

# THE VILLAGES OF BRACEBY and ROPSLEY, Lincolnshire, and their connection to CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD

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Adapted from Dissertation for Nottingham University 2004

Appendix: brief life of Bishop Richard Fox

## 'A MAN OF EXTREME AUTHORITY & GOODNESS'

The involvement of Corpus Christi College in the village of Braceby, and many other south Lincolnshire villages, is due to a family by the name of Fox, which was well established in Ropsley in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. It is a pity that the term 'middle class' was not part of our vocabulary until the eighteenth century because it is one that could apply to the family of Richard Fox. The biographer of Richard Fox, Edmund Chisholm Batten, cast about for a suitable description for Richard's parents, but he failed to find any noble background for this man who rose to such extreme heights:



Fig 1 Bishop Richard Fox

'Thomas Fox was a person of position above a yeoman, though perhaps not entitled to wear coat armour. His only sister, Elizabeth Fox, married John Bronnewell, and from this marriage many illustrious families are descended. The name Fox as a landowner in Ropsley goes back to the time of Edward III, and the sisters of Bishop Fox married into the good families of Colston and Joyner before he himself was a distinguished man.'<sup>1</sup>

Richard Fox was son of Thomas Fox of Ropsley. From this undistinguished origin he rose to become Principal Secretary of State, and Lord Privy Seal to Henry VII. He was successively Bishop of Exeter (during which time he baptised the infant Henry VIII) Bishop of Bath and Wells, Bishop of Durham and finally Bishop of Winchester, at that time the most prestigious bishopric in England. After Henry VII's death in 1509 Richard worked in the same positions for the young Henry VIII. He continued in his service, working with Wolsey until age made him gradually withdraw to his Diocese. More details of his life and work are included in an appendix.



Plate 1 Corpus Christi College quadrangle

Richard Fox lived to the age of eighty. As he grew older his great desire was to found a University College. He became immersed in the preparations to create Corpus Christi College in Oxford. Richard was a member of the Guild of Corpus Christi. His idea was to endow a college for young monks, but he was dissuaded from this course by Bishop Oldham of Exeter<sup>2</sup>. What insights into the future did Bishop Oldham have? Land was purchased from Merton College, now Corpus Christi's next-door neighbour. The college was designed with the Bishop's close involvement and opened its doors in 1517 when he was sixty-nine.

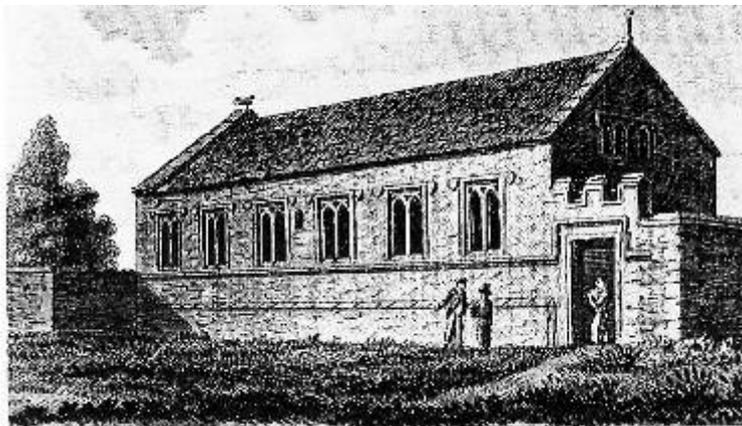
John Claymond, a native of Frampton, near Boston, Lincolnshire, was its first President. He was nine years younger than Richard Fox, and a close friend of over thirty years standing. He had already been President of Magdalen College in the same university.

Some of Bishop Fox's endowment of the College was in the form of lands in Lincolnshire and other counties. And so began Lincolnshire's connection with Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

Richard Fox also built and endowed a school at Grantham. He first thought to build it in Ropsley, but finally decided upon Grantham. A school was built, together with schoolmaster's house. The school building still exists as part of the Kings School, later attended by Sir Isaac Newton. Richard had previously purchased estates from Sir William Pounder of Barkston<sup>3</sup> including land in Barkston, Gonerby, Manthorpe, and Heydour. These holdings together with property in Twyford, North Witham & Colsterworth purchased from the Disneys of Norton Disney were used to provide the school with a teacher. A deed was drawn up endowing all this land to the College and arranging for them to pay £6

13s 4d annually to the schoolmaster and to maintain the buildings.<sup>4</sup> This deed was completed and signed in 1528 just three days before his death.

Fig. 2 Kings School, Grantham 1827



The College's archive shows that Corpus Christi held land in many South Lincolnshire towns and villages at foundation or on Bishop Fox's death, eleven years later. These are listed in Table 1. Some are listed as part of larger holdings.

MAIN ESTATES AT OR AROUND ENDOWMENT	SUBSIDIARY HOLDINGS	
Barkston	Belton	Manthorpe
Beckingham	Boston	Pickworth
Grantham	Brant Broughton	Rauceby
Great Gonerby	Carlton Scroop	Ringsthorpe
Heydour (Aisby & Oasby)	Colsterworth	Sapperton
Ropsley	Dembleby	Sleaford
	Easton	Stragglethorpe
	Fenton	Sutton in
	Humby	Beckingham
	Londonthorpe	Twyford

Table 1

Braceby is not included in this list, because the land and property there were not purchased until 1545. The time between the College's foundation and the purchase of the Braceby land saw the dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII, when a great deal of land came on to the open market.

The Braceby holding was bought from a local man, John Alen. It was in three parts. The largest was a tenement with a large allocation of strips of land in the

village fields, Northfield, Southfield and Eastfield, now known as College Farm. There were also two cottages with small amounts of land, one now Manor Farm Cottage, and the other demolished (Fig. 5). A survey carried out for Corpus Christi College of all its holdings in Lincolnshire in 1580 detailed the strips in the fields. The pages in the survey devoted to Braceby number eleven. The main holding in the occupation of Thomas Welles., whose payments were as listed in Table 2<sup>5</sup>

To the President and Scholars	£1	7s	6½d	
and beside		16s	1 d	to Mr. Flower
		1s	4 d	to St. John's
			4 d	to Queenes Majestie
				yerely for quitte
				rentes
	£2	5s	3½d	TOTAL
(Mr. Flower was a landowner in Braceby)				

Table 2

Only twenty-nine years later, in 1609 the College commissioned another survey, this time by Thomas Langdon, one of the eminent map-makers of the period. He had already surveyed their land at Whitehill in Oxfordshire in 1605.<sup>6</sup> This survey is illustrated with plans.



Fig. 3 College Farm Braceby from 1609 survey (Corpus Christi College, Oxford)

Very little land seems to have been purchased in Lincolnshire after the Braceby purchase, perhaps because of its remoteness from Oxford. A schedule of the College's holding in Braceby in 1689 shows that the open fields had now been

enclosed, and they had received the allocation of several closes amounting to 44½ acres.

Bishop Fox's Statutes (Laws) for the Organisation of the College forbade the selling of land and property: 'We are most anxious for gatherers in this College, than for scatterers, and they who recklessly squander their own, seem but seldom to make acquisitions from others'.<sup>7</sup> In Braceby the Welby family, prominent landed gentry from Denton, having purchased the land in Braceby owned by the Towne family, and with it the Lordship of the Manor, began leasing part of the Corpus Christi College properties and land in 1793. By 1863 they were leasing the whole.

In 1825 another survey of the College's holdings in Lincolnshire was made. The survey of College Farm at Braceby notes that the house and buildings were very dilapidated. The only addition to buildings in Braceby during the nineteenth century is one open-fronted barn or hovel.

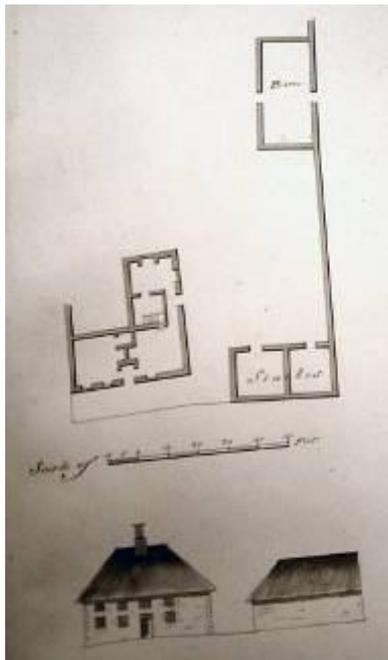


Fig 4 College Farm Braceby 1825  
(Corpus Christi College Oxford)

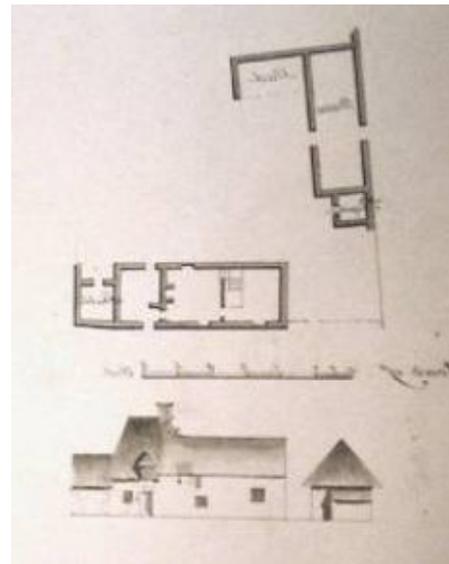


Fig 5 Farm in Back Lane, Braceby 1825  
now demolished (CCCO)

In the middle of the nineteenth century universities were commanded by Government to revise their Statutes. In 1855, when Corpus Christi's new Statutes were created, the College was finally permitted to sell the land with which it had been endowed, nearly 340 years previously.

By now agriculture was operating in a global market. The late nineteenth century saw a great depression which was disastrous for the English farmer. Low priced foreign grain and meat flooded the market. Many farmers in Lincolnshire and throughout England were unable to pay their rents. For Corpus Christi College income was so low that they were obliged to suspend several fellowships.<sup>8</sup> Many landowners suffered at this time and sold land. In 1901 Corpus Christi sold College Farm and their other smaller holdings in Braceby to the Welbys, who had been leasing them since 1793. Thus ended the College's connection with Braceby after 356 years.

In 1974 another survey of Lincolnshire holdings was made. At that time the only ancient estates still in the College's hands were Fox's birthplace and twelve acres of land at Barkston. They also had four other holdings, acquired in the twentieth century, at Austen Fen, Stewton, Burton Pedwardine and a South Kesteven District Council refuse tip.

## Ropsley - the Founder's Birthplace



Plate 2 Richard Fox's Birthplace, Ropsley 2004

The College holding in Ropsley in both 1580 and 1609 was smaller than Braceby, approximately 36 acres, and two dwelling houses. However the College did not own the founder's birthplace, Pullock Manor. The first President, John Claymond had

purchased it from a relative of Richard, Edward Fox. Claymond's will in 1536 made arrangements for Edward to repurchase it for £200. The second President, Robert Morwent, signed a deed in 1549 selling the property to Reginald Williams of Burfield, Berks, for the same amount. As it was still in the hands of the Morwent family in 1567, neither sale was ever completed. The next references to Pullock Manor in the seventeenth century, stated that it had been owned by Richard Kelham and was now owned by Richard Hickson. Both these families were landowners in Braceby and other nearby parishes.

In 1705, Corpus Christi's agent, John Threaves, visited Ropsley and found the house now belonged to Lady Brownlow. The College purchased Bishop Fox's birthplace at that time but sold it again in 1753. When in 1756 a request was made to put a commemorative plaque on the wall, Pullocks Manor was owned by Lord William Manners. By the time of the 1797 Ropsley Enclosure it seems again to have become the College's property.<sup>9</sup> In the 1910 National Valuation Survey the College was still the owner and the property was a public house, 'The Peacock'.<sup>10</sup>

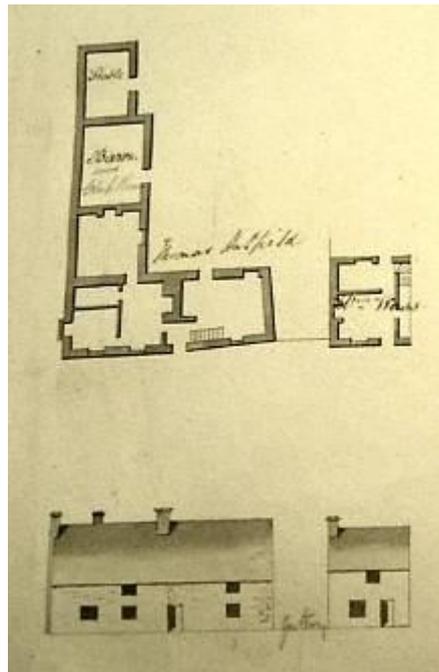


Fig. 6 Richard Fox's Birthplace from 1825 survey (CCCO)

The Bishop's birthplace in Ropsley remained in the hands of the College until 2002, when they sold it to a private purchaser.

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<sup>1</sup> Batten, E.C. *The Life of Bishop Richard Fox* p5 Corpus Christi College 1889

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p20

<sup>3</sup> Maddison's Lincolnshire Pedigrees Vol. III p795 Lincoln 1888

<sup>4</sup> CCCA/F/13/1

<sup>5</sup> CCCA 1580 Survey Da 5/1

<sup>6</sup> CCCA 1605 Survey Da 5/2

<sup>7</sup> Ward *The Foundation Statutes of Bishop Fox for Corpus Christi College* p194 London, Longman 1843

<sup>8</sup> Oral Testimony, Julian Reid Archivist CCC 26.04.04

<sup>9</sup> Fowler, Thomas *The History of Corpus Christi College* pp 28 & 289 Oxford, Oxford Historical Society 1893

<sup>10</sup> PRO IR58 49820 1910 Survey Book (Finance Act 1909-10)