

AGNES, WIFE OF THOMAS THROCKMORTON, MP

By Robert Nichols

When exploring the Throckmorton family history in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, there are references to an Agnes, who is said to be the daughter of Alex de Besford and the wife of Thomas Throckmorton. In order to determine who Agnes was, various documents from this period were examined which mentioned Thomas Throckmorton and his wife, Agnes.

Thomas Throckmorton, a Member of Parliament for Worcestershire in 1402, evidently died in January 1411.¹ In 1930, Charles Wickliffe Throckmorton, in his genealogy of the Throckmorton family, wrote that Agnes, Thomas Throckmorton's wife, brought in a descent from the Besford, Harley, and Cobert families. He concluded that Agnes was a daughter of Alexander de Besford, who was the son of John de Besford and Joan (Corbet) Harley. By his wife Agnes, Thomas Throckmorton had a son, John.² Joan (Corbet) Harley was at one time thought to have brought a royal ancestry into the Throckmortons.³

The line that connects John Throckmorton to his present-day descendants is well documented.⁴ However, the conclusions reached by C. W. Throckmorton in order to establish a relationship between the Harley, Corbet and Throckmorton families by way of their connection through the Besford family have been questioned.

The noted genealogist, G. Andrews Moriarity, shared information concerning the Throckmorton family with C. W. Throckmorton and they were mutually aware of one another's work. Moriarity published important studies of the Throckmorton family.⁵ In his works and pedigrees, Moriarity stated that Thomas Throckmorton married Agnes, daughter of Alexander de Besford,⁶ but he differed with C. W. Throckmorton's conclusion that

¹ J. S. Roskell, Linda Clark, Carole Rawcliffe, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386-1421*, 4 vols. (Stroud, Gloucestershire, 1992), 4:609-10 (Thomas Throckmorton entry).

² C. Wickliffe Throckmorton, *A Genealogical and Historical Account of the Throckmorton Family in England and the United States . . .* (Richmond, Va., 1930), 39, 41.

³ Frederick Lewis Weis et al., *Ancestral Roots of Sixty Colonists . . .*, 6th ed. (Baltimore: Gen. Pub. Co., 1988), 34 (Line 29A).

⁴ Throckmorton, *A Genealogical . . . Account of the Throckmorton Family* [*supra* note 2], *passim*.

⁵ Including G. Andrews Moriarity, "The Early Throckmortons of Throckmorton and Coughton," *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica* (5th ser.), 6 (1927): 225-53, and "Evidences on Throckmorton Family," *NEHGR* 98 (1944): 111-23.

⁶ Moriarty, "Evidences on Throckmorton Family" *supra* note 5], 114a.

Alexander de Besford was the son of Joan de Harley, supposedly daughter of Robert de Harley and Joan de Corbet.⁷

In a 1980 article, John G. Hunt and Henry J. Young challenged the claim that John de Besford and Joan de Harley had a son, Alexander, whom they identified as father of Agnes de Besford. They argued that the chronology used by C. W. Throckmorton was extremely tight, and that Robert de Harley had only one daughter, Alice (Alesia), rather than two; the second being Joan de Harley.⁸ Additionally, these authors found that C. W. Throckmorton had confused properties in Worcestershire and Shropshire.⁹ This confusion enabled C. W. Throckmorton to support his theory. In a 1989 article, Paul C. Reed produced additional information and documentation that chronologically disproved the relationships proposed in C. W. Throckmorton's thesis, as well as confirming that Robert de Harley and Joan de Corbet had but one daughter, Alisia, who married Thomas Pashale, MP.¹⁰

Based on the foregoing two articles, it is now generally accepted that C. W. Throckmorton's claim that Alexander de Besford was the son of John de Besford and Joan de Harley, daughter of Robert de Harley and Joan de Corbet, was erroneous.¹¹ Therefore, any claims to a royal ancestry through these families are disproved. There is still the question as to whether Agnes, the wife of Thomas Throckmorton, was actually the daughter of Alexander de Besford. Both C. W. Throckmorton and G. Andrews Moriarity, as well as the two articles cited above, consider that she was, but as discussed below, other sources question the parentage or even the existence of Agnes de Besford.

One of the arguments made by C. W. Throckmorton in order to establish a relationship between the Throckmortons and the Besfords involved the Throckmorton coat of arms with their quarterly of seven (Figure 1).¹² To support his claim, he stated that the seventh quarter had been erroneously attributed to the Wyke family, when, he wrote, it actually

⁷ John G. Hunt, and Henry J. Young, "Ravens or Pelicans: Who was Joan de Harley," *The Genealogist* 1 (1980): 27-39, at 28.

⁸ Hunt and Young, "Ravens or Pelicans" [*supra* note 7], 28-30.

⁹ Hunt and Young, "Ravens or Pelicans" [*supra* note 7], 32-33.

¹⁰ Paul C. Reed, "Another Look at Joan de Harley: Will Her Real Descendants Please Rise," *The Genealogist* 10 (1989): 35-72, at 52-53, 72.

¹¹ See, for example, Weis et al., *Ancestral Roots of Sixty Colonists . . .* [*supra* note 3], 34 (Line 29A), where the line is broken above Joan de Harley, citing *The Genealogist* 1(1980): 27-29.

¹² Arms, as at *The Visitation of the County of Warwick . . . 1619*, ed. John Fetherston, Harleian Soc. Pubs., 12 (London, 1877), 206, where the blazon for the seven quarters is given. The quarters are identified (at p. xv) as for: (1) Throgmorton; (2) Abberbury; (3) Olney; (4) De la Spine; (5) Olney; (6); Bosan; and (7) Wyke.

belonged to the Besford family.¹³ An article in *William and Mary College Quarterly* identifies these quarters as for: (1) Throckmorton; (2) Abberbury; (3) Olney; (4) De la spine; (5) Olney; (6) Bosam and (7) Wyke. The seventh quarter is described as, “Gules a fess or between six gouttes d’or (Wyke).”¹⁴ The Besford arms were quite similar to those of Wyke, and are blazoned: Gules, a fess between three pears or.¹⁵

The *Quarterly* article states that the Wyke arms came into the Throckmorton family through the marriage of Sir John Throckmorton to Eleanor, daughter and heiress of Sir Guy de la Spine, and his wife, daughter and heiress of — Wyke. Sir John is listed as the son of Thomas Throckmorton, the Member of Parliament for Worcestershire in 1402, whose wife is Throckmorton Arms

given as Agnes, daughter and heiress of Alexander de Besford.¹⁶ Therefore, if the arms identified as for Wyke were actually for Besford, they would have been shown as an earlier quarter, and not in last place. Thus the Wyke arms in the seventh quarter provide no heraldic support for a Throckmorton–Besford marriage.

By 1368, Alexander de Besford (died ca. 1400) had begun his career as a lawyer, when it is documented that he acted as a trustee (feoffee) on behalf of one of his clients. He held various public offices in Worcestershire, and served as a Member of Parliament (MP) for Worcestershire four times (1382, 1388, 1391, 1395).¹⁷ Most sources show that Alexander de Besford was married twice. C. W. Throckmorton gives his first wife as Joan.¹⁸ His biography in *The History of Parliament* names his parents as possibly Alexander and Joan (—) Besford, and gives his wives as first, with a question mark, —, a coheirress of — Lench of (Rous) Lench, Worcestershire, and second, before July 1386, Beatrice, widow of Thomas Bassingbourne.¹⁹



Figure 1

¹³ Throckmorton, *A Genealogical . . . Account of the Throckmorton Family* [*supra* note 2], 15-17.

¹⁴ “Throckmorton Family” [by the editor, not identified], *The William and Mary College Quarterly*, 128-9, at 128.

¹⁵ Sir Bernard Burke, *The General Armory* . . . (London, 1878; repr. 1996), 77.

¹⁶ “Throckmorton Family” [*supra* note 14], 129.

¹⁷ *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421* [*supra* note 1], 2:214-16 (Alexander Besford entry).

¹⁸ Throckmorton, *A Genealogical . . . Account of the Throckmorton Family* [*supra* note 2], 41.

¹⁹ *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421* [*supra* note 1], 2:214. The existence of his first wife, a coheirress of — Lench of (Rous) Lench, lacks primary references.

Through this second marriage, Alexander Besford received an interest in substantial holdings in the south-eastern part of England, to include the Bassingbourne manor of Astwick, and properties in Hertfordshire and in Essex. Many financial transactions that took place in his later years involved these holdings.²⁰

The History of the County of Worcester states that Alexander de Besford had two daughters, Margaret and Joan, and mentions the possibility of a third, Agnes. However, the existence of Agnes “is somewhat doubtful,” as “Margaret and Joan seem to have divided the manor [at Besford] between them” upon Alexander’s death.²¹ No primary source has been found showing Alexander de Besford had a daughter, Agnes.

The 1569 Visitation of Worcestershire also recorded that Alexander de Besford had two daughters, Margaret and a second daughter, who were coheirs to his estate. This visitation shows that Margaret married John Dicklestone and with him, had a daughter Elizabeth. Alexander’s second daughter (without being named) married Sir William Clopton, Knight, and they had two daughters, Jane and Agnes. This reference lacks any mention of a daughter, Agnes, who married Thomas Throckmorton.²² *The History of Parliament* entry for Alexander Besford states that Margaret married firstly John Dixton of Dixton, Gloucestershire, and then Thomas de la Hay, and that Joan married Sir William Clopton.²³

LENCH ROUS

The History of Parliament, in the entry for Thomas Throckmorton, states that the Throckmortons were “closely connected with their neighbors the Besfords, and this friendship was cemented by Thomas Throckmorton’s marriage to one of Alexander Besford’s daughters, Agnes, in about 1380.” This entry states that Throckmorton “acquired premises in Rous Lench.”²⁴ As *The History of Parliament* entry for Alexander Besford states that he married as his first wife a coheiress of Rous Lench,²⁵ these two entries taken together give the impression that the lands in Rous Lench came to Thomas

²⁰ *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421* [*supra* note 1], 2:216.

²¹ *The Victoria History of the County of Worcester*, ed. William Page et al., 4 vols. (London, 1907–26), 4:21 (Parish of Besford).

²² *The Visitation of the County of Worcester. . . 1569*, ed. W. P. W. Phillimore, Harleian Soc. Pubs., 27 (London, 1888), 71.

²³ *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421* [*supra* note 1], 2:216.

²⁴ *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421* [*supra* note 1], 4:609.

²⁵ *History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1386–1421* [*supra* note 1], 2:214

Throckmorton through his marriage to Agnes, daughter of Alexander and his wife, a coheirress of Rous Lench.

On 27 January 1411, Thomas Throckmorton and his wife Agnes quitclaimed from themselves and the heirs of Agnes property in Lenche Rondolf [Lench Rous], to include 2 messuages, 4 carucates of land, and 12 virgates of meadow.²⁶ Among deeds associated with Lench Rous, a document dated 1 April 1380 names an Agnes, who with her firstborn son, William, was granted lands and tenements by her brother John, a chaplain. It records that Agnes and John were both the children of William, who was the son of Henry of Stowe.²⁷ Based upon the date of this document, Agnes of Stowe would have been a contemporary of Thomas Throckmorton, and of an age to be his wife and the mother of John Throckmorton. The Agnes mentioned in this grant provides a strong case for the origin of the properties in Lench Rous that are mentioned in the 1411 Feet and Fines document.²⁸

That raises a question about her firstborn child, William, named in the 1380 document. This William could have been from a first marriage or possibly a son of Thomas Throckmorton, but as there are no other references to him, he probably died at a young age.

CONCLUSION

The only link between the Besford/Harley/Corbet families and the Throckmorton family appears to have been a close, friendly relationship as neighbors. We know that Alexander de Besford had two, co-heir daughters by his marriage to Beatrice, and that he appears to have had a first marriage that was childless or without a surviving child. Agnes of Stowe, as the wife of Thomas Throckmorton, would eliminate the unsubstantiated theories that his wife was the daughter of Alexander de Besford and an unknown mother of Lench Rous.

This would sever any and all blood ties between the Besford family line and the Throckmorton family tree, giving them two separate pedigrees (Figure 2).

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²⁶ Feet of Fines: CP 25/1/260/26, number 26 (Worcestershire), online at www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk.

²⁷ National Archives Reference: 6683/1/1 (Old deeds of Rouse Lench), online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

²⁸ Feet of Fines [*supra* note 26].

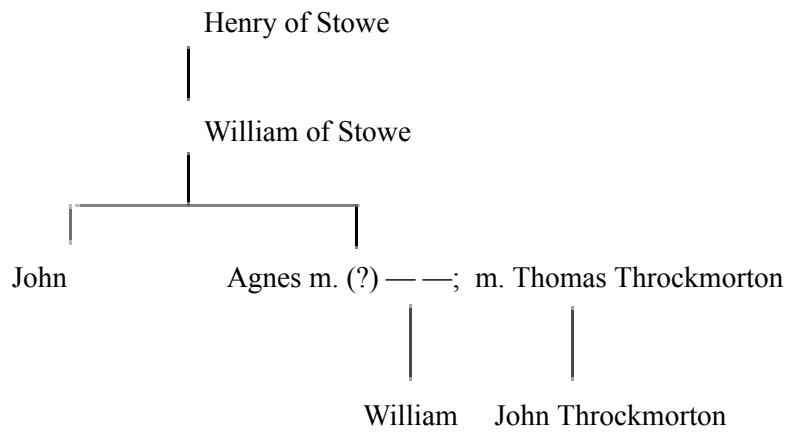
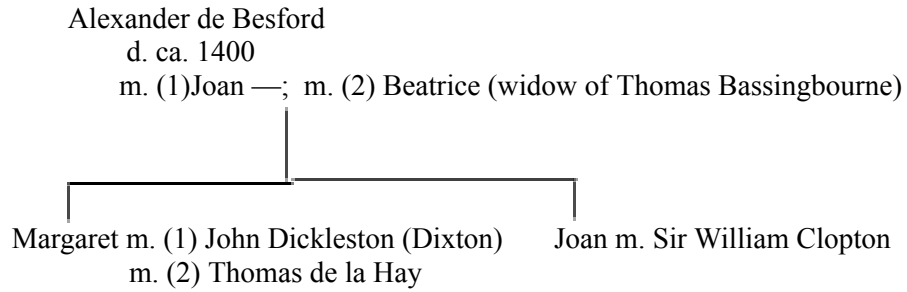


Figure 2. Besford and Stowe pedigrees