THE TWO WIVES OF ROBERT WHITNEY, ESQ., LORD OF WHITNEY: A NOTE ON THE PROOF OF ROYAL DESCENT OF JOHN BEVAN

by Adrian Benjamin Burke[1]

ABSTRACT

This article provides contemporary evidence that Robert Whitney, a scion of the ancient knightly family of Whitney of Whitney, Herefordshire, married firstly Constance Touchet, daughter of James Touchet, 5th Baron Audley. It further argues that Whitney's second and last wife was Elizabeth Vaughan, daughter of Thomas ap Roger Vaughan.

*Foundations (2008) **2** (5): 350-357* *© Copyright FMG and the author*

Charles Evans (1983) published a royal descent for John Bevan of Treverigg, Glamorganshire, Wales and Merion in the Welsh Tract, Pennsylvania, through Jane/Joan Whitney, daughter of Robert and Constance (Touchet) Whitney of Whitney.[2] Evans cited pedigrees from the *Llyfr Baglan* (Bradney, 1910) for proof of Jane/Joan Whitney's maternity (and royal descent). Although some of the statements in the *Llyfr Baglan* can be corroborated by primary, contemporary evidence, others cannot and thus should be treated with caution. Robert Whitney, Esq., is known to have had two wives: Constance Touchet and Elizabeth/Alice Vaughan.[3] Unfortunately, the myriad Whitney pedigrees and printed sources do not agree as to the maternity of Robert Whitney's children. And because the Whitney parish church was destroyed in 1730 (see Fig.1) no relevant 15th century church records survive (Watkins, 1897, p.88). As Constance Touchet's ancestry provides her descendants with a royal descent from King Edward III[4], the identity of her children by Whitney is of great interest to genealogists in the UK and USA.

While researching the English origins of my colonial New England immigrant ancestor John Whitney of Watertown, Massachusetts, I learned that the University of Wales,

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[2] For proof Robert Whitney was *lord of Whitney*, see Jones (1956, p.1). Abstract of Document No.6, dated 1474, *Whitney and Clifford Manuscripts* "*Robert Whyteney, esq., lord of Whyteney*".

[3] Based on a review of all known pedigrees of the Whitney of Whitney family available at the British Museum in London and through the Harleian Manuscripts, as well as all published books on the Whitney family available to the author, *inter alia*: Bartrum (1985); Bradney (1910); Clark (1886); Watkins (1897); Whitney (1859); See also Ward & Doyle (2006) citing: "*The Visitation of Herefordshire, 1586, with additions of later date*," Harleian MS. No.1140, f.66b, British Library, London; "*The Visitation of Herefordshire, 1586, with additions of later date*," Harleian MS. No.1159, f.65b, British Library; "*The Visitation of Herefordshire, 1586*," Harleian MS. No.1442, ff.66, 67, 68b, British Library; "*The Visitation of Herefordshire, 1569*, with additions," Harleian MS. No.1545, ff.69-69b, British Library, reproduced in Melville (1896); *London Visitation 1634*, Harleian Soc. Publications (1880) **15:**157.

[4] Bradney (1910, pp.4-5); Note: CP (**1**:341) does not list the daughters of James (Tuchet), 5th Baron Audley, although his second wife's mother was called Constance.

Bangor, possesses the *Whitney and Clifford Manuscripts*, a collection of 571 items comprising the Whitney and Clifford manorial records.[5] These manorial records have been housed in the university's archives since 1954, when they were donated by the widow of Mr E Thornton Jones, a Bangor solicitor. Two years later, E Gwynne Jones (1956) created a detailed catalogue of the collection comprising abstracts of conveyances, deeds, maps, wills and other records relating to the manors of Whitney and Clifford from the 14th to the 19th centuries. An analysis of one particular 15th century deed contained within this collection provides strong evidence of the identity of Robert Whitney's first wife.

The First Wife of Robert Whitney, Esq., of Whitney

Document No.11 (see Fig.2) in the *Whitney and Clifford Manuscripts* is a deed dated 8 October 1492 between Simon Milbourne, Esq.,[6] Roger Vaughan, Esq. of Clero [Clyro], Walter Bollehedde, rector of Wynfreton, Walter Mille, vicar of Kyngton and, John Taillour, vicar of Almaly, and Robert Whitney, Esq. The abstract (Jones, 1956) reads in part:

> *FEOFFMENT of the manor of Whitney, the advowson of the church of St. Peter of Whitney, together with lands and tenements in Whitney, Stowe and Millehalgh [Mill Half Farm], to the use of the said R.W. and his heirs male, and in the event of his death without heirs male, to the use of the said R. W. and his heirs by his first wife, Constance, daughter of James Andeley, lord of Andeley [sic – James Touchet, 5th Baron Audley], and in the event of the lack of such heirs, to the right heirs of the said R.W.*

For confirmation I obtained a copy of Document No.11 and had it transcribed and translated from the original Latin by Michael A Faraday[7] (2007). The relevant part of the translated text is as follows:

> *to the abovesaid Robert Whitney and the male heirs of his body lawfully begotten for ever of the chief lords of that fee for services thereof formerly owed and customary And if it should happen that the said Robert Whitney, without a male heir of his body begotten, should die, then we wish and grant by these presents that the said manor or lordship advowson or patronage of the aforesaid church with all and singular its appurtenances regalities franchises whatsoever customary and attaching to the said manor or lordship by whatever right belonging and all the aforesaid lands tenements meadows grazing pastures mills woods wastes rents reversions and services with [their] appurtenances in Whitney, Stowe and Millehalgh aforesaid shall remain to the said Robert Whitney and his heirs by himself and the body of Custance [Constance] formerly his first wife, daughter of James Audeley, knight, lord Audeley, lawfully begotten, for ever to hold of the chief lords of that fee for services thereof formerly owed and customary; And if it should happen that the said Robert Whitney*

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5 *Whitney and Clifford Manuscripts* (1333-1891).

6 He was father of Blanche Milbourne, the wife of James Whitney, Esq., who was heir of Robert Whitney, Esq. The abstract by Jones (1956) of Document No.213, dated 24 March 1547/8, states "*Assignment of lease of demesne lands of Clifford, formerly granted to the said James Whitney by Prince Arthur, late eldest son of King Henry VII, for 60 years, 20 February 1496/7 from Dame Blanche Herbert, widow, late wife of Sir William Herbert, late of Troy. Knt, deceased, and formerly wife of James Whitney, esq., deceased, to Robert Whitney, Esq.*";
See also Robinson (1872); Cooke (1872); Weaver (1886).

7 Michael A Faraday, of Surrey, is a genealogist and historian of the Marches.

should die without an heir begotten of himself and the body of the said Custance then we wish and finally grant the manor or lordship advowson or patronage of the aforesaid church with all and singular its appurtenances regalities [their] franchises accustomed and attaching whatsoever to the said manor or lordship by whatever right belonging and all the aforesaid lands and tenements meadows grazing pastures mills woods wastes rents reversions and services with their appurtenances in Whitney, Stowe and Millehalghe aforesaid shall remain to the right heirs of the said Robert Whitney of the chief lords of that fee for services thereof formerly owed and customary

The key clause in this deed reads, in Latin:

Roberto Whitney & heredibus suis per ipsum de corpore Custancie quondam sue prime uxoris filie Jacobi Audeley militis domini Audeley legitime procreates

Constance Touchet was Robert Whitney, Esq.'s first wife, and he evidently had remarried by the time the deed was executed on 8 October 1492. We now have conclusive, contemporary evidence that resolves the longstanding confusion surrounding the identity of Whitney's first wife.

The Second Wife of Robert Whitney, Esq., of Whitney

The Welsh poet Lewis Glyn Cothi wrote a lengthy, yet sadly undated, epithalamium in tribute to the marriage of *merch Tomas ab Rosser/Meistres Alis dewiser*, [Mistress Alice, daughter of Thomas son of Roger] to Robert Whitney, Esq.[8] Having established that Constance Touchet was Robert's first wife, his marriage to the daughter of Tomas ab Rosser [Thomas ap Roger Vaughan of Hergest] must have occurred before the execution of the deed.

Various pedigrees and non-contemporary sources confused the first and second names of Whitney's second wife. One pedigree referred to her as the daughter of Thomas Rogers, which seems to be an amalgam of her father and grandfather's first names.[9] This is likely due to the Welsh patronymic naming custom.[10] Other sources called her *Elsbeth* and still others, *Alice*.[11] As for being called *Alice*, perhaps the transition of her first name went something like: Elisabeth > Elsbeth > Eliz' > Alis >

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8 Cothi (1837): See Note IX for English translation of Welsh verse: *"...Robert Whitney, lord of Whitney, in the county of Hereford, on his marriage with Ales (Alice) daughter of Thomas ab Roger, (Dosp.I.6,7) lord of Herast* [sic]*. When commissioners were appointed in the 12th year of Henry VI, to return a list of all the principal inhabitants of the county of Hereford, &c. Robert Whitney's name appears in the list of the knights. See an anecdote of him, in Camb. Regist. vol. i. p.59, &c"*; Wilkins (1884).

9 Weaver (1897) citing: Harleian 615, ff.60b, 61; Harleian MS. No.1159, f.65b; Melville (1896, Appendix IV, pp.268).

10 Robert Whitney m. dau. of Thos. Rogers of Herefford (Weaver, 1897);
Robert Whitney married secondly Elsbeth Vaughan (Bartrum, 1985);
Robert Whitney married secondly, "*Eliz f: Thos. Van*." (Lewes, 1765).

11 Weaver (1897, Whitney Table 1); Watkins (1898, p.80); Bartrum (1985, p.457, Chart "*Drym Benog 2(B_1)*").

Alice.[12] The first name of Robert Whitney's widow was Elizabeth. This is proved by the record of the granting of the administration of the estate of Robert Whitney, Esq.

The will of Robert Whitteney esq., of the parish of Whitteney was granted to Elizabeth his relict and James his son. James appeared at Hereford on 27 September when he was granted to administer and power was reserved for Elizabeth to administer at a later date.[13]

The question must be asked, however, whether Alice Vaughan was his second wife and Elizabeth his widow was yet a third, previously unidentified wife? The range of documents examined for this article make no mention of a distinct third wife, and the confusion surrounding her Welsh name and the irregularities of medieval English script and spelling suggest to me that Alice, whose marriage to Whitney was described by Cothi, and Elizabeth, his widow, were in fact one and the same.

The Maternity of Robert Whitney's Children

I had hoped to find contemporary evidence of the maternity of Whitney's children, unfortunately I have been unable to document any of them conclusively. The wording of Document No.11 clearly indicates that by 8 October 1492 Whitney had lost his first wife Constance either through death or (less likely) divorce, and had subsequently remarried. In addition, the document clearly implies that Whitney had issue by his first wife, but the gender and number of his descendants is not specified. Conceivably, Constance could have given birth only to Jane/Joan or only to a son, or to both or even, as one source states, to all of Whitney's children![14] It is interesting to note that none of Whitney's purported five daughters were named Constance, but one was named Elizabeth, presumably after her mother, Elizabeth Vaughan (Bartrum, 1985, Whitney Table 1).

From the *Whitney and Clifford Manor Manuscripts* we learn that Whitney's successor to the lordship of Whitney Manor was James Whitney, who by all accounts was his eldest son and heir.[15] Melville (1896) believed the name *James* was a solid indicator

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[12] Bartrum (1985); Bradney (1910, p.103) states that Robert Whitney's second wife is "*'Eliz', da. to Watkin Vaghan of Hergest, esq. who had issue James Whitney*"; Lewes (1765); Weaver (1897).

The fact that Cothi called her *Alis*, in his epithalamium, could suggest she was called that during her lifetime. Or perhaps there was a transcription error made when his handwritten poem was transcribed and reprinted in the 19th century?

[13] Herefordshire Record Office (HRO), Court Books: HD4/1/106 1495-6. From a transcription by Mrs. Muriel Tonkin of Wigmore, Herefordshire; I have copies of the transcription and of the original document. See also Faraday & Cole (1989, p.139). I have not been able to locate a copy of the actual Will of Robert Whitney, Esq. It is not included in the *Whitney and Clifford Manuscripts*, the HRO searched their archives to no avail and there is no mention of it in the National Archives online index.

[14] *Sir Robt. Whitney, his brother, Sheriff in 1479, married Alice daughter of Sir Thomas ap Sir Roger Vaughan of Hargest, an event celebrated by an effusive epithalamium in Welsh by the local poet, Lewis Glyn Cothi. (Archaelog. Cambren., 1880, 4th S. Vol. xi., p.226.) On her decease without issue, he married Constance, daughter of James, Lord Audley, and their second son Sir James married Blanch, fourth daughter and coheir of Simon Milborn, and left at his early decease in 1500, two sons.* (Watkins, 1897, p.80).

[15] Abstract of Document No.213 (Jones, 1956); Watkins (1897) is the only source I have seen that claims James was a second son. If true, his eldest brother probably died in infancy. Another possibility, if James was Whitney's son by his second wife, is that there was a son James by the first wife, who d.inf., with the first son by the second wife being given the same name, as was common practice at the time. According to his IPM (Faraday, April 2007),

that his mother was Constance Touchet: her father was named James and was a celebrated knight and baron. As the name *James* does not appear in the Whitney and Vaughan pedigrees prior to the arrival of James Whitney, Esq., it follows that James was named in honour of Lord Audley (Melville, 1896, p.115). It is worth asking which is more likely, would Whitney have named his son after the boy's famous grandfather or after his former father-in-law? It should be remembered that Watkins (1897) stated all of Whitney's children were by Constance Touchet.

Through careful analysis of Jones' abstracts, I discovered a previously unidentified son of Robert Whitney, Esq., also named Robert.[16] This Robert Whitney was *of Pencombe and Castleton*, Clifford Parish, Herefordshire (Ward & Doyle, 2006, p.262). He may in fact have been Whitney's second son, for St. George (1883) shows that Robert Chaundler, of London, erroneously described his great grandfather as: *Robert Whitney, 2 sonne of ... Whitney of Whitney*. Chaundler mistakenly combined two Robert Whitneys (a father and his son) into one individual since we know his great grandfather was Robert Whitney, Gent., of Castleton, and his father (Chaundler's great-great grandfather) was yet another Robert Whitney. Despite Chaundler's confusion about the number of Roberts in his pedigree, he may well have been correct in describing Robert, father of Robert Whitney, Gent. of Castleton, as the *second son of a Whitney of Whitney* or the head of the senior branch of the family; in this case Robert Whitney, Esq. (presumably by either Constance or Elizabeth.)[17] The two Robert Whitneys of Castleton appear in several pedigrees, all of which are incorrect in some way.[18] The Whitney of Castleton branch ended in 1587 when the lands were sold per the instructions of the will of Nicholas, eldest son of Robert Whitney, Gent.[19] A few years later Nicholas's two sons Eustace and Thomas would be found living in London (Ward & Doyle, 2006, p.255).

Genealogical Summary

As the primary focus of this article has been on genealogical information gleaned from the *Whitney and Clifford Manuscripts*, I have restricted this summary to include only the children of Robert Whitney, Esq. mentioned in the *Manuscripts*, and to Jane/Joan,

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James Whitney of Whitney died 31 July 1500, seized of the manor of Boughrood, leaving his heir, a thirteen-year-old-son named Robert, later of Icombe, Gloucestershire; see also (above) Whitney Family Pedigrees.

16 Abstract of Document No.208, "*Gift of messuages, lands and tenements in the township of Clifford between Richard Welford, Robert Whitney, son of Robert Whitney, esq., deceased: William Wallewyn and Thomas ap Jenkyn and Simon Milborn, esq., John Breynton and Thomas Cockes, dated 28 Sep 1512*" (Jones, 1956, p.35). A copy of this document in the author's possession clearly states, "*Robertus Whitney filius Roberti Whitney armigeri defuncti* "

17 Will of Robert Whitney, Gent., of Castleton, Weston Deanery, 1555-1556 (f. 28v), available at the Herefordshire Record Office (HRO). A transcription of the will, provided to the author by Rhys Griffith of the HRO, names wife Elizabeth, eldest son Nicholas, son Thomas and unmarried daughters Eleanor and Margaret; See also Faraday & Cole (1989, p.229).

18 In one pedigree (ff. 66b) Robert Whitney (of Pencombe and Castleton) is not shown with a father, but his son Robert Whitney (of Castleton) is listed with children; another pedigree shows him as the son of Sir Robert Whitney (see above). It was no doubt due to these incorrect pedigrees that Melville (1896) incorrectly attributed to John Whitney, the immigrant of Watertown, Massachusetts, a descent from Sir Robert and Dame Sibyl (Baskerville) Whitney of Whitney.

19 Ward & Doyle (2006, pp.259-261), who do not discuss the Chaundler pedigree's statement: *Robert Whitney, 2 sonne of ... Whitney of Whitney* and its suggestion that Robert Whitney of Pencombe and Castleton was the second son of Robert Whitney, Esq.

mentioned by Evans. According to Bartrum (1985) and Bradley (1910), Whitney had a third son, Hugh of the Hay, and several other daughters.

Robert Whitney, Esq., Lord of Whitney, m.(1) Constance, daughter of James Touchet, 5th Baron Audley; m.(2) bef. 8 October 1492, Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas ap Roger Vaughan of Hergest. His issue (maternity and order of births uncertain) was:

i. James Whitney, Esq., of Whitney, b.c.1464; d.31 July 1500; m.c.1486 Blanche Milbourne, daughter of Simon Milbourne, Esq. Issue. (Whitney of Whitney).

ii. Robert Whitney, probably the second son, of Pencombe and Castleton, Clifford Parish, Herefordshire, b.c.1466; d. after 28 September 1512; m. Unknown. Issue. (Whitney of Castleton).

iii. Joan/Jane Whitney, m. Roger Vaughan of Porthaml. Issue. (*inter alios*, John Bevan).

Conclusion

The maternity of Robert Whitney's children is unsubstantiated by primary, contemporary sources. John Bevan's royal descent through Constance Touchet rests solely on undocumented and contradictory pedigrees that were created after the events in question occurred and that are laced with known errors and omissions. One future avenue of research is to pursue a comprehensive study of probate and manorial records and deeds concerning all known siblings of Constance Touchet and Elizabeth Vaughan in the event that some of them may have mentioned Whitney nieces and nephews.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Steven Edwards; Michael A Faraday; Einion Wyn Thomas; Rhys Griffith and the staff at the Herefordshire Record Office; and Allan E Green, Robert Leigh Ward and Tim Doyle of the Whitney Research Group. Please visit the Whitney Research Group website: http://wiki.whitneygen.org.

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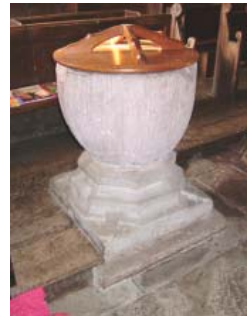


Fig.1 ***The medieval church at Whitney-on-Wye was destroyed by floods and rebuilt in 1740. Fragments of the original were incorporated, including the 12th century font***
Photographs by Steven Edwards, © FMG 2008

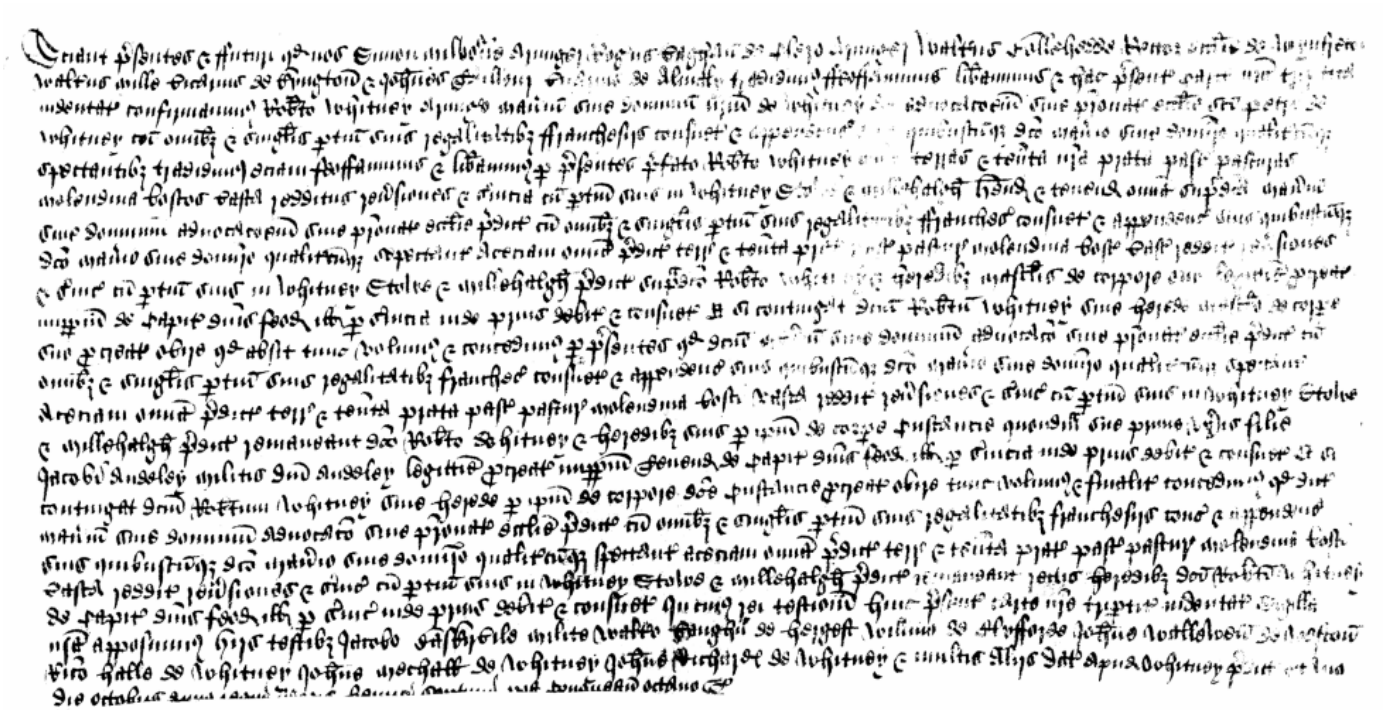


Fig. 2 ***Deed dated 8 October 1492 between Simon Milbourne, Roger Vaughan of Clero, Walter Bollehedde, rector of Wynfreton, Walter Mille, vicar of Kyngton and, John Taillour, vicar of Almaly, and Robert Whitney.***
[Document 11 in the *Whitney and Clifford Manuscripts* (see p.351).]