2,000 acres from Stoughton to Robert Thompson.¹⁶⁵

The Indian reservation was in two parts, one at Myanexet, the other at Quinatisset. Five hundred acres of the latter and a large tract of the former were half of the reservation and were sold by Black James to Dudley and Stoughton on 10 November 1682, Dudley establishing a farm on the Quinebaug River. On 18 June 1683 he sold two thousand acres of forest there to Thomas Freak of Hannington, Wiltshire, England for £250. This included the present Thompson Hill, but another 2000 acre tract east of this, was sold to Robert, the initial boundary between the tracts running through the cellar of the old Pequot Fort. Another large slice of the Indian reservation, east of the Quinebaug or Myanexet, now occupied by New Boston village, was secured by Joseph Dudley and smaller farms by other non-residents. These farms were all laid out in 1684, the earliest of any in Windham County, but owing to the uncertain tenure of the land, they were not improved for many years. Stoughton had persuaded the General Court on 16 May 1683 to grant him, Dudley, Robert Thompson, Daniel Coxe, and John Blackwell a tract of land of about 65 square miles, which they promised to, settle with thirty families. This was the settlement that was to become the town of New Oxford for which they agreed to provide an orthodox minister. At the same time Robert was granted an additional five hundred acres "by way of gratuity" in recognition of Robert's "readiness upon all occasions to be assistant to them in the service of this colony".¹⁶⁶ The land was: "to be laid out to him with all reasonable convenience", and an old plan of Oxford shows among other lots of land in the southerly part of the town as "Thompson's 500 acres". This is mentioned in a history of Webster Massachusetts which refers to the Thompson grant, which was confirmed to his heirs in 1727. It was bounded on the west by the Hobart or Kingsbury land, on the north by Oxford Village, and on the east by Dr. Douglas' land. On 26 Nov., 1803, "Thomas Corbett and Elizabeth, his wife, she being heir and devisee of Robert Thompson of Elsham, County of Lincoln, England, deeded for \$750 for Thompson farm to James Benjamin Davis and obtained possession. A large portion of this land is known as Douglas Woods. Reuben Dudley is present owner of a portion, which has been improved." This Elizabeth was the great-great-grand daughter of Robert Thompson.¹⁶⁷

Robert's new partner in this venture, John Blackwell, had, like Robert, been in the City of London militia and a junior officer in the Parliamentary army. He also supported the republic and was a religious and political Independent in the 1650s. He and Richard Deane were joint-treasurers

¹⁶⁵ Theodore B. Lewis, 'Land speculation and the Dudley Council of 1686', *WMQ*, 3rd Ser., 31, No. 2, (Apr., 1974), 255-9; Larned ED, *History of Windham County, Connecticut*, Vol. I (Chester, Conn, 1976) 14

¹⁶⁶ Larned, *Windham County*, 14-5; Shurtleff, NB, (ed.) *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay, Vol. V, 1674-1686* (Boston, 1854); Daniels GF, *History of the town of Oxford Massachusetts*, (Oxford, Mass, 1892) 2-5; Iamartino J (ed.) *Echoes of old Thompson II*, (Virginia Beach VA, 2006) 9

¹⁶⁷ Webster Historical Commission, *An Architectural and Historical Survey of Webster, Massachusetts*, (1979); Daniels G F, *History*, p 6 n. 2

to the Rump and joint receiver-generals of the assessments. In this capacity he would necessarily have had dealings with Robert when he was a naval commissioner. Blackwell, like Robert, had also invested in Irish land and when he arrived in Massachusetts Bay in 1684, produced a scheme for a land bank. It is not clear whether this had anything to do with his involvement in this particular land purchase, but he rapidly gained influence in the colony. Later he went to Pennsylvania as deputy-governor, but returned to Massachusetts in 1690 and to England at the time of Robert's death.¹⁶⁸

Settlement in Robert's land in Massachusetts and Connecticut

The General Court of Massachusetts was told that some gentlemen in England wanted to come to the colony and Robert and colleagues agreed that the thirty families would settle within four years and would have freedom from county rates for four years. In October 1684 a petition from the selectmen of Roxbury requested a tract for a village in the same area, but the court ruled that Robert and colleagues would have to make the first choice of land before the following June, provided that the families settled within three years from that time and maintained an able orthodox and godly minister. This does not seem to have happened very quickly, so in January 1685 they were given a three year extension. Eventually a warrant was issued to Mr John Gore, the deputy surveyor, to survey and lay out the land near Worcester and return the survey to the secretary's office.¹⁶⁹

The land purchased from Black James was then divided up in June 1684 by the surveyor, John Gore and his assistant Benjamin Gambling. Both were from Roxbury and were supervised by Colonel William Dudley and both given a five hundred acre plot as payment. The line dividing Robert's from Freak's property ran through an old Indian fort, but, because the surveyors blundered, the southernmost part of this land, most of which belonged to Robert, ended up in Connecticut rather than Massachusetts. As the Nipmug grant extended across the border, this land was later confirmed as part of Connecticut. In the Connecticut State Archives a deed of sale between Stoughton and Robert exists, dated 6 November 1684, whereby Robert paid £100 for 1000 acres at Quanetussett, (Quinatisset). This was in addition to the other land at Quinatisset which Robert had purchased from Stoughton in 1683 for £20. It was described as being part upland and part meadow, and abutting onto another 1,000 acres which Stoughton had previously conveyed to Robert and onto other land held by Stoughton, Dudley and Thomas Freak and to the southwest on 'wilderness lands'. Stoughton claimed to be the true, sole and lawful owner of these lands, so they may be in addition to any lands Robert held in his own right in New Oxford. This land was available, as the Nipmugs who had occupied it, had joined the Narrangansett in King Philip's War, despite being partly Christianized. Although 5000 acres was in theory to be an Indian reservation, Stoughton and Dudley had got hold of it and sold it to Robert and Freak.¹⁷⁰

Robert was then instrumental in providing families of Huguenot refugees from France to fulfil the agreement. He had met one of their leaders, Gabriel Bernon, a merchant from La Rochelle,

¹⁶³ G.E.Aylmer, 'Blackwell, John (1624-1701)', *NewDNB*

¹⁶⁹ Shurtleff, *Records*, 408, 409, 426, 467-8; Vol. XXI *Transactions 1919*, (1920) 304

¹⁷⁰ CSA Killingly Parish Land Records Vol. IV f31a: Deed of sale Stoughton to Thomson 6/11/1684; *Thompson, Windham County, Connecticut History*: <http://www.connecticutgenealogy.com/windham/thompson>; Larned, *Windham County*, 15

through another refugee, Isaac Bertrand de Te(u)ffeau, the Treasurer of the French Protestant Church in London, and Bernon had agreed to provide the necessary thirty families. The circle of Non-Conformists in London extended not only to the representatives of the Congregationalists of New England, and through Robert to the Society for the Propagating of the Gospel among the Indians, of which Robert later became president, but also to the Dutch and French Protestant churches in London, with whom the Thomsons had contact through Maurice Thomson's widow. It was natural therefore that Robert should extend the hand of friendship to those perceived as co-religionists and allow them to settle in the newly acquired territory. The refugees arrived in Boston in 1686, but only some found their way to New Oxford in 1687 when a company led by Rev. Daniel Bondet, made a settlement in the "Nipmuck" country about seventy-five miles west of Boston. There were about fifteen families in the party, which number was much increased in the course of a year and they built houses, a church and a mill in what became known locally as 'The French Plantation'. Robert provided letters of credit to de Teuffeau, who advanced about £1000 to Bernon, who presenting them to Dudley and Stoughton in Boston, granted, through him, 750 acres to Bernon. He then acquired a further 1750 acres and Dudley accompanied him to New Oxford to see him settled. On 3 July 1688, a deed for New Oxford from King James II confirmed the grant of 41,245 acres of land southwest of Worcester town to Dudley, Stoughton and Blackwell and seals attached for Robert Thomson and Daniel Coxe. Having allocated about 11,000 acres for town land, they shared five equal parts of the land, and according to the deed, Robert held the northern most tract west of Oxford Village, as lot 3 of about 6000 acres, (though on Bernon's map lot 3 is shown as 300 acres). Robert, as an absentee landlord, was to receive annual quitrents from any settlers. The developers also fulfilled their part of the original bargain by ensuring that Daniel Bondet became minister of the French colony, as he also signed the deed and worked for the Society for the Propagation of The Gospel, presumably with Robert's agreement.¹⁷¹ However in 1696 the settlement was abandoned and the Huguenots went to other areas probably to another settlement which had been established under the Huguenot minister Ezechiel Carre, and a physician, Pierre Ayrault near the western shore of Narragansett Bay in what became East Greenwich.¹⁷²

An intriguing sidelight on Robert's intentions and ambitions during this period appears in letters sent from Wait Winthrop in New London, Connecticut, to Fitz-John Winthrop in Boston. In a postscript to a letter written on 24 October 1682 Wait adds: "Here was a letter from Sir Edmund Andros to Mr Tayler. He says the affairs of New York not yet settled, but by Joles there is a report that the Duke is selling it to Major Thompson and (torn) who have offered £13,000 for it". Two years later, on 11 November 1684, Wait reiterated: "We have certain intelligence that Major Thomson and others were purchasing the Duke's interest at York, and that it was in a manner concluded." This rumour was echoed in a report from Governor Dongan of New York in a rather muddled report sent to Sir John Werden where he wrote "We went so far in the fishing as to subscribe £2,500 and but £100 in the name of the Duke. The project has been ruined by a report from Boston and

¹⁷¹ Toppan, RN, 'Andros Records', *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 13, (Worcester, 1901) 487; *Massachusetts Colony Records*, Vol. V p 408; *Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Transactions* Vol. 21, (Boston, 1920) 304; Macek, PJ *Early History of Webster, Dudley & Oxford, (Webster MA)* 128-135; Bernon's map of Oxford lands in Daniels, *History*,

¹⁷² Holmes A, 'Memoir of French Protestants settled at Oxford', *MHSC*, 3rd Ser. Vol. II (1830) 20-30, 69; Stapleton, A, *Memorials of the Huguenots in America*, (Carlisle PA, 1901) 33
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Pennsylvania that this country was sold to a Colonel Thompson". What exactly was happening here is obscure, but it appears that some sort of syndicate, possibly led by Robert, was attempting to buy out James Duke of York's interest in the colony of New York, possibly to avert the problem of Andros taking over the whole of New England as Governor, but that eventually negotiations had failed as Andros was appointed. The Winthrops were clearly in touch with what Robert was up to, as Wait mentioned in another letter of 1 September 1686 that a man had settled in the Nipmug country "by perswasion of Major Thomson" and that he had "a good character of him by Major Thomson's factor."¹⁷³ Robert however does not appear to have wanted to go to New England again, as in 1687 he decided to divide up the land granted to him into five equal lots and give his children one share each.

Robert, New Hampshire, The Merrimac & the Million Acre Purchase

In 1685 Robert had also become involved in another scheme with the same group of men, but further north. Both Richard Wharton and Joseph Dudley wrote separate letters in November 1685 to Thomas Glover, the London merchant and father of Robert's brother in law (Glover's son had married Robert's daughter) about establishing a settlement at Cascoa Bay for fishing and colonization and William Stoughton wrote a similar letter to Robert. Wharton referred, in his letter to Glover, to his "projections for planting and promoting the fishing trade and other improvements in Cascoa Bay", and that Stoughton and Dudley had recommended the project to Robert. Reflecting the fear among Non-Conformists, that accompanied the succession of the Catholic James II to the throne, Wharton said that if these plans were "favourably and truly represented to such sober and pious people as sitt uneasy in many parts of England may, I hope, encourage them to remove hither."¹⁷⁴

On 19 December 1687, at a meeting of the Council held at Boston, at which Governor Andros, Joseph Dudley, Robert Mason and Edward Randolph were present, Dudley presented a petition on behalf of himself and William Stoughton for confirmation of the eight square mile tract in the Nipmug lands, which had previously been granted to them and Robert, by the late General Court of Massachusetts in 1683. This was confirmed and granted to them and to Dr Daniel Cox as they had desired. Other purchases were then made from the Nipmucks in Massachusetts and Connecticut and grants were made in the North such as the Wamesit purchase, which later became Lowell, Massachusetts.¹⁷⁵ This purchase was separate from three other schemes: those of the Nipmug Company (or Syndicate for the Connecticut Nipmug lands), the Atherton Company, and the Million Acres Purchasers scheme. Massachusetts and Robert Mason had been in conflict for a number of years over the land north and south of the Merrimac River. New Hampshire, to which Mason had the strongest claim, was separated from Massachusetts in 1679. The separation meant that Massachusetts had no right to control or settle land further than 3 miles north of the Merrimac and Mason claimed he was the proprietor of the land between the Naumkeck and Piscataway. The then

¹⁷³ *MHSC* 5th Ser. Vol. VIII, (Boston 1882) Winthrop Papers continued, 440-465: Letters Wait to FitzJohn Winthrop, 24/10/1682, 11/11/1684, 1/9/1686; *CSPC, Am & WI, Vol. 12: 1685- (1899)* 1-8

¹⁷⁴ *MHSC*, VII, 6th Ser. (Boston MA, 1889) 473

¹⁷⁵ Toppan, 'Andros Records', 487; *Massachusetts Colony Records*, Vol. V p 408; *CSM, Transactions* Vol. 21, (Boston, 1920) 304; Macek, *Early History*, 128-135
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agents for Massachusetts, Peter Bulkley and William Stoughton, managed to get a delay on the final decision on this matter in London, and fresh agents were to be sent to London with proofs of their claims. In February 1682 Edward Cranfield was appointed Governor of New Hampshire, but to appease Mason, he was able to nominate and appoint two deputies to sit in the General Assembly of the new province.¹⁷⁶

In May, and again in June 1682, the King in Council wrote letters to the Massachusetts government, arguing that as Bulkley and Stoughton had given up all titles to the land claimed by Mason, then the latter could rightly pursue his claims in the Massachusetts courts against those claiming individual rights of possession and improvement, and could claim all unimproved land as his own. Six days later, on the other side of the Atlantic, it was decided to send over two new agents, Joseph Dudley and John Richards, the latter being Robert's agent in Boston, who had arranged his purchases and mortgages over the previous twenty or more years. They were empowered to spend up to £1,000 to obtain a pardon from the King and have the Massachusetts charter continued. Two months later the petition of the Governor Simon Bradstreet was received at court seeking pardon but also "We also send an address from the inhabitants who live within the compass of Mr Mason's pretended claims, which claims appear to them to be very unreasonable." On 29 August, Dudley and Richards provided answers to the King's previous letters in which they withdrew any claims to land 3 miles north of the Merrimac. Given the previous relationship between Robert Thompson and John Richards, it is highly likely that they met and consulted with each other whilst Richards was in London.¹⁷⁷ The following November, Mason wrote to Governor Bradstreet in an attempt to enforce his claims to all the unimproved lands from 3 miles north of the Merrimac to the Naumkeck, in particular the lands within the settlements of Salisbury, Newbury, Ipswich and Rowley.¹⁷⁸

To the north of Massachusetts along the borders with New Hampshire in the Merrimack region, another purchase had been made from Wanalanset, chief Sachem of the Indians the year before. It was a tract of land on both sides of the Merrimack River, six miles in breadth, extending from the Souhegan River to Winnipisseogee Lake. Apart from Dudley, Stoughton and Robert, other purchasers had included Edward Randolph, William Blathwayt and Daniel Cox. Mason had a previous claim to this territory as being part of New Hampshire and on 15 April 1686 preserved this claim by charging 10 shillings a year rent for it, but died in September 1688, his claims being inherited by his sons, John and Robert Mason.¹⁷⁹ The new partners, Randolph and Blathwayt, were altogether different from previous investors. Randolph was the notorious royal official in the colonies who always wanted to reduce the independence of Massachusetts when he could, and reported back in negative terms to the British Government. Blathwayt had entered the Plantations office in 1675 and through hard work became clerk-in-extraordinary of the Privy Council in 1678, secretary to the Lords of Trade in 1679, surveyor and auditor of the American revenues and, from 1681 to 1683, was

¹⁷⁶ *CSPC Am & WI*, Vol. II 1681-5 (1898) 191-201: Instructions for Cranfield 20/02/1682; Petition of Robert Mason 18/02/1682

¹⁷⁷ *CSPC Am & WI*, Vol. II: 1681-5 (1898) 226-59; 276-291: Order re letter to Massachusetts 23/05/1682; Governor Bradstreet to Secretary Jenkins 29/05/1682; Governor's Order 14/06/1682; King to Governor Bradstreet 23/06/1682; Petition of Governor Bradstreet 24/08/1682; Answer of the Agents 20/06/1682.

¹⁷⁸ *CSPC Am & WI*, Vol. II: 1681-5 (1898) 332-42: Mason to Bradstreet 19/11/1682

¹⁷⁹ Hill, JB, *History of the town of Mason, New Hampshire from the first grant of 1749 to the year 1858* (Boston MA, 1858) ; Anon, *History of the town of Goffstown New Hampshire*, (undated NH)
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under-secretary of state to Lord Conway. These were the new breed of dedicated bureaucrats, who presumably were brought on board to make the scheme acceptable to the government in London.¹⁸⁰

Emerson and Kences claim that “the speculative bubble burst at the outbreak of King William’s War as new settlements went up in smoke, and frontier lands throughout New England became worthless” and that the investors lost everything in a financial panic. This is probably an exaggeration as Robert did hold on to some land, though it does not appear to have been developed in his lifetime. Robert’s associate Wait Winthrop held titles to lands in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, much inherited from his grandfather and father, though some he and his brother Fitz-John acquired was, like Robert’s, while both were councillors in the Dudley Council. Their brother-in-law was Robert’s former land agent, John Richards who by the 1680s was a major mortgage holder for property in Boston, possibly some of it dating back to the 1660s, when he had managed mortgages for Robert. Their brother in Law, Richard Wharton, had been a member of the Atherton Company, was involved in the Million Acre purchase and obtained the Pejebscot Patent from the Purchase and Way families. Robert therefore had bought into a whole inter-related dynasty of successful New England merchant families to obtain more Indian land.¹⁸¹

The Million Acre Purchase, initiated by Jonathan Tyng, involved purchasing 120 square miles either side of the Merrimac River from Lake Winnepesaukee to the Sea. Also involved in the scheme were Dudley, Stoughton, Wharton and Samuel Shrimpton. Wharton, Dudley, the Winthrops and the Tyngs were all related by marriage. In May 1686 these men formed themselves into a company, which included twenty members each putting in £20 and each then able to choose 5,000 acres of the best land before the rest was put up for sale. In order to get permission from the King to do this they bribed both Blathwayt, the new clerk-in-ordinary to the Privy Council, and Daniel Coxe, physician to the King, who was also involved in another land speculation scheme with Robert. The indenture for this land indicates those who benefitted from the deal. As well as Dudley, Wharton and Shrimpton, thirteen others including Robert Thompson, Coxe, Blathwayt and even Edward Randolph shared a twentieth parts of the land each, the remaining fifth to be assigned by the first three on the western side of the river.¹⁸²

Robert, ever since his purchase of the property at Guilford, had several dealings with the Connecticut government, particularly with Deputy-Governor (later Governor) William Leete. On 22 and 24 July 1675 the Connecticut Council sent letters to Robert via Leete asking him to assist them with their affairs in England that related to their dealings with Governor Andros of New York. In the letter they requested his help in relation to disputes with Andros and James Duke of York over the boundary between the two colonies. Enclosed with the letter to Robert were papers including a narrative of the case, and copies of both the King’s letters and Andros’ demands. They feared that

¹⁸⁰ Richard R. Johnson, ‘Randolph, Edward (*bap.* 1632 *d.* 1703)’ *NewDNB*; Barbara C. Murison, ‘Blathwayt, William, (*bap.* 1650 *d.* 1717)’ *NewDNB*

¹⁸¹ Baker, E, ‘Maine, Indian land speculation, and the Essex county witchcraft outbreak of 1692’, *Maine History*, 40, (Fall 2001) 159-189

¹⁸² Lewis, ‘Land speculation’, 259-62, 267; ‘Documents relating to the Massachusetts Charter - copy of Merrimac River Indenture’ *CSM Collections*, Vol. 64, 513;; For Coxe and speculation in West New Jersey see Michael Hunter, ‘Coxe, Daniel (1640-1730)’ *NewDNB*; Albright G. Zimmerman, ‘Daniel Coxe and the New Mediterranean Sea Company’

Andros would misrepresent the political situation and their actions, and wanted to stop Andros prejudicing their position when the case was heard, possibly before the arrival of Governor John Winthrop in London. To Robert, they expressed their “good confidence of both ability and good faithfulness in managing what we have committed to you, which is indeed to do your uttermost for preventing so great hazard as the looseing the whole of our rights and privileges in this wilderness.” They asked him to discover “any working against us at court and the more effectual way to prevent mis-reports” and particularly “to procure some effectual stop to said Major Andros from any further molesting us.” They said they would later satisfy him, which was probably the later grant of land in lieu of the expenses he would have occurred.¹⁸³

Robert Thompson, William Penn and the development of Pennsylvania

Apart from land speculation in New England, Robert also became involved in the purchase of land held by the Penn family in Pennsylvania. Robert would have known William Penn’s father, Admiral Sir William Penn (1621-1670), when Robert was a commissioner of the Navy in the 1650s. Before that, Penn had been appointed a ship’s captain in 1644, and made rear, then vice-admiral of the Irish Squadron, a role Robert would have known about 3 years before on the Additional Sea Adventure. Penn had remained on the Irish station until 1650 when he was sent first to the Azores and then to the Mediterranean, returning to England by March 1652. He played a part in the First Dutch War and then convoyed colliers down the East coast. He, with Venables, commanded the ‘Western Design’, for the failure of which, both were temporarily lodged in the tower of London, before Penn retired to his Irish estates. It is likely that Robert’s brother, Maurice, was also involved in the Western Design, and may have actually sailed with them. Penn was restored to the Admiralty Commission in March 1660, later becoming an MP and elder brother of Trinity House. Replacing Robert at the Navy Office, he clashed with Pepys, and then served in the navy again in the Second Dutch War. He was relieved of his post after a scandal over prizes taken and had to face the parliamentary commission of inquiry into the miscarriages in the war, on which commission Robert’s brother George Thomson sat.¹⁸⁴

Born a year before Robert, Admiral Penn died in 1670, the year of the New Conventicle Act, for protesting against which his son, William Penn, (1644-1718), was imprisoned. Being vindicated by his trial, Penn then became recognized as a champion of dissent, and although a Quaker, would no doubt have met with and consulted Robert and his circle of Non-conformist friends, particularly in relation to the 1672 Declaration of Indulgence, which gave both Quakers and other dissenters like Robert relief, and was supported by many of them, who were merchants in London. He also became a friend of the earl of Rochester, later a political ally of Robert’s nephew John Thompson. Through Rochester and Sunderland, Penn then entered court circles and in 1681, he obtained his grant in the New World for land west of the Delaware River, as a payment of debts owed by the crown to his father. He had already become a trustee for the province of West New Jersey, which served as a model for his plans for Pennsylvania. He also persuaded James Duke of York to grant him the three adjacent counties of Delaware. However land grants and relations with the Indians were

¹⁸³ CSA Colonial Boundaries Series I, Vol. I f 156, Minutes of Connecticut Council 22 July 1675 & ff 157-60 A brief Account...; Vol. II No 38: Connecticut Council to Thomson 24 July 1675

¹⁸⁴ C.C. Knighton, ‘Penn, Sir William (*bap.*1621, *d.* 1670)’ *NewDNB*
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complicated by the area previously having been under the jurisdiction of New York. It was into this new territory that Robert decided to extend his property.¹⁸⁵

Robert, Daniel Coxe & the Mediterranean Sea Company.

Another land speculation scheme in which Robert joined Daniel Coxe was in Pennsylvania. Coxe had investments in New Jersey, and sought grants from William Penn on the west bank of the Schuylkill River. Robert, Sir Mathias Vincent, a near neighbour of Robert's who lived in Islington, and Coxe were given three separate deeds to found a settlement and establish trade with the Indians. These deeds were signed by Penn on 20 April 1686 and granted each partner about 10,000 acres, part of which they intended as a refuge for persecuted Huguenots. The minutes of the Commissioners of Property state that these 30,000 acres were laid out in one tract, soon after the first purchase, and confirmed by the account of the Surveyor General, Thomas Holmes, who produced a map of the improved parts of Pennsylvania. William Penn, writing to Thomas Lloyd on 21 April stated that the three speculators were "men of vast estates" and had agreed to send 60 families, mainly French Huguenots. Three days later Penn wrote to the Provincial Council that two or three shiploads of refugees would be coming over, paid for by Robert and colleagues and that they had advanced £2000 so that proper brick buildings would be constructed.¹⁸⁶

However this modest grant was part of a much more grandiose scheme that Coxe had dreamed up for a company called the New Mediterranean Sea Company, with plans for a 150,000 acre stretch of territory that would reach Lake Erie, the New Mediterranean Sea in the title. It would try and divert the fur trade from reaching other colonies, notably New York. The list of potential subscribers was impressive and included not only Dudley and Staunton, Robert's fellow speculators in Massachusetts, but also Robert's own son Joseph and his son-in-law William Ashhurst, as well as Lord Montague of Boughton, Viscount Coleraine and Robert Boyle, a fellow member with Coxe of the Royal Society. As Mary Geiter has shown, by 1677 there were at least 14 Quaker merchants in London alone. She saw the New Mediterranean Sea Company as a concrete example of the interplay of commerce and politics. In the late 1680s a working relationship was established between Quakers and people in government. Penn was key, as proprietor of Pennsylvania, as he could grant trading rights in the colony. Thus the joint venture of the New Mediterranean Sea Company, was set down in a grant by him to a group which included a cross section of Society¹⁸⁷ As well as the fur trade, Coxe hoped to exploit the fish in Lake Erie and the Buffalos roaming in the area. Ten days after the Schuylkill deeds were signed, David Lloyd (c. 1656-1731) the new Attorney General for Pennsylvania, was appointed to look after the 30,000 acres allocated to the three partners.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Mary K. Geiter, 'Penn, William (1644-1718)', *NewDNB*

¹⁸⁶ Wokeck MS, et al (eds.) *The papers of William Penn*, 3, 1685-1700 (Philadelphia PA, 1986) 84-6, 86 n.5, 88;, W., 'Surveyor General Thomas Holme's 'Map of the improved part of the province of Pennsylvania', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 6, (1970) 55

¹⁸⁷ Albright G Zimmerman, 'Daniel Coxe and the New Mediterranean Sea Company', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, (henceforth *PMHB*) 76, 1, (Jan., 1952) 86-96; Geiter, M, 'London merchants and the launching of Pennsylvania', *PMHB*, 121, 1 /2 (Jan/April 1997) 101-122; Klinefelter, W, 'Surveyor-General Thomas Holmes', 55; Geiter, M K, 'Affirmation, assassination and association: The Quakers, parliament and the court in 1696', *Parliamentary History*, 16, Pt 3, (1997) 280-1

¹⁸⁸ Geiter 'Affirmation, 280-1

According to Nash, Penn had been in conflict with Governor Dongan of New York over the control of the Susquehanna valley fur trade for four years, which had involved complicated negotiations with the local Indian tribes, who were rivals of the French fur traders who were moving down from Canada.¹⁸⁹ Jennings claimed that when Penn had arrived in the area in 1682 the Susquehannocks had already done a deal with the Iroquois confederacy and had vacated the valley and so Penn tried to negotiate with the Iroquois. However Dongan intervened and asserted New York's rights to the area in order to protect the Albany fur traders. Dissident French Canadian fur traders, known as *coureurs du bois*, were then drawn into an organization set up by the French Huguenot refugee Jaques le Tort, who in 1686 established a plantation near modern Spring City on the Schuylkill River. Le Tort then worked with Coxe to supply him with the prized fur pelts. Robert may have got wind of activities of which he did not approve, as it became known that he had lost interest in the scheme.¹⁹⁰

Coxe in correspondence with Lloyd, informed him in September 1687, that "Major Thompson hath likewise relinquished his interest" but also that "About thirty persons considerable for estate have subscribed between ten and twelve thousand pounds in order to the settling upon the great lake" and that they intended to settle the following spring. However by this time Mathias Vincent had died and in a further letter to Lloyd on 15th October, Coxe commented that "Major Thompson from some misunderstanding hath long since between him and your Governour hath abandoned his share, so that all the burthen will be upon mee and I am dealing with the Governour for the Major's interest." In both letters he refers to Jacques Le Tort, with whom Vincent had made an agreement on 13 September 1686 and another agreement with Gousse Bonnin on 18 September. Le Tort was from Alencon in France and brought over a number of Huguenots who settled on Vincent's land. Another French Protestant, Anthony de Laire from La Rochelle, contracted with Coxe, who paid his fare and expenses to the new world so long as he worked for him and traded with the Indians. Adlord Bowde, the son of a Hertford Draper of the same name, had also emigrated and was acting as Coxe's commercial agent to exchange the furs that the French settlers had gathered through trade with the Indians for other imported commodities from England. Bowde was also to get from Lloyd a list of families of English, Dutch French or Swedish origin who would be willing to settle on the Schuylkill plantation.¹⁹¹

What exactly became of the titles to the properties granted is not entirely clear. Coxe, along with Sir Mathias Vincent and Robert, had purchased 30,000 acres of land in Chester County, which had been formed 4 years before. Robert's share was 10,000 acres, and when Vincent died the next year his share was purchased by Joseph Pike, a Quaker merchant from Cork. Coxe, titular governor of West New Jersey from 1687-1692, then sold his lands in West New Jersey to the West New Jersey Society in 1692, but it is not clear what happened to his Pennsylvania property. How and to whom

¹⁸⁹ Nash, GB, 'The quest for the Susquehanna Valley: Pennsylvania and the seventeenth century fur trade', *New York History*, 48, 1, (Jan 1967) 3-17

¹⁹⁰ Jennings, F, 'The Indian Trade of the Susquehanna Valley', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 110, 6, (Dec 1966) 407-9

¹⁹¹ Keith C P, *Chronicles of Pennsylvania from the English revolution to the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle 1688-1748*, 2 Vols. (Philadelphia, PA, 1917) Vol. 1, 131; Zimmerman, 'New Mediterranean', 91-96; Information from Mr Alan Greening re Adlord Bowde

Robert may have relinquished his share, as suggested by Coxe in his letter to David Lloyd in 1687, is doubtful as later legal disputes centred on Robert's will, in which he had entailed his 10,000 acres on his descendants. In June 1775 his grandson, also Robert, of Elsham Lincs., sold his share for £5,500 to three Philadelphia men, suggesting that Robert had not relinquished it. This area was later to take the name of Vincent, Chester County. Coxe and Robert owned what is now East and West Vincent townships but after Penn's death his descendants disputed the sale of land to Robert and Coxe, a dispute which lasted for 100 years and it is claimed that this was only settled in 1786, and that during that time, because the title was unclear, the land could only be rented and none was sold until after 1790, which conflicts with the evidence for the 1775 sale. What may have complicated this situation was that between 1688-90 Penn and Coxe both had new schemes for consideration by the London Government and investors, Penn's for a second settlement on the Susquehanna River, for a city to be a centre for fur trading activities with the Iroquois Confederacy, Coxe for a grandiose joint stock company for the entire area from the western boundaries of the East Coast colonies to the Pacific Ocean. By this time however Robert had switched his interests back to the New England colonies who were seeking the renewal of their charters.

Robert and the renewal of colonial charters 1688-1692

Both before and following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, Robert was intimately involved in the renewal of colonial Charters by the crown. In the late 1950s, Philip Haffenden analysed the policy of Charles II and James II in relation to the renewal of colonial charters and identified a number of reasons why the Lords of Trade and the Committee of Plantations were not able to develop an effective long term strategy towards implementing policies of centralization and direct colonial rule, despite the efforts of the Lords to carry out policy independently of the King. He pointed out that the monarchy was distracted by internal events in Britain, by political crises, and in the case of James II by the removal of non-Catholic advisors of experience.¹⁹² The survival of James, initially as heir apparent, then as king, naturally took precedence over the desire of councillors and colonial officials to centralize the colonial provinces in North America, and the legal processes involved in revoking the original charters had to follow the established norms of procedure. Opposition within the judicial establishment and the removal of key legal officers slowed down the process until Randolph and then Andros got the bit between their teeth and a new Plantations Committee was nominated in 1675.

That year, Connecticut, which had already been using Robert to represent their interests in the previous decade, called upon him again, when they found that Andros, the Governor of New York, had been misrepresenting them. The struggle over the boundary between New York and Connecticut was thus being referred to this new governmental body in London, but was overtaken by the events of King Philip's War, which changed the whole situation in New England between June 1675 and August 1676. Robert had been elected again as Deputy Governor of the East India Company in April 1674 and April 1675, so was in a position where he could have some potential influence over government policy as regards overseas trade and colonial policy.¹⁹³ In October 1678

¹⁹² Haffenden PS, 'The crown and the colonial charters 1675-1688 Pt I', *WMQ*, 3rd Ser. 15, No 3 (July 1958) 298-311; Pt II, *WMQ*, 3rd Ser., No 3 (Oct 1958) 452-66

¹⁹³ *CCMEIC 1674-76*, iii-iv

Leete asked Robert or another appropriate person to present the colony's humble address to the King, and pardon their slowness in so doing.¹⁹⁴ However it was difficult for Robert, as the government in Massachusetts was equally in need of support in London and had a rather different view of New England from the other colonies. It is clear from the tone and wording of Mather's pamphlet, *A Brief Account*, that he equated in his mind, Massachusetts with the whole of New England. Criticism of this view is reflected in an anonymous pamphlet, *A Short Discourse*,¹⁹⁵ whose author comments that Massachusetts "affect to call themselves by the general name of New England, though they are not above a tenth of those colonies that go under that denomination". Given Robert's interests in Connecticut and other colonies, this attitude of Mather's must have grated a bit and may have led him and others not to give as full support to Mather's proposals as he would have wanted.

Increase Mather's account of his three year stint as an agent in London on behalf of Massachusetts is set down in a pamphlet published in 1691.¹⁹⁶ He had left Boston in April 1688, when Andros was still in power, to try and convince James II to remove the governor. Although having an audience with him, and James appearing to be sympathetic, Mather claimed nothing was done for him. He had landed at Weymouth on 16 May 1688, and had visited Robert at his house in Newington Green soon after. John Richards, Robert's key agent in Boston and trading partner, was a prominent member of Mather's North Church and treasurer of Harvard. Three days before James II left London for the last time, Robert took Mather to meet Gilbert Burnet, an Anglican minister and close advisor of William III. Burnet had come over with William and was later to become Bishop of Salisbury. Robert also introduced Mather to his nephew, Sir John Thompson, who was a member of the Convention Parliament which met after Christmas 1688. John was by then the son-in-law of the Earl of Anglesey, a friend of the old Puritans and of New England.¹⁹⁷ In his autobiography, Mather said that he had great affection "in the families where I had been chiefly conversant, viz- Sir Henry Ashurst, Major Thomson and Mr Whiting".¹⁹⁸ On 31 January 1689, following the offer of the crown to William and Mary, Mather walked to Robert's house at Newington Green where a service was held in "solemn thanksgiving of the nation's deliverance."¹⁹⁹

Samuel Sewall (1652-1730) was another New Englander who came over to England to secure the interests of Massachusetts. He had graduated MA from Harvard in 1674, and had married Hannah, the only surviving child of the wealthy and influential merchant John Hull, the mint-master of Massachusetts, in whose house in Boston the Sewalls resided. Hull had come to England in 1661 to try and secure the charters then, and with five other speculators, had secured the Pettiquampscut purchase from the Narragansett Indians in Rhode Island in 1657. He thus would have already been

¹⁹⁴ CSA, War Colonial Series Vol. I ff n156, 160: Minutes of Connecticut Council; ff 142a,: Leete to Thomson 23/10/1678

¹⁹⁵ Anon, *A short discourse shewing the great inconvenience of joyning the Plantation charters with those of England...etc.* (1689)

¹⁹⁶ Mather I, *A brief account concerning several of the agents of New England, their negotiation at the court of England*, (London, 1691)

¹⁹⁷ Johnson, RR, *Adjustment to Empire : New England Colonies 1675-1715*, (Chichester, 1981) 143-4, 161

¹⁹⁸ Hall, MG, *The autobiography of Increase Mather*, (Worcester MA, 1962) 327, 343

¹⁹⁹ Hall, MG, *The last American Puritan : The life of Increase Mather 1639-1723*, (Middletown CT, 1988) 212-3, 222

known to Robert through both of these as well as his trading activities Sewall managed the Boston printing press from 1681-4, and on his father in law's death, took over his business and property interests as well as being elected to the Court of Assistants. He also travelled to England in November 1688 to support Mather and visited and worked with Robert. On April 20th 1689 Sewall noted in his diary that he gone on foot to Hackney through Brick Lane about half a mile long and dined with Mr Thomas Glover, his son, Read, Thompson and their wives. Later, on 18 May 1689, Sewall commented that he had visited Hampton Court with Mr Mather, Sir Samuel Thomson and Mr Joseph Thomson. Later Sewall and Stoughton were both judges in the Salem witch trials, though later Sewall recanted his role in them, much to Stoughton's disgust.²⁰⁰

During the Glorious Revolution, Mather also claimed that Lord Wharton had arranged an audience with the then Prince of Orange and Mather had prevented a circular letter being sent to New England which would have kept all governors in place.²⁰¹ He also tried to persuade the new King that Massachusetts should have its old charter restored first, and then have additional privileges added to it. To help, he worked through Sir Henry Ashhurst, Robert's brother in law and fellow director of the New England Company. With the dissolution of the Convention Parliament these moves failed, and the new parliament appeared to Mather to be disinclined to deal with Massachusetts affairs as fast as he would have liked. He then persuaded the new Duke of Monmouth to push for a new charter, which would incorporate the terms of the old. However his plans were referred firstly to the King's legal officers, then The Council, then the Committee for Foreign Plantations, further delays occurring when the King returned to Holland. He also, through another aristocrat (possibly Robert's nephew, John Thompson, now Lord Haversham), approached Queen Mary, who made sympathetic noises, but could do nothing on her own. On William's return, Mather managed to deliver the 16 December 1690 address of the Boston General Court to him.²⁰²

Robert and his relatives were clearly involved in discussing, if not the planning of these negotiations, as on 26 March 1691 Mather recorded in his diary that he had been in the morning with Robert and Sir W Phips with the Marquis of Carmarthen, and then dined at Robert's house.²⁰³ Then on 18 April 1691, a petition was presented to the King from "merchants and others who have concerns in New England", which was signed, by among others, Robert, his son Joseph, his nephew Samuel, his brother in law Thomas Glover and his son-in law William Ashhurst. This claimed that they had been faced with great difficulties in New England because the ancient, rights and privileges had been removed and because of the war with the French and Indians. They sought not only the confirmation of the charters etc. but also, that frigates be sent out to secure the coast and aid in the conquest of Canada.²⁰⁴

Mather then obtained a second audience with the King on 28 April and tried to persuade him to keep the government of Massachusetts separate from that of the other colonies, to preserve

²⁰⁰ *CMHS*, V, 5th Ser. (Boston MA, 1878) 236; van Doren, M, (ed.) *Samuel Sewall's Diary*, (NY 1963) 75, 77; Judith S. Graham, 'Sewall, Samuel (1652-1730)' *NewDNB*; Rory T. Cornish, 'Hull, John (1624-1683)' *NewDNB*

²⁰¹ Mather, *A brief account*, 4

²⁰² Mather, *A brief account*, 5-7

²⁰³ Moody RE, & Simmons RC, (eds.) 'The Glorious Revolution in Massachusetts: Selected Documents 1689-1692', *CMHS*, 64, (Boston 1988)

²⁰⁴ *CMHS*, 64, 'The Glorious Revolution in Massachusetts, 478
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their religious traditions and privileges. Two days later, according to Mather, the legal officers said that the King could appoint what government he chose for the colony and that he decided he would appoint a governor, a military man, but on the nomination of the Massachusetts agents. On 7 May Mather saw the solicitor general in the morning, dined with Robert and then saw Lord Wharton at Whitehall,²⁰⁵ but the King then returned to Holland, creating another hiatus for the agents, who put pressure on the King's advisers to obtain the political arrangements they favoured. A draft charter went to the council on 8 June and Mather and Ashhurst discussed the terms with the Attorney-General and attempted to change the minutes agreed by the Committee for Plantations, with which they disagreed.²⁰⁶

A major concern of Mather and the other agents was that titles to property might be disallowed by the new charter, so he and Ashhurst petitioned the King that no titles to property or privileges existing under the old charter might be disallowed and that Massachusetts might take over the government both of New Hampshire and Nova Scotia. This raising of the stakes indicated that much of the government of the colonies was still up for grabs, and Mather received a letter from Plymouth seeking to join up with Massachusetts, rather than New York, if they could not get a separate charter. When it became clear that the draft charter would be enacted, Mather sought a variety of advice from politicians and lawyers, and in the end settled for some modifications to the charter, that largely protected the property titles. Much of his printed pamphlet was self-justification for not getting what his colleagues in the colony might have wanted, but he probably got the best deal in the circumstances, given that the King was not going to reverse the legal judgement against the old charter. Any legal process or appeal to the House of Lords was considered too risky, particularly as legal opinion suggested that the Old Charter was defective in crucial ways, and, if restored, the colony might lose control of both Maine and New Hampshire.²⁰⁷

Mather then justified the compromises he had made and blamed the Massachusetts leaders and their petition for deferring to the King rather than claiming their virtual independence from royal control, justifying the imposition of a royal governor as flowing from the colony's desire for military protection from the French and Indians. He supported the appointment of Sir William Phipps as governor and Stoughton as deputy, as well as the 28 Assistants of the new council, whom he claimed were all friends of the colony.²⁰⁸ What part Robert played in all this is not clear but Mather stayed with him and dined with him on numerous occasions and it is likely that Robert's opinions on influential figures in Parliament were taken into account when Mather had to work through a parliamentary system with which he was not familiar. Between them, the Ashhursts and the Thompsons would have been valuable supporters of the position taken by Mather in relation to the colonial charters, in which both had an interest.

However in a letter of 4 July 1691 from Increase Mather, then in London, to John Richards, he said that he was desired by Mr Joseph Thomson (Robert's son) to have his concerns in New England in Richards' hands rather than those of Edward Thomas. Apparently Joseph was offended

²⁰⁵ *CMHS*, 64, 'The Glorious Revolution in Massachusetts', 519

²⁰⁶ Mather, *A brief account*, 8-11

²⁰⁷ Mather, *A brief account*, 11-15

²⁰⁸ Mather, *A brief account*, 15-22

by Thomas signing a Tory address to the King, which involved sending over a general governor for the whole of New England. However he also commented that Joseph would have written to Richards sooner "but that the unjust prejudices his father hath taken against you were his discouragement."²⁰⁹ Why Robert had taken against Richards is not clear, but maybe in his 70th year Robert was becoming rather cantankerous. However his interest in what was happening on the other side of the Atlantic was displayed in a pamphlet probably written by Robert, possibly in conjunction with Daniel Defoe.

Robert and *The Humble Address*

Between May and September 1691, Robert, possibly in conjunction with Daniel Defoe, then a fellow inhabitant of the Newington Green Dissenting community, three miles north of the City of London, probably wrote a pamphlet called *The Humble Address of the Publicans of New England*. This was part of an ongoing debate in print relating to the renewal of the New England colonial charters following the Glorious Revolution and the overthrow of the Dominion of New England and the imprisonment of Sir Edmund Andros. It was a response to an earlier humble address to the King from a group of New Englanders who were unhappy with the idea of restoring the old charters in the original form. In an analysis by Breen of its contents, he highlighted that it contained: "a constant fear of political conspiracy against popular rights; an obsession with the potential corruption and irresponsibility of all civil power; the necessity for the people to embody certain classical moral virtues if the nation was to avoid despotism; a belief in the superiority of a republic over other forms of government; and persuasion that only the free participation of all people in civil affairs could thwart the spread of tyranny."²¹⁰

This was Breen's take on it, on the assumption that the writer was a New-Englander not a Londoner. However Johnson suggests that it was either Robert or Daniel Defoe who penned it, as the evidence pointed to someone in the capital who was involved with the whole process at court of trying to get the charters renewed. The author comments on: the sins of the Stuarts; the mismanagement of English trade and the need to preserve the East India Company's monopoly, all issues much closer to Robert's experience rather than those of the young Defoe though the acerbic style is more like the latter's. It is therefore possible, given that Mather knew and dined with Robert on many occasions, and that Defoe later corresponded with Mather's son, that the pamphlet was a joint production, Robert, as far as is known, having never authored another pamphlet. Nevertheless, an analysis of the style and contents of the pamphlet in comparison with letters, activities and reported statements by Robert around the same period, suggests that his beliefs were those which were incorporated within it.²¹¹

The support that Robert gave to Mather during his time in England is seen partly in a letter he wrote to William Stoughton on 1 January 1692 and partly in the records of the New England Company, the Governorship of which Robert was elected to unanimously on 25 March 1692. In the

²⁰⁹ Increase Mather to John Richards 4/7/1691 from 'The Winthrop Papers' in Moody & Simmons, 'The Glorious Revolution', *CCSM*, 64, (Boston 1988) pp 559-60

²¹⁰ Breen, TH, *The character of the good ruler: Puritan political ideas in New England, 1630-1730*, (New Haven, 1970) as quoted in Johnson, RR, 'The Humble Address of the Publicans of New-England: A reassessment', *NEQ*, Vol. 51, No.2 2 (Jun, 1978) 241-2

²¹¹ Johnson, 'The Humble Address', 243-7

letter he said “And now I mention Mr Mather, I cannot but admire his indefatigable labour for your country under all the discouragements he hath mett with even from those that should have assisted him because their moros constated humors weare not complied with, which causeth my advice to you. That for the future if you shall have occasion to send Cometioners over, you will send such as know our court and yours, for I believe though your present Cometioners are honest men and great in your generall courts, yet if it had not bin for Mr Mather prudence as well as paines, you had not had such advantages as you have, in your charter (as much as they are slighted by them.)”²¹²

As a merchant trading with New England he had often ensured that part of the Company’s annual revenue to the Commissioners in Massachusetts reached them by bills of Exchange. However whilst Mather was in England in 1691-2 the company paid some of his expenses which amounted to £400, while the Massachusetts government, on whose behalf he was acting, undertook to repay the commissioners at the rate of 28% interest. The Commissioners wrote to Robert, as Governor, in February 1693, “The government here are very thankful to your Honour for supplying Mr Mather with that summe to be expended in their service.”²¹³ Mather was later to remember Robert’s kindness when he wrote to Sir William Ashhurst in 1717: “I have directed to Mr Soden a small book which I pray my Lady Ashhurst to accept of as a testimony of the love I have for her, on the account of her father, as well as her own deserts.”²¹⁴ This comment raises the issue of what kind of reputation Robert had gathered for himself by the end of his life, how his character was viewed and what role he played in his extended family.

²¹² Thomson to Stoughton, 1/1/1692 in Moody & Simmons, ‘The Glorious Revolution’ p 623

²¹³ Kellaway, *The New England Company 1649*, 166, 181

²¹⁴ *CMHS*, 64, ‘The Glorious Revolution in Massachusetts’, 623; Lovett RW, (ed.) ‘Harvard College Records IV Documents 1638-1722’, *CMHS*, 49, (Boston MA, 1975) 160
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Chapter 4 -The reputation, character and family of Robert Thompson

During the 1650s, whilst he was a commissioner of the navy, Robert built up a reputation for efficiency and decisive action. He was not afraid to point out the inadequacies of the fleet, the docks, the victualling system etc. and pressed parliament for money, sometimes twice the sum allocated for the fleet. He was thus a key individual in helping to build up the British navy that Admiral Blake used so effectively in the first Anglo-Dutch War of 1652-4 and then against the pirates in the Mediterranean and the Spanish in the Caribbean. As Deputy-Governor of the East India Company he was also seen as effective in helping to organize the new fort, town and port of Bombay, which the British had acquired from the Portuguese as part of the dowry of Queen Catherine of Braganza. He ensured that proper plans were drawn up for providing laws and constitutions for the port and providing appropriate manpower. In both capacities he earned a reputation for having a sound grasp of detail across all aspects of his work.

As an active and committed director he was, with Thomas Papillon, one of the representatives of the Company that attended the treaty negotiations at Breda following the Second Anglo-Dutch War. This experience and his regular and frequent attendance at meetings of the Court of Committees earned him a reputation for effectiveness as a negotiator, loyalty to the company, and commitment to its principles, earning him thanks and pecuniary remuneration as a result. His growing reputation helped him be elected Deputy Governor on a number of occasions in the Restoration period. He was also committed to his ideals of spreading the gospel among the Native American Indians, becoming an active agent for the New England Company, arranging financial transactions for them and eventually becoming the Governor. It is clear from comments by Pepys and others that he was committed to the idea of liberty of conscience for all godly Christians, and was part of the Independent community at his home in Newington Green.

However, Robert, despite supporting both the Society for Spreading the Gospel among the Indians, and the ministers of Harvard University who were involved in it, was quite prepared, with other Puritans in both Massachusetts and Connecticut, to get hold of Indian land, either by purchase or particularly after King Philip's War, by virtual confiscation. Although supportive of the converts, the so-called 'Praying Indians', he was prepared to join the various syndicates which exploited Indian land and shared it out between the members, notably in the Million Acre Purchase and other speculative ventures. He had the same prejudice as other Puritans had at the time against both Catholics in Ireland as well as pagans in America. In the 1650s he had purchased land confiscated from the Irish rebels of 1641, because of his involvement in the Additional Sea Adventure of 1643, which was designed against them. They were not members of the godly Protestant groups with which he was associated, so could be perceived as unworthy of owning land that could be used for higher, but also purely secular purposes, by the godly. The link between his religious and secular activities is seen in a plan for spreading the gospel among the natives of the Indian sub-continent.

Thrown into extraordinary circumstances, being the youngest of four surviving sons with three sisters, his prospects would not have seemed good, had not his elder brothers chosen to seek their fortune in the New World before he was born. He thus would have been helped to emigrate,

probably through the influence of his eldest brother Maurice, who had established connections from Virginia to Massachusetts as well as across the Caribbean. By 1639 he was establishing himself in the centre of Boston through the purchase of the Old Town Meeting House, on what is now State Street. Maurice had plantations in Virginia and was trading British goods to English settlers in the new colonies in exchange for tobacco and other colonial products which enabled him to make a profit at both ends of the journey. It is possible that Robert started his commercial life as his brother's agent in Boston, with a prime location close to Boston harbour and introductions to the dominant local Puritans of the day. His brothers' decision to return to England to support Parliament, probably led him to return as well and join the local militia forces in London.

Robert's family and descendants

Despite suggestions that Robert may have married Edward Hopkins daughter, there is no clear proof. What we do know is that he married Frances Chambers on 23 July 1646 at Saint Dunstan's Church, Stepney, where his brother Maurice had been an active member of the local classis, and that she was still alive at his death. His family consisted of: Elizabeth, born about 1647, who married William Ashhurst on 31 August 1668, at Newington in London; Mary, born about 1649, who married Samuel Clarke on 6 May 1668 at Leverton, Lincoln; William, (died by 1691), who married Elizabeth Glover and left an eldest son, William; Joseph, christened on 27 February 1657 at Saint Olave Hart Street in London; Susanna, born about 1659 at Robert's estate at Culpho in Suffolk who married Robert Duckenfield Bt as his second wife, on 7 August 1683 at St Leonards Shoreditch and died at Duckenfield in Lancashire on 7 July 1742, aged 83 and was buried in the Presbyterian Chapel at Cross Street London. Not only did she have to care for some of the 10 children by his first wife Jane Escourt, but, she and her husband, who died in 1729 aged 88, had 14 children of their own.²¹⁵ Robert Thomson's last daughter was Hannah (Anna), who married Thomas Miller in London on 18 February 1694.

Elizabeth the eldest produced two children, Robert Ashhurst, who, like his father and Robert, became Governor of the New England Company, and Judith who married her cousin William Thomson Junior, son of William. The latter became a director and then Governor of the Bank of England. Sir Robert Clerke, son of Mary and Samuel, became an MP for Cambridgeshire and also a governor of the New England Company. In Robert's will, made in 1691, and confirmed by him in March 1693/4, it becomes clear what some of the property was that remained with him at his death. Along with his household furniture etc, coach and horses and £500, he left his wife the profits of his houses, land and stock at Guilford Connecticut as well as the rents from his farms at Culpho and Felsham in Suffolk and that purchased from Mr Denham in Kent. He had already split his land obtained through the Nipmuck purchase so that each of his four daughters had 1000 acres each and a further £100 was allocated to each share to further the settlement of more families on each plot. Thus the link with New England, initiated by Robert, continued into the next two generations. By the time Robert's will had been proven in 1695, it was clear that his widow Frances was still alive, and she and Joseph were his executors, his son William was dead, as was Anna's husband Thomas Miller. To his grandson William he gave, when he became 25, his estate at Elsham in Lincolnshire, which he

²¹⁵ Cockayne, GE, *Complete Baronetage*, (5 Vols. 1900-6) Vol. IV, pp 16-17, The Life of Major Robert Thomson by Prof. Alan Thomson

had bought from his Oldfield cousins, as well as the reversion of the farm in Kent, to be held by his wife during her lifetime. This was then to descend to Joseph, the son of his own son Joseph. Other land in Yorkshire and Kent was held by his brother in law Glover and his son in law Samuel Clerke in trust.²¹⁶

It is not clear what happened to his holdings in the East India Company stock, but it is possible that he cashed some of it in to supply the other bequests in his will, each grandchild, apart from Joseph Thomson receiving £50 when they married or became of age. He did not mention the property he purchased at West Bradenham in Norfolk in 1684, though it is possible he had sold it or passed it on to one of his descendants before his death, as an early 19th century essayist claimed that: "Henry Warner, Esq. of Wormill Hall, near Mildenhall in Suffolk, who sold it to Robert Thompson, Esq. about 1684; from the Thompsons it descended to the wife of Anthony Burward of Woodbridge in Suffolk, and the said Anthony holds it for life."²¹⁷

Robert's grandson, Joseph, was a member of the Inner Temple and the proprietor of Killingly, Windham County, Connecticut. As Robert's heir, he petitioned the Connecticut Assembly in 1734 with other local inhabitants, to ensure that the settlement of 1708, which fixed the northern boundary of the parish as the line that divided Massachusetts from Connecticut, secured the exact line. This had remained unsettled, and was reputed to be the southern boundary of Woodstock parish. Robert's grandson, Robert, William's younger son, appears to have attempted to claim the Thompson lands in Watton at Stone, and, like his great-grandfather Robert, came into conflict with the legal authorities. A complaint was made to the House of Commons on 16 December 1698 that Mr Robert Thomson and Samuel Robinson had attempted to enter Woodhall Park and House, which was in the possession of Richard Woolaston Esq. MP and seized his goods in breach of the privileges of the house. Three days later a petition was presented on behalf of Philip Boteler, an infant, whose care had been committed to a master in Chancery. The latter had let Woodhall Park and House to Robert Thompson Esq. under a covenant not to assign it without leave of the court, but he had given Mr Wollaston leave to hunt and fowl in the park. However he had destroyed much of the game, and it had been agreed to let the property to Mr Robinson. Mr Wollaston claimed a breach of privilege against them because of the denial of what he saw as his rights and the case was referred to the privileges committee.²¹⁸

Robert Thomson – An assessment

It has been assumed by some historians that he was well in with Cromwell, though he only had roles within naval administration. He had indeed been in the Parliamentary army, but by 1660 his main interest was in overseas trade. First his brother Maurice was the Governor of the East India Company in the 1660s, then his brother William in the 1670s, when he himself became Deputy Governor both to William and to others. Many of the directors of the Company may well have had republican, rather than Cromwellian sympathies, but that did not stop them collectively lending

²¹⁶ Waters, *Genealogical Gleanings*, 65-6

²¹⁷ Anon 'Hundred of South Greenhoe: West-Bradenham', in *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, 6 (1807), 142-147

²¹⁸ *CJ* XII, 355-60:16: 19 December 1698

Charles II thousands of pounds, which kept the King independent from both the Catholic Louis XIV and the Anglican Parliament. The Declarations of Indulgence, which benefited a range of non-conformists, were just the kind of measure that Robert and his friends would have supported. The Whigs, with whom his nephew John Thompson, later Lord Haversham, was initially associated, would have been his natural political allies, though Lord Annesley, the Lord Privy Seal, was Haversham's father in Law. His brother Maurice has been associated with the first Navigation Act of 1660 and it is not unreasonable to assume that because the bulk of his trading interest were with the East, rather than the West, that he would not have been averse, at least initially, to supporting the later Navigation Acts. However this may have put him in conflict with his friends in Massachusetts & Connecticut.

His attitude to the Native American Indians appears to have been ambivalent. He was, on the one hand, rather paternalistic towards them, a not uncommon attitude at the time, particularly as the point of the New England Society was to convert the 'savages', noble or otherwise, to Christianity and thus engage in actively spreading the gospel, but also to turn them into civilized human beings. However those who refused to hearken to the lord, or slipped back into their old ways, when pressurized by King Philip and his minions, would have been seen by many white settlers as apostates. As such, Robert or any other Christian man was entitled to take over the lands of the rebels, who had been defeated in battle. He was doing the lord's work, but also gaining land with which he could further that work, but also for his own profit. Governments both colonial and in England, expected settlers to "improve" the land, that is fence it in, plough it up and make it productive in European terms. Robert's involvement in so many land speculation schemes was thus seen as justifiable, in both religious and political terms.

The colonists with whom he dealt had many interconnections and some he would have known, or known about, before he left England. He would probably have heard the Reverend Charles Chauncy, president of Harvard, who helped in the missionary work, preach as vicar in Ware church, when he was teenager, as Ware was only a few miles from his birthplace. John Eliot, the apostle of the Indians, had been born on the other side of the River Lea at Nazeing in Essex. Samuel Stone, who helped establish Hartford Connecticut, came from Hertford, again a few miles from his birthplace. The lawyers and attorneys, who acted for his financial interests in Boston, were such people as William Stoughton, John Richards and others who came to dominate Massachusetts politics. He corresponded with the governors of Massachusetts and Connecticut and it was rumoured by the sons of John Winthrop in letters between them that he had attempted to buy New York from the future James II. He knew Samuel Sewell and the Mathers and was active recovering the original charters for the colonists after the Glorious Revolution. Thus although he spent little time in America, he was seen as a great friend of the colonists. Was this reputation well earned, and what do his own writings tell us about his personality?

Any assessment of Robert's achievements needs to take into account the role played by his older brothers. Could he have achieved what he did without their support? It was probably Maurice who first set him up in Boston in the 1630s, George who probably helped him get a commission in the London Parliamentary forces and possibly into his role as Navy Commissioner. It was probably Maurice who got him into the Additional Sea Adventure to Ireland, the Assada Adventure to the

Indian Ocean and into the East India Company itself. William was also in a position to protect him in the immediate post-Restoration period and further his advance into the East India Company as well as the New England Company. Despite his support for the Non-Conformist cause, Robert never appeared to be bold enough to make a principled stand. He was not a radical who would risk all, but a cautious man who would negotiate rather than confront. Although he represented the East India Company at Breda, the Company did not get much out of the final treaty, though between them Robert and his brother William established a *modus vivendi* with the governments of Charles II, whereby the Company lent the King money while being able to maintain their privileges under the Royal Charter. In America most of his land speculation schemes did not benefit him that much in his own lifetime, though he did use them to further the interests of the dissenting protestants, whether Huguenot or nonconformist. Robert was many things in his lifetime, a life rich with incident and with political resonance. It is important that his name lives on in the name of the town of Thompson Connecticut.

Postscript

In 1713 Cotton Mather in Boston wrote to Walt Winthrop in New London. In the letter he said: "You knew old Major Thompson. He had a story that a young nobleman, travelling with his tutor, visited a church in Italy, and among the epitaphs asked his tutor to read one of them, which was not very legible. He read Populokolothropon (a word whereof I am not learned enough to know the etymology). The nobleman enquired what the English of it? And the tutor answered: 'The world is well rid of a knave.' And so my old major was used, when he heard of the death of certain persons, only to lift up his hands and say Populokolothropon. And others also would quere Major Thompson's Greek, as they call it on such occasions."²¹⁹ It appeared he also had a sense of humour.

²¹⁹ *Collections Massachusetts Historical Society*, 4th Ser. 8, Cotton Mather to Walt Winthrop 2 January 1713
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Book II – Major Robert Thompson

Document 1: Major Robert Thompson, Esquire (From Echoes of Old Thompson Volume I)

By Marcella (Houle) Pasay

Ellen Larned's "History of Windham County" provides its readers with a number of particulars concerning the Nipmuc Country and the land transactions that led to the formation of Thompson, CT, but scant personal data about Robert Thompson, the town's namesake. Other than "...of North Newington, Middlesex, England--a very noted personage, president of the society for the Propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts, and a firm and devoted friend of the colonies," and, "Thompson's land remained in his family for upwards of an hundred years, and the town that subsequently included it was named in his honor"¹, there was little else written. What motivated this absentee landlord to acquire two thousand acres of wilderness in the Colonies and insure his family's ownership by deeding it to his heirs before he died?²

Contrary to the benign, benevolent philanthropist that some might imagine, he was a man of strong convictions, who possessed a perceptiveness borne of life experiences and was influenced most notably by his association with Oliver Cromwell, the man England "most loves to hate."

Robert Thompson was born about 1610, perhaps the fourth son of Robert (Sr.) and Elizabeth (Halfhide) Thompson in the Watton, Hertford County, England. He had two sisters and at least six brothers. Mary, possibly the oldest child, emigrated to the Colonies and in 1644 married William Tucker of Elizabeth City, Virginia; his sister Elizabeth married Francis Stuke and their children's' baptisms are recorded in the parish of Watton-at-Stone, Hertford. The eldest son of Robert (Sr.) and Elizabeth was said to be Maurice who was born circa 1606. He became a wealthy merchant who emigrated to Virginia for a short time before returning to England. He served as governor of the East India Company and was prominent in Cromwell's government. Another brother, George, baptized in 1607, lost a leg serving in the military during the English Civil War. Brother William was governor of the East India Company during the reign of King Charles II, a Member of the House of Commons and was knighted in 1660. There is also mention of a brother named Glover in Robert's will.

Waters, in his Genealogical Gleanings In England, quotes someone as saying:

"Heard three men of quality, one seemingly a Dutchman, rejoice that the Dutch had done so well, and attribute it chiefly to the care and diligence of Maurice Thompson and brother Major (Robert), in supplying them with information of the motions of the English fleet...Finds that Maurice Thompson was always violent against kingly government, was intimate with the Protector, sat on some high courts of justice, and sentenced some beheaded lords to death, so that he is incapable of bearing any office. He was a poor man in Virginia, but got a great estate, chiefly from the King's party. He, Hugh Peters and Nicholas Corsellis³, a Dutchman, went over in the beginning of the war to collect money in Holland for the distressed Protestants in Ireland, and was always in great favour with the Dutch. As to (the) Major...thinks he must mean his (Maurice's) brother Major Robert Thompson, who was so great with Cromwell that he had nearly married

¹ Larned, Ellen D., History of Windham County, Connecticut (Chester: The Pequot Press, 1976 Bicentennial Edition), vol. I.: p. 15

² Suffolk Deeds, Lib. XIV, 194, 195 (MA Archives, Dorchester)

³ Two of Maurice's daughters married Dutchmen: Martha married Nicholas Corsellis and Elizabeth married Joseph Alston.

his daughter: he began with nothing, rose high enough to purchase 2,200 pounds a year in bishops' lands, and lost it on the Restoration, so that he brags that he hates not the persons but the office of bishops; he is bold, full of malice, and embittered against government; he was six or seven years a navy commissioner for the protector, so that he knows well the ways of the navy, and is thus able to commit this treason...Westminster, 24 June 1666."

Opposing Parliament's victorious war against the Dutch, Cromwell lobbied for a long-term constitutional settlement, and, among other things, a program of Christian evangelism and religious toleration. Letters from John Eliot, New England's Apostle to the Indians had been published in London newspapers and had elicited much sympathy from Cromwell and others. In July, 1649, A Corporation for Promoting And Propagating The Gospel of Jesus Christ in New England was incorporated. Among the first fourteen assistants we find the name of Robert Thompson.⁴ Henry Ashurst was Treasurer of the Society and a successful London merchant who sought to translate the Bible into the Indian language in New England. That work was completed in 1663 during Robert's term as the Society's second governor. His son-in-law, Sir William Ashurst (Henry's son), followed him as third governor.⁵

In 1657 Cromwell ordered the reorganization of the East India Company that traces its origins to 1600 when, under its original charter granted by Queen Elizabeth I it was known as "The Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies". This was the vehicle with which the Thompsons plied their trade in the Colonies and abroad.

Antonia Fraser, in her biography, Cromwell, The Lord Protector, wrote:

"...It is not surprising that the eyes of the Elect were turned increasingly towards a New World across the seas where conscience might flourish, prosperity would follow, and the frustrations of royal or episcopal control could be forgotten in the establishment of a godly kingdom. Cromwell himself seems to have seriously considered emigrating with his family to North America in the early 1630's."

A number of documents found at the Massachusetts Archives at Columbia Point in Dorchester, MA trace the land acquisitions of Robert Thompson in New England. On a visit to Boston in 1639, he purchased an old church building on what is now State Street in that city. He most likely returned to England because of the political unrest brewing there. Robert also procured from Rev. Henry Whitfield in 1651, the stone house in Guilford, CT, purported to be the oldest building standing in New England. It stayed in the Thompson family until 1772.

It wasn't until the 1680's that Thompson acquired the acreage at Oxford and at Quinattissit, now part of Thompson (see map*). The first entry in the Records of the Colony⁶, is dated May 16, 1683:

"This Court having information that some gentlemen in England are desirous to remove themselves into this colony, & (if it may be) to settle themselves under the Massachusetts; for the encouragement of such persons, & that they may have some from among themselves, according to their motion, to assist & direct them in such a design, this Court doth grant to Major Robert Thompson, William Stoughton, & Joseph Dudley, Esq., and such others as they shall associate to them, a tract of land, in any free place, containing eight miles square, or a township, they settling in the said place, within four years, thirty

⁴ Scull, G. D., Esq., "The Society for Promoting and Propagating The Gospel In New England," New England Historic Genealogical Register April 1882: 157-160.

⁵ Robert's son Joseph and grandson William (son of William Ashurst) were also members. (See NEHGS Register, Vol. 39, July 1885, pp. 299-301.)

⁶ More precisely, Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, vol. v., 1674-1686.

*Map can be found in the Echoes of Old Thompson Volume 1 book

families & an able orthodox minister, and do allow to the said township freedom from country rates for four years from the time above limited."

The second entry, dated the same day, reads:

"This Court, being informed by our agents, now in England, of the good will & friendship of Major Robert Thompson, of London, & his readiness upon all occasions to be assistant to them in the service of this colony, wherein they are, according do, by way of gratuity, give unto the said Major Thompson & his heirs five hundred acres of land in the Nipmugg country, to be layed out to him with all reasonable convenience."

This grant was given to Robert Thompson because he settled a boundary dispute between Massachusetts and Connecticut settlers. Being friendly with both states, Thompson received this land that became known in time as the Thompson grant.⁷

The Oxford Grant, to the north, given to the three original grantees, Robert Thompson, Joseph Dudley and William Stoughton, stipulated that the grantees had three years to settle 30 families in the area. Because the end of 1685 was upon them and they had not settled the land, they asked for and received an extension of three years. In 1686, French Huguenots began to settle in the Oxford, MA area fulfilling the grant requirements. These settlers gave the nearby river its name, the Frenchtown River, now the French River.⁸ The settlers in New Oxford for the next 10 years suffered several bloody Indian attacks from the north possibly inspired by the French in Canada during the little known King William's War of 1689-1697, pitting French and the Indians against the British Colonies. In 1696, the back-breaking Johnson Massacre was the last straw and caused the Huguenot village in Oxford to be abandoned. Following the resolution of King William's War, some settlers returned in 1698 but it was many years before the settlement prospered.⁹

The land Thompson selected in Connecticut is best explained by the following note in the book, "Connecticut Town Origins", by Helen Sellers;

"...When the planters of (Woodstock) petitioned the court of Massachusetts for the right to establish that settlement in 1683, the request was granted on condition that certain gentlemen of Roxbury in Massachusetts already granted an eight-mile square in the Nipmuck Country "have the first choice". They chose the section called Quinnatisset, and the two largest land-owners subsequently became non-resident Englishmen, one of whom was Major Robert Thompson from whom the town later was to take its name. In 1684 this (land) was laid out to farms and then left for thirty years."¹⁰

Robert Thompson was known to the Connecticut, Massachusetts and British government authorities having lived in New England for a period of time and residing in or near London for the balance of his life. He had been asked by notable people in the government and both colonies to resolve and support issues on many occasions. His influence in London and in Boston, with the most notable of the people of the time, cannot be underestimated. Major Thompson was a "loving" friend of Edward Hopkins, married to the daughter of Theophilus Eaton, a founder of New Haven, and the second Governor of the colony of Connecticut.¹¹ Thompson was a key person in the development of the Massachusetts and Connecticut colonies and deserves further

⁷ Paul Macek & James Morrison, "Early History of Webster, Dudley and Oxford", 2nd ed. 2001, pg. 152

⁸ Ibid, page 153

⁹ Ibid, page 164

¹⁰ Helen E. Sellers, "Connecticut Town Origins", Pequot Press, Stonington, CT 1942

¹¹ Holmes Ammidown, "Historical Collections", Vol. I, New York, 1874, pgs 110-111

research. Hopefully, this sketch will encourage some researcher to look more deeply into his connections.

In 1691, Thompson wrote his will that was proved in 1694, probably not long after his death. This instrument catalogs his holdings and is a valuable genealogical tool found in Genealogical Gleanings in England:

Robert Thompson, 14 April 1691. To my wife, in addition to her jointure¹², my household stuff, plate, coach and horses and five hundred pounds; and during her natural life, the profits of my houses, lands and stock at Gelford¹³ in New England, the rents of my farm at Culpho and Felsham, in the county of Suffolk, and of that bought of Mr. Denham in Kent. I give unto my wife and son Joseph five hundred pounds to dispose as they know is my mind without being accountable to any. I will that there be not above three hundred pounds expended on my funeral in mourning and all other expenses. I will that what is expended on those one thousand apiece (which I have by deed settled on my daughters Ashurst, Clark, Miller and Duckingfield¹⁴) of land at Nipmugg in New England be made up a hundred pounds to each for their further settlement, as Mr. Stoughton shall direct. To my grandson William Thompson, son of my deceased son William, during his natural life, after he shall attain the age of twenty five years, Esham, in Lincolnshire, with its appurtenances, bought of my cousin Oldfield, and the farm in Kent bought of Mr. Denham, and that, in the mean time, my executors receive the profits and lay them out in land for his use as aforesaid; and this in discharge of the twelve hundred pounds which my executor is to pay: after his decease to his first son, then to the second son (and so on); failing male issue, to my grandson Joseph, son of my son Joseph (in the same order, &etc.); then to my daughters that shall be living, during their natural lives, and after their deaths to such of their sons as are or shall be baptized Robert. Whereas upon my son William's marriage I did settle several lands in Yorkshire and Kent upon my brother Glover and son Clark in trust, &c. &c.

On examining Mr. Richard Bradly's account of Kintledg, I found an overweight¹⁵ which, for the reasons writ in my waste book¹⁶, may be my just right, yet, least there should be an error, I will that his heirs or executors be paid the sixty four pounds. I give unto each of my grandchildren (except Joseph Ashurst) that shall be living at my death, when they marry or come of age, fifty pounds. My dear wife and son Joseph to be executors.

The witnesses were Ann Cunliffe, Henry Scoupholme, John Rooke and William Watson. The testator declared it to be his will 12 March 1693. Signed and delivered in presence of Henry Scoupholme, Mary Watson and A. Hatway. Proved by Joseph Thomson, 6 December, 1694. Confirmed by decree 3rd Session Trinity, 1695. The receipt of the original will acknowledged by Joseph defuncti, executores hujusmodi negotium promoventes, Joseph Thomson 13 July, 1695.

Sententia pro value Testamenti Roberti Thompson, nuper de Stoke Newington in comitatu Middlesexiae armigeri defuncti etc. etc. in judicio inter Franciscam Thompson, relictam, et Josephum Thompson, filium, dicti de functi, executores husjusmoi negotium promoventes, ex unna, et Dominam Elizabetham Ashurst (uxorem domini Willelmi Ashurst, militis), Mariam Clerke (uxorem Samuelis Clerke armigeri) Annam Miller, viduam, et Dominam Susan Duckingfield (uxorem Domini Roberti Duckingfield Baronetti), filias naturales et legitimas dicti

¹² An estate in lands or tenements, settled on a woman in consideration of marriage, and which she is to enjoy after her husband decease", according to Webster's Dictionary, 1858 edition

¹³ Guilford, CT

¹⁴ See Suffolk Deeds

¹⁵ Excess

¹⁶ Among merchants, a book used in which rough entries of transactions are made, previous to their being carried into the journal", Webster's, 1858 ed.

defuncti, ex Guilielmum Thompson nepotem ex filio ejusdem defunct, partes contra quas idem negotiumpromovetur, &c. &c. 1695.

The Latin paragraph identifies the preceding document as the last will and testament of Robert Thompson recently of Stoke Newington, Middlesex County. It goes on to name: His wife Frances, son Joseph, daughters Lady Elizabeth Ashurst (wife of Sir William Ashurst, knight), Mary Clarke (wife of Samuel Clarke, "arms bearer"), Ann Miller, widow, Lady Susan Duckingfield (wife of Sir Robert, Baron), and lastly his grandson, William Thompson.

The last thirty years of Robert Thompson's life were highlighted by devastation and loss. In 1658 Oliver Cromwell, his ally, perhaps mentor, the most controversial figure in English history, died. Two months later, the monarchy was reinstated and the Restoration begun. As a friend of the now infamous Lord Protector Cromwell, Thompson lost prestige as well as lands but luckily escaped execution when the new King took power. To have to endure the horrific exhumation and hanging of Cromwell's body in Westminster Square in 1661, cannot be comprehended. Then, in 1665, one hundred thousand lives were claimed by the Great Plague. Surely this touched the Thompson family who were known to be London residents. This was followed by the Great Fire of London in 1666 when nearly eighty percent of the city burned, a total of eighty seven churches and thirteen thousand, two hundred houses. Thompson owned a number of properties outside London as evidenced in his will, but surely other friends and relatives lost their homes and places of worship.

The indentures made in 1687 by Thompson to his children divided the Nipmuc land (granted him in 1683) into five equal shares. What, in fact, was he gifting them with? Along with the actual property and the income they provided, was he also giving them a chance at a new beginning if they so chose? Did he foresee a possibility for growth greater than the obvious monetary gain? Perhaps some remnant of his allegiance to Cromwell persuaded Robert Thompson to invest for the future of his family in a godly kingdom.

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Document 2:

Major Robert Thompson – Part II (From Echoes of Old Thompson, Volume II – Donning Press)

In the first Echoes of Old Thompson Book, Marcella (Houle) Pasay presented us with an excellent biography of Major Robert Thompson. Since then, more information has come to light and we can now add a new chapter to the story of this interesting man.

Robert Thompson and his Impact on the founding of Oxford MA:

In the earliest days of the colonization of New England, few ventured to settle inland because of the fear of Indian attacks and the lack of roads and pathways. Most development followed the coasts and rivers. Yet, as the small towns on the coast grew and prospered, colonists pushed deeper into the interior of present-day Massachusetts and Connecticut. While this expansion was temporarily halted by the Indian attacks at the outbreak of King Philip's War in 1675, the war's end brought renewed interest in colonization in the early 1680s.

Major Robert Thompson's ability to work out border difficulties and other issues between the colonies as well as his connections with the royal government in London made him one of the most noted personages of these times. He was given large land grants as his reward for efforts on behalf of the Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island colonies. As can be seen in the map in our first book, Major Thompson had two large land grants, one east of Fort Hill in present day Thompson and another in Oxford, MA. A condition of the Oxford land grants was that he and his partners would have 30 permanent families living on the land by 1683; but, failing to meet this date, he and other grantees were given a short extension. Around this time, Major Robert Thompson was the president of the Society for Promoting and Propagating the Gospel in New England, headquartered in London. Formed in Cromwell's day, nearly forty years before, the Society's mission was to help educate and settle the Indians in New England. Major Thompson's presence in the Society and his ownership of large tracts of former Indian land could be interpreted in a number of ways. No matter what his motivations, Thompson's interests in New England surely would benefit with peaceful relations between the colonies and the Indians.

To summarize, Robert Thompson was a London merchant of very high standing; the General Court of Massachusetts, in recognition of valuable services he had rendered to the colony, had given him five hundred acres of his choice of former Nipmuc land, not yet unoccupied, in the interior of the province. At the same time, the General Court had granted to a company organized in London with Robert Thompson at its head, a tract of land, eight miles square, now called the Oxford grant, for the site of a settlement. Lastly, Robert Thompson was president of the Society for Promoting and Propagating the Gospel in New England.

The reader must appreciate that Major Robert Thompson was no average merchant. He was closely connected with his brother Maurice, who was *the* leading merchant in London for many years. Another brother William became the President of the East India Company, which at one point "...ruled over nearly one-fifth of the world's population; possessed its own army and navy....and had a revenue greater than that of Britain.it was a 'government owned by businessmen, the shares in which were daily bought and sold'".¹⁷ Robert and Maurice had lived in America for a time and each owned extensive estates on both sides of the Atlantic. Family ties between all of the Thompson family members and the other leading merchants have been well documented by Robert Brenner in his book "Merchants and Revolution". Robert Thompson had been closely involved with the British Navy, a vice admiral and possibly higher, and was intimately involved in the slave trade. The Thompson brothers were extremely close to Oliver Cromwell, the dictator "Lord Protector" of England, yet with the restoration of the Monarchy, the

¹⁷ The East India Company, Brian Gardner, 1971, Barnes and Noble Books with A.M. Heath & Co. Ltd

close relationship with Cromwell did not prevent Robert from wielding extensive influence both in London and in the Colonies. Clearly, Robert Thompson did not lack for high level connections.

It happened at this time (after 1683) that the Huguenot refugee Gabriel Bernon met a fellow-refugee, Mr. Teffeau, who introduced him to Robert Thompson. We'll follow Bernon's statement for what happened next:

"Mr. Bernon states that he was of one of the most ancient families in Rochelle, in France; that upon the breach of the Edict of Nantes, to shun persecution, he fled to London; that, upon his arrival, Mr. Teffeau, Esq., Treasurer of the Protestant Church of France, presented him to the Honorable Society for the Propagating the Gospel Among the Indians of New England; that Mr. Thompson, the President, offered to install him in the said Society, and offered him land in the government of the Massachusetts Bay; whereupon, Isaac Bertrand du Tuffeau desired him to assist him to come over to New England to settle a plantation for their refuge, which he did, and furnished him means for beginning the settlement."

"That Du Teffeau arrived in Boston with letters of credit from Major Thompson and himself and delivered them to his Excellency, Joseph Dudley, and the Honorable William Stoughton, who granted to the said Du Teffeau 750 acres of land for him (Bernon) at New Oxford, where he laid or spent the money he had furnished him; that by letters received from Du Tuffeau he was induced to remove to Boston, shipping himself, his family and servants, with some other families, and paid passage for above forty persons; that on their arrival in Boston, he presented letters from Major Thompson to Dudley and Stoughton who were pleased, besides the 750 acres that were granted to Bertrand du Tuffeau and to him, to grant him 1750 acres more, and for a more authentic security, his Excellency was pleased to accompany him to Oxford, to put him in possession of the two thousand and 500 hundred acres."¹⁸

Now, readers, understand what happened here. Joseph Dudley personally escorted the wealthy Huguenot refugee Bernon and his group to the Oxford settlement deep in the interior of Massachusetts. Why is this of interest? Because at this time, Joseph Dudley was the temporary governor of Massachusetts during a very troubled period in New England history. Both William Stoughton and Joseph Dudley were active in government and each served significant periods as the governor of Massachusetts. It is fascinating to consider that Major Robert Thompson, and two future governors of Massachusetts were working together to settle the refugees on their personal land grant. In today's world, such an intermingling of business, religion and government interests would be unheard of, but then, such connections were the norm for the rich and powerful. How else could the interior of New England be settled? The rest of the sad story of Gabriel Bernon and the Oxford settlers is not for this book but is in itself a fascinating story for those interested in local history. The connection between Major Thompson and the French settlers did have a direct impact on Thompson however as the French River flowing through Thompson is named after those unfortunate French settlers in Oxford.

The Thompson Name – Should it be spelled ‘Thomson’?:

One of the leading researchers of the Thompson family line is Virginia Thomson. She wrote the following on March 7, 2004 in response to a request for a portrait of Major Robert Thompson for our upcoming book. Her answer:

*Hello Joseph,
I don't know that any pictures of Maj. Robert Thomson exist. It's possible, I suppose, that a bust or portrait might exist somewhere...probably in England.....*

By the way, Sir William, Robert's brother, is the only family member that

¹⁸ Holmes Ammidown, Historical Collections, Volume 1, pg. 125, 1995 Reprint Heritage Books

changed his surname to include the 'p'. Maj. Robert Thomson was a 'Thomson' until his last breath. Warmest regards, Virginia

Now, she raises an interesting point in that it is possible that our town has the wrong spelling for Major Robert Thompson. Is it possible that we have been spelling the name wrong for 200 years?

Virginia wrote again:

Hello, again, Joseph: Sir William, Robert's brother, because he was knighted under England's laws, had to change the spelling of his surname to include the 'p'. He was the only one of the brothers with that spelling.

I may be able to add a little more color to Maj. Robert's story, with excerpts from Robert Brenner's "Merchants and Revolutions": "Robert Thomson actually did emigrate to Massachusetts during the 1630s, becoming an intimate with many of the leading figures of New England congregationalism. Robert Thomson was a beneficiary and trustee of the Connecticut founding father Edward Hopkins." I sent the following in an email to Prof. Alan Thomson (who is the foremost researcher of this line in England): Edw. Hopkins made his will 17 March 1657 - "Signed, sealed, declared, and published by the said Edward Hopkins, Esq., at his house at London, on the 17th day of March in the year of our Lord 1657 to be his last will and testament." Here's the interesting part(s): I do give to my sister Mrs. Margaret Thomson¹⁹ the sum of £50, to be paid her within one year after my decease. I do give unto my nephew Henry Thomson £800, whereof £400 to be paid within sixteen months after my decease, and the other £400 within six months after the decease of my wife. I do likewise give and bequeath to my niece Katherine Thomson, but now Katherine James, (over and above the portion of £500 formerly given her,) £100.." "My farther mind and will is, that, within six months after the decease of my wife, £500 be made over into New England, according to the advice of my loving friends MAJOR ROBERT THOMSON and MR. FRANCIS WILLOUGHBY, and conveyed into the hands of the trustees before-mentioned,.. "I do give unto my honored and loving friends MAJOR ROBERT THOMSON and Mr. Francis Willoughby £20 a piece, in a piece of plate, as a token of my respects unto them;...." He makes his nephew, Henry Dalley, "sole executor" and "my good friends MAJOR ROBERT THOMSON and Mr. Francis Willoughby overseers."

Robert Thomson purchased the home of Henry Whitfield when the latter returned to England. (I note here that Brenner is also using Savage's "Genealogical Dictionary of the First Settlers of New England."). By 1643, all the (Thomson) brothers, Maurice, Col. George, Sir William and Maj. Robert, had returned to England and were extensively involved in parliamentary changes prior to and during the "Civil War". It must also be remembered that these Thomson brothers were also among the new Merchant-Adventurers who began importing slaves from Africa. Warmest wishes, Virginia

That Major Robert "Thomson" and "Mrs. Margaret Thomson" are mentioned in the will by Connecticut Governor Edward Hopkins, spelled as "Thomson", is further evidence of Robert Thomson's connections and possibly further evidence of the true spelling of his last name. However, this document raises questions.

In unattributed notes from Alan Thomson, a professor at Hertford University in England, it mentions that Maj. Robert had a daughter Mary, then two sons, Joseph and William, (d. 1678), followed by a daughter Elizabeth (Thomson) Ashurst – her husband was William Ashurst, Lord

Mayor of London; then another daughter who married Mr. Miller. Lastly, there was a daughter Susan who married Sir Robert Dukingfield.

Who is Mrs. Margaret Thomson referred to in Edward Hopkins' will? Professor's Thomson's notes mentions that Major Robert Thompson is born in **1622** and died 1694 which is believed to be correct. In the next sentence, it says - 1655 Robert paid two tithes in Lancaster County. It goes on to say that in 1660 he married (**Frances**) Margaret () Welch, widow of John Welch, in Christ Church, Middlesex. Margaret, the wife, was probably a daughter of Robert Mascall or Miskill, and Mascall left bequests to Robert Thompson and his daughter Mary and to others. One other note mentions that Maj. Robert Thomson,(1622-1694) was a friend of Increase Mathers, in Massachusetts.

East India Company & Major Robert Thompson:

Virginia Thomson also included an excerpt that cannot be attributed specifically to a source:

Sir Josiah Child, long one of the most important merchants in the kingdom, successfully took control of the East India Company in the last few years of Charles II's reign, in the years of the Tory reaction (1681-1685). In 1682 "on a sudden", Sir Josiah Child "forsook all his old friends that first introduced him with great difficulty into the Committee and afterwards raised him to the honour of Governor, throwing them totally out of the management" -- Whig friends like Sir Samuel Bernardiston, Thomas Papillon, Sir John Banks, Major Robert Thompson -- "betaking himself to new counselors that were very ignorant in this trade." These new counselors, it turns out, were a motley collection of Catholic and Tory courtiers.

This is the first indication that Major Robert Thompson was also involved with the East India Company, the huge company that was once led by his brother William.

Hopefully, these additional items will be useful for any researcher looking to complete a more comprehensive biography of the town's namesake. My thanks to Virginia Thomson and Professor Alan Thomson for their contributions.

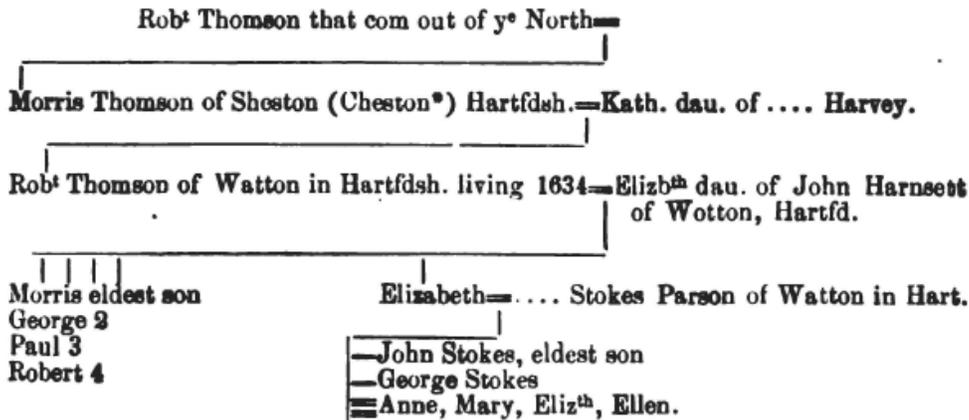
Document III: Genealogic Gleanings in England by Henry Fitz-Gilbert Waters, Boston
1901 – New England Historic Genealogical Society

In connection with the foregoing it may be well to note that Thomas Sprigg of London, merchant, in his will of 19 May, 1675, proved 14 January, 1678, appointed Mr Maurice Thomson, Col. George Thomson, Sir William Thomson and Major Robert Thomson his executors and trustees, &c. King, 10.

[Major Robert Thompson of London purchased of the Rev. Henry Whitefield of Guilford, Ct., who returned to England in 1651, his property in that town including the famous "stone house" built in 1639—one of the oldest buildings in New England now standing. The property remained in Thompson's family "to the great detriment of the town till October 22, 1772, when Andrew Oliver, Esq., of Boston, as attorney for Thompson's heirs, sold it all to Mr. Wyllys Elliott for £3000 of the current money of Massachusetts." (Smith's Guilford, p. 92.) Savage (Gen. Dict. iii. 288) conjectures that Thompson married a sister of Gov. Hopkins. We see by the Hopkins wills that the governor had a sister Margaret who married a Thompson; but the names of her children, Henry and Katherine, are not found as the children of Robert Thompson in the probate of his will. It is possible, however, that they and their mother died after 1657 and before 1691. Several letters from Major Robert Thompson are printed in Hutchinson's Collection of Papers. Winthrop, in his History of New England, under 1639 (vol. i. p. 307 of 1st ed., p.

370 of 2d ed.), states that "a fishing trade was begun at Cape Ann by one Mr. Maurice Tomson, a merchant of London." (See also Mass. Colony Records, i. 256.) This was probably Maurice, eldest brother of Maj. Thompson, son of Robert of Watton, and grandson of Maurice of Cheshunt. "He was Governor of the East India Company in the reign of King Charles the First, as was also his brother Sir William in the reign of King Charles the Second." His son, Sir John Thompson, bart., was created Baron Haversham, May 4, 1696. (Collins's Peerage, ed. 1741, pp. 230-233.) For other facts concerning Major Thompson and his brothers and their families, see Collins's Peerage, as cited. See also Wotton's Baronetage, iv. 488.—EDITOR.

[From Hertfordshire Pedigrees.]



Harl. MS. 1234, fol. 124, and Harl. MS. 1547, fol. 11.

—H. F. W.]