

Previous failed plots meant she was held in fairly strict confinement here although she was allowed out under guard. Tutbury however was an unhealthy place and eventually they decided to move her to Chartley. Local legend says that she came via Abbots Bromley. It was whilst she was at Chartley the Babbington plot, the plot that finally caused her downfall, was hatched. This plot sealed her fate and she was placed under even tighter security. Sir Walter Aston held her at Tixall for a fortnight before being taken from Tixall to Fotheringay where she was finally beheaded.



*Sir Walter Aston  
1st Lord 1639*

Mary was moved away from Staffordshire because it was considered to be a county full of Catholics who would be willing to help her. Throughout the Elizabethan period and beyond, despite persecution, many landed families in Staffordshire remained loyal to the Catholic faith. The Catholics of Staffordshire were described later as "Romes snaky brood roosted and rested themselves more warmer and safer. Than in any part of this kingdom"(Richard Lee 1624). Places around Staffordshire where Catholic families lived included Saredon, Moseley, Brewood, Boscobel, Horsley, Knightly, Kings Bromley, Hamstell Ridware, Hoar Cross, Wolseley, Stafford Castle, St Thomas, Stafford, Gerrard's Bromley, Sandon and Hilderstone to mention but a few. Many of the landed families in these places were to play a significant part in historical events of the next few decades. Walter, grandson of Sir Walter Aston of Tixall who had guarded Mary Queen of Scots, subsequently bought the manor of Colton in 1610 to add to his estate at

Tixall. Walter was converted to Catholicism whilst acting as ambassador to Spain for James 1. Upon his return to England his wife and three sons, Walter, John and Herbert joined him in also practicing the Catholic faith. Despite his faith, he was created Lord Aston for his services to the crown whilst he was living at Colton. In 1638 Herbert built a secret chapel as part of his new house at Bellamour in Colton so that his family and employees could practice their faith in secret and safety. The remains of this house can still be seen as you enter the village. In 1678 all the family are registered on the list of Recusants (those not prepared to worship according to the Anglican Rite) for Colton along with most of their employees; one of the highest numbers for Staffordshire.

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*Their Sources of Information and Research Included :-*

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## Colton History Society

### Persecution of Catholics around Colton From the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries

At the Reformation when Henry VIII broke from Rome and created the Church of England, to continue to follow the Catholic faith became an ever increasingly dangerous thing to do in this country. The Catholic Church was in effect driven underground. Despite terrible persecution, many Staffordshire families stayed loyal to the Catholic faith and often became embroiled in plots and events attempting to reinstate Roman Catholicism as the faith of the nation. Even some residents of Colton were connected at various times to these events and plots.

From the establishment of the Christian Church in England through to the Catholic Act of Emancipation in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the faith of the monarch dictated the faith of the people and the monarch decided what was of crucial importance to everyone whether you were from a high status family or the lowliest labourer. An individual's faith and the practicing of it was a fundamental factor in how society behaved until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. These factors led to a number of attempts by Catholics after the death of Henry, to remove the monarch and replace him or her with a practicing Catholic monarch. Elizabeth I, who continued and extended Henry's reformation of the Church, was threatened in just such a manner. The major threat by Catholics against her rule

were the numerous attempts to replace her with her Scottish cousin, Mary Queen of Scots. 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; she was effectively held captive by Elizabeth until she decided what to do with her. Mary was Catholic with a very legitimate claim to the English throne and therefore became a focus for the Catholics of England to overthrow Elizabeth, install Mary in her place and reinstate the Catholic faith for England. Elizabeth was very well aware of this. After being held first in places in the north and then Derbyshire, Mary eventually was moved to Tutbury Castle in Staffordshire.



Tutbury Castle



His flight eventually brought him into Staffordshire in the vicinity of Brewood where local Catholic families helped him. He was hidden from Cromwell's soldiers at Boscobal and also at Moseley Old Hall before he was able to make his escape eventually to the Continent. His rescuer at Moseley Old Hall was Thomas Whitgreave who hid the future king successfully in the priesthole in his house whilst the soldiers searched for him in vain. Thomas took a great risk because he knew that he would be put to death for doing this if Charles was discovered. A few years after this courageous act, Thomas Whitgreave married Constance Boughey from Boughey Hall Farm in Colton and she went to live with him at Moseley Old Hall. Could they possibly have met at Bellamour?

She married Thomas upon the death of her first husband Whitehall Degge of nearby Kingstone. She had a son by her first marriage. Such was the antagonism towards Catholics in this period that her former father in law took her to court for



*Thomas Whitgreave*

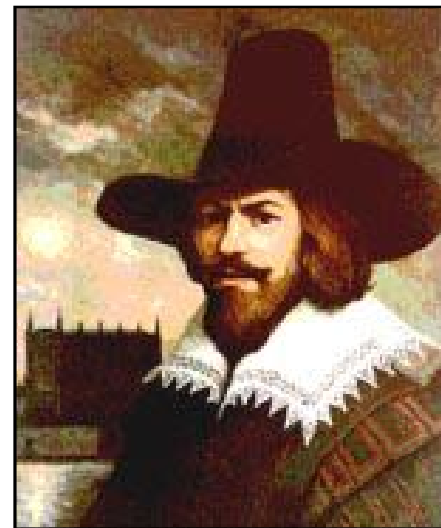
the custody of her son on the grounds that she was bringing him up in the Catholic faith in the household at Moseley old Hall. She lost her custody battle and tragically had to give up her son. An example of how religion can divide families.

The Gunpowder plot had had a great deal to do with instilling this great fear of Catholics in the minds of the common people in this country and the fear that

England would once more be a Catholic country controlled by Rome in the way it had been in the past was something that the majority, especially those in power, did not want. Those figures able to influence events used every opportunity to discredit Catholics and further outlaw the practice of Catholicism. The Plague was blamed on the Catholics and the fire of London was also said to have been started by Catholics. Therefore it was not surprising in 1679 that when a man called Titus Oates suggested to certain people in high places that there was yet another plot to kill the King, this time Charles II, he found them very willing to listen.



*The Catholic Plotters*



*Guy Fawkes*

This plot was alleged to have been planned primarily at Tixall by the third Lord Aston, also the immensely powerful Howard, Lord Stafford and other local Catholic figures of importance. The person who was supposed to have revealed the plot to Titus Oates was Dugdale the former steward to Lord Aston. Lord Aston had had cause to terminate Dugdale's employment at Tixall due to fraud and embezzlement of his master's funds. He had a grudge and this made him the ideal person to be involved in Titus Oates' plotting. Dugdale claimed that he had heard them plotting on the bowling green. Jesuit priests serving Lord Stafford and Lord Aston were also supposed to be involved. Some of the plotting was also supposed to have taken place at Bellamour, the Colton house of Lord Aston's brother Herbert. Titus Oates used this in his evidence for a plot and found he was very readily believed. This plot became known as

the Popish Plot and was eventually revealed as a complete fabrication but not before Lord Stafford had lost his head and Lord Aston and Herbert Aston had languished in the Tower of London for a good few months. Dugdale came out of it very well in that he received considerable expenses, gifts and an allowance until he died. Viscount Stafford's trial lasted seven days and he was the last in England to die as a martyr.

Herbert Aston went to a Jesuit seminary at St. Omer in France and died here in Colton in 1689. His son John inherited the Bellamour estate but on his death.

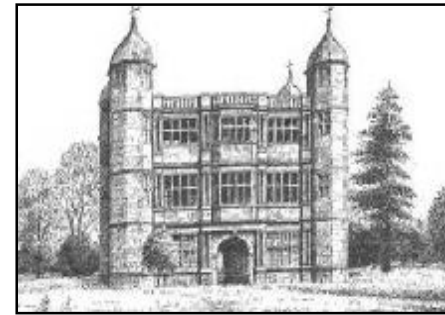
Ownership reverted to the Tixall line. A number of priests are recorded at Bellamour Hall all with aliases. John Aston's priest became the tenant at Bellamour and continued to use an alias so that he could still minister in safety. Fines were still heavy and very restrictive although it did begin to ease as the 18<sup>th</sup> century dawned.

By the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century the lives of recusants was to improve considerably and in 1778 the Catholic Relief Act was passed. For the first time Catholic Chapels were allowed to open to the public and registers of Catholics began to be kept. The Bellamour register dates from 1791 and went on until 1821. A chapel was built at the new Bellamour Hall in 1795 as a wing of the new house. Persecution was not over yet however for the main Catholic family of Colton. Lady Mary Blount the then owner of Bellamour had her hay ricks burnt down and her new trees destroyed. Banners carried the message "Down with your heads ye popish crew". Perhaps it was more jealousy of her new house than her Catholic connection by then.



*Bellamour Hall*

Life for Catholic families got progressively easier as the 18<sup>th</sup>. Century progressed and full toleration came in 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the Act of Emancipation. Many Catholic families however had suffered a great deal in this time in Staffordshire and elsewhere for adhering to the Catholic faith.



*Tixall Gate House*

Throughout the period from the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth to the Act of Emancipation in 1834 there was a great fear of Catholics in this country and they had to practice their faith in secret always with the threat of imprisonment or death hanging over them. Catholic priests ministered to them in secret assuming aliases to hide amongst the population and conducting acts of worship in small chapels hidden away in the houses of those rich enough to be able to support them knowing that if they were caught the consequences would be dire. Priest holes were constructed in many of these houses to hide the priest if a search was conducted. Catholic landed families were fined heavily and ran the risk constantly of having their land sequestered. The widow of Lord Aston had her lands sequestered in 1650 and this caused the whole family considerable hardship because she was no longer able to pay annuities to Herbert, John and their sister Gertrude. For many years there were also other constraints put upon them such as they were not allowed to travel more than 5 miles from their estates without special permission.



*Mary Queen of Scots*

The attempts by the future Charles 11 to regain his throne from Cromwell also received help from Staffordshire Catholics and eventually forged another link with Colton. Charles 1 had been beheaded and his son, the future Charles11 was trying to reclaim his right to the throne of England. Charles was resoundingly defeated by Cromwell's forces at the Battle of Worcester and had to flee for his life.



*Moseley Old Hall*