

Assessment of papists' land at Coughton, 1723

CR1998/J/Box 86/15

The Document of the Month for September is an assessment of the land belonging to 'papists', now more familiarly known as Catholics, for the purpose of raising £100,000 for King George I. Composed in 1723, the list of Catholic landowners includes Sir Robert Throckmorton, 4th baronet, and also names his grandmother Anne Throckmorton (née Monson), who was the widow of Sir Francis, the second baronet, and appears to be the most prominent landowner at Coughton.

Coughton Assessment of y^e Papists Land towards
Raising one hundred thousand pounds
for his Majesty King George 1st of year
1723

S ^r . Rob ^t Throckmorton	66 = 09 = 9
M ^r . Allen	18 = 10 = 0
Tho. Lincher	11 = 05 = 0
Tho. Taylor	08 = 10 = 0
Rob ^t Morgan	09 = 00 = 0
Peter Batten	05 = 00 = 0
Ralph Lewis	10 = 00 = 0
Jos: Lowe the for W ^m Sanders Land	02 = 10 = 0
Geo: Waltingham	02 = 00 = 0
James Barron of W ^m s Gray	15 = 00 = 0
r ^e Keene	01 = 10 = 0
M ^r . Garrett	03 = 15 = 0
Dame Anne Throckmorton	135 = 00 = 0
John McCullerworth	06 = 00 = 0
	<u>294 = 09 = 9</u>

The estate at Coughton Court was held by the Throckmortons from 1409, and they gradually developed a reputation as an influential Catholic family.ⁱ Even after the English Reformation, many of the Throckmortons remained steadfast in their faith, although the local church which the family had built, St Peter's, converted to the Church of England.ⁱⁱ

The hostile climate surrounding Catholicism persisted through the centuries, often via legislation. The date of this land assessment suggests that it was created in response to a 1722 taxation act, which imposed a 'papists tax', thus raising money for the crown whilst also limiting the powers and freedoms of Catholics.ⁱⁱⁱ As can be seen from the document, the tax owed appears to have been measured according to the land owned by each taxpayer. A full transcript of the document has been provided separately.

Catholics in post-Reformation England and recusant records

It is unclear who exactly produced this land assessment, but it is likely that the Catholic Throckmortons were already accustomed to keeping records of their lands and wealth due to legal requirements. In 1717, the Forfeited Estates Commission had begun registering 'papists' and their estates in the wake of the 1715 Jacobite rising.^{iv} In the Commission's papers, both Anne Throckmorton and her son Sir Robert, 3rd baronet, register their lands in Warwickshire.^v

The laws against Roman Catholics find their origins in 1534, when the Church of England was created under Henry VIII. By the late sixteenth century, recusancy, meaning the refusal to attend Church of England services, had become an indictable offence, and from this point records show Catholics being fined, forced to forfeit their lands, or required to register themselves and their lands to avoid such penalties.^{vi} The records relating to Catholics in the Warwickshire Quarter Sessions include lists of 'Popish Recusants' and registers of 'Papists' Estates'. Sir Robert Throckmorton, 3rd baronet, can be found in a 1717 roll which documents his lands in Warwickshire.^{vii}

The family collection of the Throckmortons of Coughton Court also contains letters and legal documents relating to recusancy, including a number of travel licences which Robert Throckmorton paid for over the course of the early seventeenth century. As a 'confined recusant', Throckmorton was required to obtain permission in order to go more than 5 miles beyond his home in Weston Underwood, Buckinghamshire.^{viii}

The Throckmortons of Coughton Court

Over the centuries, a number of notable Throckmortons held to their Catholicism in the face of persecution. The family was involved in conspiracies to overthrow Protestant monarchs, including the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, and the lesser-known Throckmorton Plot of 1593, in which Francis Throckmorton was a key conspirator in a scheme to assassinate Elizabeth I and crown Mary Queen of Scots in her place. Francis was executed for his crimes the following year. There were also Protestant members of the Throckmorton family in the post-Reformation era, some of whom were similarly non-conformist. Job Throckmorton

represented the Puritan cause as a Member of Parliament in the late sixteenth century, and is believed to have been one of the authors of the Marprelate Tracts, a series of pamphlets which criticised the power of bishops in the Church of England.^{ix}

It was not until the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed in 1829 that the Throckmortons were able to benefit from greater religious freedoms. In the 1850s, Sir Robert Throckmorton, 8th baronet, was able to commission the Church of St Peter, St Paul and St Elizabeth to be built in the grounds of Coughton Court; a Catholic Church had not existed on the family estate since before the Reformation.^x Nevertheless, the legacy of religious secrecy can still be seen at Coughton Court, which features a 'priest hole', a form of architectural trickery used to conceal Catholic ministers during the years of persecution.^{xi}

ⁱ National Trust Collections, 'Coughton Court' <https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/place/coughton-court> [accessed 29/07/2022]

ⁱⁱ National Trust, 'Coughton Court's churches' <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/coughton-court/features/coughton-courts-churches> [accessed 29/07/2022]

ⁱⁱⁱ UK Parliament, 'Religion and belief: Key dates 1689 to 1829' <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/religion/key-dates/1689-to-1829/> [accessed 29/07/2022]

^{iv} GenGuide, 'Returns of Papists' Estates' <https://www.genguide.co.uk/source/returns-of-papists-estates-catholics/> [accessed 29/07/2022]

^v FindMyPast, FEC 1/1283

<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=GBOR%2FFEC1%2F1283%2F0022&parentid=GBOR%2FFEC1%2F0088938> [accessed 29/07/2022]. See also FEC 1/1282 and FEC 1/1321.

^{vi} GenGuide, 'Returns of Papists Estates' <https://www.genguide.co.uk/source/returns-of-papists-estates-catholics/> [accessed 29/07/2022]

^{vii} See Warwickshire County Record Office, QS0061, QS0062 and QS0009/5-10 for records of recusants and papists' estates.

^{viii} GenGuide, 'Returns of Papists Estates' <https://www.genguide.co.uk/source/returns-of-papists-estates-catholics/> [accessed 29/07/2022]

^{ix} Catholic Gentry in English Society: The Throckmortons of Coughton from Reformation to Emancipation, ed. by Geoffrey Scott, Google ebook https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Catholic_Gentry_in_English_Society/4--4DQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0 [accessed 29/07/2022].

^x National Trust, 'Coughton Court's churches' <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/coughton-court/features/coughton-courts-churches> [accessed 29/07/2022]

^{xi} National Trust, 'Priest holes' <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lists/priest-holes> [accessed 29/07/2022]