

marriage with her. Such was the antagonism towards Catholics in this period that her former father in law took her to court for the custody of her son on the grounds that she was bringing him up in the Catholic faith. She lost her custody battle and tragically had to give up her son.

Much was blamed on the Catholics and it is therefore not surprising that yet another 'supposed plot' was exposed. This one, the 'Popish Plot' of 1679, was supposed to have been partly plotted at the home of Herbert Aston – Bellamour Hall in Colton.



Bellamour Hall, Colton.

Lord Stafford, Lord Aston, Herbert Aston and others were accused by a man called Titus Oates of plotting to kill the King. Lord Stafford was executed before the plot was revealed to be a complete hoax and the other prisoners released from where they had been held in the Tower of London.

Persecution continued for the

family at Bellamour in the form of fines and sequestration of land until finally by the Act of Emancipation in the mid 19th Century Catholics were allowed to practise their faith with freedom.

References.

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Acknowledgements.

Research and Text by Dorothy Bradbury and Gill Sykes.
Editors Gill Sykes/Gay Lawrence.

Pictures.

Picture of Old Moseley Hall by courtesy of The National Trust.
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"The Local Heritage Initiative is a national grant scheme that helps local groups to investigate, explain and care for their local landscape, landmarks, traditions and culture. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) provides the grant but the scheme is a partnership, administered by the Countryside Agency with additional funding from Nationwide Building Society".



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Persecution of the Catholics

Following the Reformation when Henry VIII broke from Rome and became supreme head of the Church in England instead of the Pope, religious practice in this country was thrown into turmoil. The king closed monasteries and confiscated their land and treasures. These seizures affected Colton farms. The Lount and The Grange (later known as Boughey Hall Farm) belonging to St Thomas's Priory in Stafford, were seized by Henry and given away as a gift to one of his supporters. Churches were forced to stop many of their Catholic rituals and Colton Church was no exception. This state of affairs continued in the short reign of Edward VI when he pushed through further huge changes in the religious practices of the population and many church possessions of value were seized by the Crown. Upon Edward's early death in 1553 the whole process was reversed by a complete restoration of the Catholic faith under his sister Mary Tudor. Her short and 'bloody'

reign, when many Protestants were burnt at the stake; was followed upon Mary's death by Elizabeth I restoring all the changes that her father and brother had begun.

Again Colton Church was affected. All the valuables still in their possession with any Catholic significance had to be declared and were seized. Any pictures on the interior church walls having any connections with the Cult of the Saints had to be painted out. Pictures on the walls of Colton church disappeared under whitewash until they were found again in the 19th Century



The picture of St. Nicholas that was painted over inside Colton Church.

From then on the Catholic Church was, in effect, driven underground and those who remained faithful to Rome endured more and more persecution as time went on. Despite this, over the next two and a half centuries, many Staffordshire families stayed loyal to the Catholic faith, practising it in secret. They often became embroiled in plots attempting to reinstate Roman Catholicism as the faith of the nation. Some residents of Colton were connected at various times to such events and plots.

The faith of the monarch dictated the faith of the nation. This led to a number of attempts by Catholics to remove the monarch and replace him or her with a practising Catholic monarch. Elizabeth I was soon threatened in such a manner. The major threat by Catholics to her rule were their attempts to replace her by her Catholic cousin Mary Queen of Scots who also had a claim to the English throne. Some of this plotting took place in Staffordshire not too far away from Colton.

Elizabeth always perceived her cousin to be a threat and when Mary took refuge in England after her disastrous reign in Scotland, Elizabeth held her captive until she decided what to do with her. Mary

soon became a focus for Catholic hopes. Elizabeth was well aware of this and moved Mary around the country to try and avoid any plots succeeding. Mary was eventually moved to Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire. Tutbury was an unhealthy place and she complained. They decided to move her for a while to Chartley Hall. Local legend says that she came via Abbots Bromley passing through Colton. It was whilst she was at Chartley Hall that the Babington Plot, the plot that finally sealed her fate, was hatched. When this plot was discovered in 1586 she was held under close arrest by Sir Walter Aston at his house in Tixall, just four miles from Colton.



The Gatehouse to Tixall Hall through which Mary Queen of Scots rode to her imprisonment by Sir Walter Aston.

From Tixall Hall she moved to Fotheringay Castle and beheaded there in 1587. Mary was moved away from Staffordshire because it was considered to be a county full of Catholics who would still be willing to help her. The Catholics

of Staffordshire were described with scorn as “Rome’s snaky brood roosted and rested themselves more warmer and safer than in any other part of this kingdom” (Richard Lee 1624). Places around Staffordshire where Catholic families lived included Chillington, Boscobel, Saredon, Moseley, Brewood, Horsley, Knightley, Kings Bromley, Hamstall Ridware, Hoar Cross, Wolseley, Gerrard’s Bromley, Stafford Castle and Sandon to name but a few. Many of the landed families who lived in these places were to play a significant part in events in the next few decades.

The Gunpowder Plot of 1605 created a great fear of Catholics. Jesuit Priests ministered to them in secret assuming aliases so that they could hide with families who were wealthy enough and brave enough to support them. Hiding holes known as Priest holes were constructed in these houses so that the priest could hide if the house was searched whilst he was celebrating Mass, knowing that if found he would face execution and the family be imprisoned.

Walter Aston, grandson of the Sir Walter Aston of Tixall who had been Mary’s gaoler bought the Manor of Colton in 1610 to add to his Tixall Estates. Walter had

converted to Catholicism whilst acting as Ambassador to Spain for James I and his family followed his example. In 1638 his son Herbert built a secret chapel as part of his new house at Bellamour in Colton so that he and his family and employees could practise their faith in secret.

Constance Boughey who owned Boughey Hall Farm in Colton was also a Catholic. After the death of her first husband she married a very important Catholic - Sir Thomas Whitgreave of Moseley Old Hall, near Wolverhampton. Thomas had hidden Charles II in the priest hole at Moseley Old Hall, when he fled after being defeated at the Battle of Worcester in 1651. When they had gone Thomas helped Charles to move on to another safe Catholic house and then on to safety in France



Moseley Old Hall

Constance Boughey went to live with her new husband at his house taking her young son by her first