Wollaston and Morton

by H. Hobart Holly*

It is strange that two names so well known in Quincy are of people about whom Quincy residents know very little, and whose lasting influence on our local history was negligible.

In the case of Capt. Wollaston, until recently we did not even know his first name. Virtually all that we knew of him came from Governor William Bradford who had only second-hand information on his activities and on his plans that did not work out. Thus the information is meager and the conclusions have proved to be inaccurate. He turns out to be a man of minor importance, and whose stay here was very short. Why a small hill and the area now comprising Quincy excepting North Quincy, Braintree, Randolph and Holbrook was named for him is a mystery. His name endures primarily because the Old Colony Railroad selected it for a station, and the community served by the station took the name of Wollaston.

We know of Thomas Morton's stay here principally from two sources— again William Bradford, and Morton's own book The New English Canaan. Since his activities here were far from conventional, the two accounts were written from two very different points of view. Rather than seek a factual middle ground, most of what has been since written about him has favored one side or the other, generally his biased account. A very colorful interesting character, his neighbors tolerated his escapades for a time. When it was discovered that he had traded to the Native Americans more firearms than they possessed collectively, and boasted of how well he had taught the Indians to use them, the colonists of the area had him arrested and sent back to England. His sojourn here is commemorated by the name Ma-re Mount, now Merrymount, the name he gave to the hill that had been Mount Wollaston. It is unfortunate that he is remembered principally for his escapades rather than for his book which gives a fine description of this area when the English settlers arrived and made a valuable contribution to the colonization of Massachusetts.

**Captain Richard Wollaston**

A detailed story of the search for Capt. Wollaston is given in the paper Wollaston of Mount Wollaston. The paper which is well annotated as to sources, records material relating to the enterprise that brought Capt. Wollaston to New England, to Humphrey Rastall who headed it, and to some of Capt. Wollaston's activities.

A genealogical search of the prominent Wollaston family in England failed to identify a possible candidate.

The search then turned to expeditions of exploration in which such a person might have been involved. The earliest mention was found in the description of a voyage of Capt. John Smith in 1615. John Smith records a confrontation with a Capt. Barra, an English pirate, whose lieutenant was "Capt. Wollston". Two years later in 1617 a Capt. Wollaston is mentioned in the account of Raleigh's expedition to Guiana. Capt. Wollaston was on a vessel that "slipped away...bent on piracy". In 1618 the pirates were in Newfoundland. Raleigh blamed Wollaston and others for the failure of the expedition, and names him as Capt. Richard Wollaston. On March 18, 1626, Capt. John Pennington (in the Downs) reported to the Duke of Buckingham that Capt. Wollaston was "buried yesterday."

It is noted that at that time, the title of "captain" was applied to the master of a vessel, and also to the man in charge of a group of soldiers or others on the vessel but not officers or crew of the vessel. This captain generally did not take his orders from the master of the vessel but from a party who was often not on the vessel. It was therefore a job of considerable responsibility since he had to provide for their living as well as direct their activities.

The above accounts of a Capt. Wollaston indicate a man of the soldier of fortune type, of considerable capacity, but not one who would have headed a business enterprise such as the one that brought our Capt. Wollaston here.

This led to research of the Mr. Rastall with whom Capt. Wollaston was associated. He turned out to be Humphrey Rastall who was earlier a Bristol merchant but, by the time of our interest in him, a London merchant. Happily for us, he had a propensity for getting into trouble, mainly for failure to fulfill contracts. We were thus able to learn much about his activities from court records, including the enterprise that brought Capt. Wollaston here.

For the story of the enterprise, we will quote directly from Wollaston of Mount Wollaston. This contains much that does not relate directly to Capt. Wollaston but does show that it was purely a commercial venture, and that neither Wollaston, Rastall or anyone else associated with it had any idea of a settlement here as some historians have suggested. It also makes it clear that Thomas Morton had no association with it as some historians have suggested. It should be noted that

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"New England" refers to Cape Ann and that "Monahiggin" is Monhegan Island, both of which at the time were summer stations for fishermen from Europe.7

The evidence of Wollaston and Rastall being associated on a voyage to New England appears in two series of legal actions, one before the High Court of Admiralty in England, the other in Virginia.

On 23 March 1624/5 (HCA 3/30/324d) Tobias White, master of the ship Unity, brought suit against Henry Beale and Peter Leonard, owners of two-thirds of the ship, for wages due him and his crew. On 10 May (HCA 3/30/351d) Beale and Leonard asked that Humphrey Rastall and Percy Griffith appear to answer for paying the salaries due.

Under 'Beale and Leonard versus Rastell and Griffith,' Thomas Hamon, Boatswain's Mate aboard Unity, was interrogated on 11 May (HCA 1/49/128) under 'Examinations as to Pirates.' He states that Rastell and Griffith chartered Unity (in which Rastell had an ownership interest) for the voyage and shipped 'sundry passengers and divers goods and merchandise to the full loading to be transported to Virginia, Canada, New England or one of them.' He then describes the voyage as follows: (Part only is quoted.)

"Tobias White, master of the Unity set sail out of the Thames about 6 or 7 April 12 months ago, and sailed toward Virginia, but before the year was fair spent Rastell, being in the ship did direct and command White to leave his intended course for Virginia and direct his course for New England where they arrived safely, . . . and when the Unity was provided and ready to sail from New England for Virginia, Rastell hired a bark of New England and caused the passengers and goods to be put out of the Unity to be carried to New England and commanded White to stay at New England until Rastell's return, . . .

"Near about 3 months after Rastell's departure from New England for Virginia as above said, when the Master and Company of the Unity were ready to set sail from New England toward London, the Master received intelligence by letters from Rastell to Captain Woldeestone that it was his wish to have the ship and company come from New England to Virginia, but within two or three days after their going from Monhegine, the winds were very contrary to their course for Virginia . . . inasmuch as they were out of hope reach to Virginia, it being then about the beginning of December, about the end of the year . . .

"Captain Woldeestone had nothing to do in the ship, but the command of the landmen . . . . . . The master took into the Unity 6 men to be transported thence to Virginia, with the consent of Capt. Wollaston for he was in the ship and saw the men and did not distaste their being there until they were at sea. . . . It is true that Capt. Wollaston commanded the Master and Company of the Unity to keep the sea and bear up still for Virginia, but for the reason before set down, they refused to bear up any longer for Virginia, but steered for England, . . . .

"On 12 May 1625, Stephen Bolton, Boatswain of Unity was examined (HCA 13/45/1) and essentially confirmed Hamon's story. He states that after two or three days at New England, by command of Rastall, Unity disposed of most of her goods, . . . . He states that when they were preparing at New England to sail for England, there came news that it was the will of Rastell to have her come to Virginia whereupon she departed from New England and went to Monhegine and there furnished herself with bread. . . . 6 passengers were carried for Virginia, but took them not without the consent and good liking of Capt. Wollaston. . . . Capt. Wollaston in New England sent 3 hogsheads bread into the Unity to provide him and his passengers for Virginia . . . .

"On 13 May 1625 (HCA 13/45/3rd) Tobias White, master of Unity examined and generally confirmed the previous stories, but added some details of interest . . . . After the delay while waiting for Rastall, White, according to Rastall's direction went to Capt. Wollaston and demanded victuals from him for the Unity, but Wollaston said he had scarce enough himself for his company for the winter; and refused. White told him he must return to England and Wollaston bade him go, and only to stay for his letters, and on a letter for Wollaston from Virginia from Rastall willled the Unity to come to him in Virginia, whereupon Wollaston with four passengers came on board the Unity for Virginia and understanding there was bread to be had they set sail on 1 December from Monhegine for Virginia . . . . Wollaston and his passengers ate the three hogsheads of bread Wollaston had put aboard."

The above shows Capt. Wollaston to have been in the employ of Humphrey Rastall, in charge of a group of indentured servants who were passengers on the Unity. Rastall was committed to provide these men for fishing activities at Cape Ann for the summer and then deliver them to parties in Virginia. Capt. Wollaston had complete responsibility for these men and, in Rastall's absence, spoke for him as charterer of the Unity. Capt. Wollaston's reference to provisions for his men for the winter clearly indicates that he was leaving some of them in Massachusetts for the winter. These could well have been or included those that he left at Mount Wollaston. These may have been the four or six who were on board Unity with him when he intended to go to Virginia. Why this location was chosen, or whether Unity itself anchored in Black's Creek and landed the party below the cedar tree, we will probably never know. The landing appears to have been in January 1624/5, 1625 our style.

Thomas Morton

Thomas Morton was a very different type of person than Capt. Wollaston. It is hard to find anyone like him in our history. There were undoubtedly others of his character in England whose joy for living centered in the pubs and having a good time. What made Mr. Morton unique was that he also had a love for adventure that would remove him from the merry England to which he had been accustomed. It was the continuing of his English life style in the wilderness of the New World that made him distinctive and brought him a degree of fame. When he declared himself "Lord of Misrule" he was following an English custom of his time. A man would go to a pub to throw a party, declare himself the Lord of Misrule, and treat everyone present to drinks. A jolly celebration around a May-pole was another custom that he brought here from merry England. "Mine Host of Ma-re Mount" was a colorful interlude in the serious New World of his time, but as a neighbor he was a threat rather than an asset.

Thomas Morton of Clifford's Inne, London, England, gentleman, was a lawyer, well educated and a man of means. Little is known of his business
activities or connections in England. Some historians believe that he first came to New England in 1622 with Thomas Weston’s people, landing at Wessagusset now Weymouth. There are no indications that he was part of Mr. Weston’s venture. If he had a connection, it apparently did not last. At times in years following he was in Plymouth. It is also not known if his purpose in coming to the New World was adventure, trade or settlement.

It was in the spring of 1625 that he came to Mount Wollaston, just a few months after Capt. Wollaston had left his men here in charge of his lieutenant, Fletcher. It seems likely that he came from either Weymouth or Plymouth. William Bradford describes the take-over as follows.

"...But this Morton above said, having more craft than honesty who had been a kind of petty-fogger of Furnival’s Inn in the others’ absence watches an opportunity (commons being but hard amongst them) and got some strong drink and other junkets and made them a feast; and after they were merry, he began to tell them he would give them good counsel. ‘You see,’ saith he, ‘that many of your fellows are carried to Virginia, and if you stay till this Rassall return, you will also be carried away and sold as slaves with the rest. Therefore I would advise you to thrust out this Lieutenant Fletcher, and I, having a part in the Plantation, will receive you as my partners and consociates; so may you be free from service, and we will converse, plant, trade, and live together as equals and support and protect one another.’ or to like effect. This counsel was easily received, so they took opportunity and thrust Lieutenant Fletcher out of doors, and would suffer him to come no more amongst them, but forced him to seek bread to eat and other relief from his neighbours till he could get passage for England.”

Thus did Thomas Morton establish his trading post at Mount Wollaston. Regardless of the accuracy of details in Gov. Bradford’s account, it is clear that Thomas Morton came on his own without partners, and representing no one. Throughout his stay at Mount Wollaston, it was always his enterprise. There is no indication that he ever had colonization in mind. He probably brought one or more servants with him. It is not known if he brought in other men to add to the small group—less Lt. Fletcher—that Capt. Wollaston had left there.

From the information that has come down to us on Mr. Morton, it is easy for people to come up with varying impressions of the man. For what is probably the most objective description of Mine Host of Ma-re Mount, we will quote Samuel Eliot Morison’s biography of him.*

“One of these small trading groups deserves more than passing notice, since it provided the first strange interlude played in the neighborhood of Quincy. Thomas Morton, a gay gentleman with an eye for trade, author of the most entertaining book on early Massachusetts, gathered a knot of boon companions on Mount Wollaston, which he renamed, in conscious punning, Ma-re Mount; and well he lived up to its usual pronunciation. Morton was quick to improve the sporting possibilities of the neighborhood, which Captain Smith had observed. When engaged in dickering with Indians whom he had previously well primed with lusty liquor, or playing ‘mine host of Ma-re Mount’ with ‘claret sparklings neate,’ he roamed the forest with dog and gun, or sailed about the bay, fishing and shooting water-fowl. White men and Indians alike found good cheer at Merrymount. Young squaws were particularly welcome, and young Pilgrims probably found an occasional surreptitious visit to Merrymount as stimulating, and ultimately as exhausting, as their descendants do a trip to New York. In the spring of 1627, Morton and his friends ‘set up a May-pole,’ says Governor Bradford of the Pilgrim colony, ‘drinking and dancing about it many days together, inviting the Indian women for their consorts, dancing and frisking together, (like so many fairies, or furies rather), and worse practises.’ Which no doubt was true, as May Day in the Merry England of King Charles was by no means the chaste school festival of to-day; indeed Morton admits it was not. ‘A goodly pine tree of 80 foote long,’ he writes, ‘was reared up, with a peare of buckshorns nayled on somewhat neare unto the top of it; where it stood, as a faire sea marke for directions how to find out the way to mine Hoste of Ma-re

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Mount.’ A mock-classical poem, whose mythological and somewhat phallic allusions puzzled the Pilgrims ‘most pitifully to expound,’ was nailed to the pole; and ‘there was likewise a merry song made, which (to make their Revells more fashionable) was sung with a Corus, every man bearing his part; which they performed in a daunce, hand in hand about the Maypole, whiles one of the Company sung and filled out the good Liquor, like Gammedes and Jupiter.’

THE SONGE

Drinke and be merry, merry, merry, boyes;
Let all your delight be in the Hymen’s joyes;
Io! to Hymen, now the day is come,
About the merry Maypole take a Roome.

Make Greene garlons, bring bottles out
And fill sweet Nectar freely about,
Uncover thy head and feare no harme,
For here’s good liquor to keepe it warme;
Then drinke and be merry, &c.

Nectar is a thing assign’d
By the Deities owne minde
To cure the hart oppresset with greife,
And of good liquors is the cheife.
Then drinke and be merry, &c.

Give to the Mellancolly man
A cup or two of ’t now and than;
This physicke will soone revive his bloud,
And make him be of a merrier moode.
Then drinke and be merry, &c.

Give to the Nymphe that’s free from scorne
No Irish stuff nor Scotch over worne.*
Lasses in beaver coats come away,
Yee shall be welcome to us night and day.
To drinke and be merry, &c.

Morton might have been left alone if he had not endangered the safety and threatened the trade of his neighbors by purchasing peltry with firearms, and teaching the Indians how to use them.

* It is probably necessary to explain to the younger generation that the ‘Irish stuff and Scotch’ were clothing not whiskey. The English of that time were beer and wine drinkers, and although they appreciated an occasional shot of ‘hot waters’ such as aqua vitae or brandy, whiskey and rum were almost unknown to them.
We have so often been told how Morton’s downfall was due to the Pilgrims’ hatred of mirth and jollity, that it is worth noting the facts. All the coast settlements between Maine and Nantasket, none of them puritan, joined in requesting Plymouth to suppress Morton. The Pilgrim Fathers first tried friendly admonishment. Morton declared he ‘would trade peacecs with the Indeans in despite of all.’ Plymouth remonstrated a second time: ‘the coutrie could not beare the injury he did; it was against their commone safetie.’ Morton ‘answered in high terms as before.’ Finally, in June, 1628, Plymouth was given the warrant to arrest him. Fiery little Miles Standish, whom Morton calls ‘Captaine Shrimp, a quondam drummer,’ marched to Boston Bay, and ordered mine host of Merrymount to surrender in the King’s name. At this point we will let Governor Bradford tell the story:

‘But they found him to stand stily in his defence, having made fast his dorns, armed his consorts, set diverse dishes of powder and bullets ready on the table; and if they had not been over armed with drinke, more hurt might have been done. They sommaned him to yeeld, but he kept his house, and they could get nothing but scotes and scorns from him; but at length, fearing they would doe some violence to the house, he and some of his crue came out, but not to yeeld, but to shoote; but they were so steed with drinke as their peeces were too heavie for them; him selfe with a carbine (over charg’d and almost halfe fill’d with powder and shot, as was after found) had thought to have shot Captaine Standish; but he step’d to him, and put by his peeces, and tooke him. Neither was ther any hurt done to any of either side, save that one was so dronke that he rane his own nose upon the pointe of a sword that one held before him as he entred the house; but he lost but a little of his hott blood. Morton they brought away to Plimoth.’

From Plymouth he was shipped to England; but this was by no means the last of Thomas Morton. Before long he was back at Merrymount with more liquor, and in the same jovial, defiant temper. By this time the Massachusetts Bay Colony had been founded. Governor Endecott, dålling the Maypole as a rallying point for disorderly youth and runaway servants, cut it down. Nevertheless he offered to take Morton into the official fur-trading monopoly. Mine host of Merrymount preferred to play a lone hand; for he was making six or seven hundred per cent profit. Again he was arrested, put into the bilboes, and deported, his house on Mount Wollaston burned before his eyes. In England, Morton very naturally played in with the enemies of the Massachusetts Colony, posed before Bishop Laud’s committee of the Privy Council as an Anglican martyr to puritian spite, and ‘was comforted by their lordships with the cropping of Mr. Winthrop’s ears,’ an item which interested that gentleman when he read it in an intercepted letter of Morton. Also at this time Morton wrote his book, ‘New English Canaan, or New Canaan. Containing an Abstract of New England . . . by Thomas Morton of Cliffor’s Inne gent.’ He had high hopes of returning to New England in the company of Church and King men, to destroy the Bible Commonwealth, and assume the government of Massachusetts in the King’s name. When he finally did drift back, ten years later, all hope of neat vengeance had been swallowed up in civil war. Morton spent a winter at Plymouth, where a Pilgrim father recorded with amazement that the sometime host of Merrymount was ‘content to drink water.’ Later, he ventured into the Bay jurisdiction, where the authorities were neither forgetful nor forgiving. For no good reason he was imprisoned, ‘laid in irons to the decaying of his Limbs’ as he complained in a humble petition to the General Court. After being mulcted of his property under color of a heavy fine, Morton was released, made his way to York in Maine, and there died, a broken-spirited, half-crazed old man.

One would wish that the authorities had not struck an enemy when he was down; but that was the way things were done in the seventeenth century, by puritans and Anglicans at home or abroad. We are heavily in debt to Morton for the jolliest contemporary account of early New England. If he did not love our people, he at least loved our land. As the verses in laudem authoris of the ‘New English Canaan’ declare:

To modell out a Land of so much worth
As until now noe traveller setteth forth;

Faire Canaans second selfe, second to none,
Nature’s rich Magazine till now unknowne.
Then here survey what nature hath in store,
And grant the love for this. He craves no more.”

Some may question Thomas Morton’s importance as a builder of the Bay Colony. There is no question, however, that he contributed some merriment and interest to our history for the enjoyment of those who read it today. Also, his fine account of our area of Massachusetts at his time— the Natives, the beauty of the country, the minerals, the birds and beasts has given both his contemporaries and us a greater appreciation of the land to which the early settlers came. He is part of our heritage.

References
2. The New English Canaan of Thomas Morton, with introductory matter and notes by Charles Francis Adams, Jr., Boston, Published by the Prince Society, 1883.
7. High Court of Admiralty records in England and in Virginia.

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