

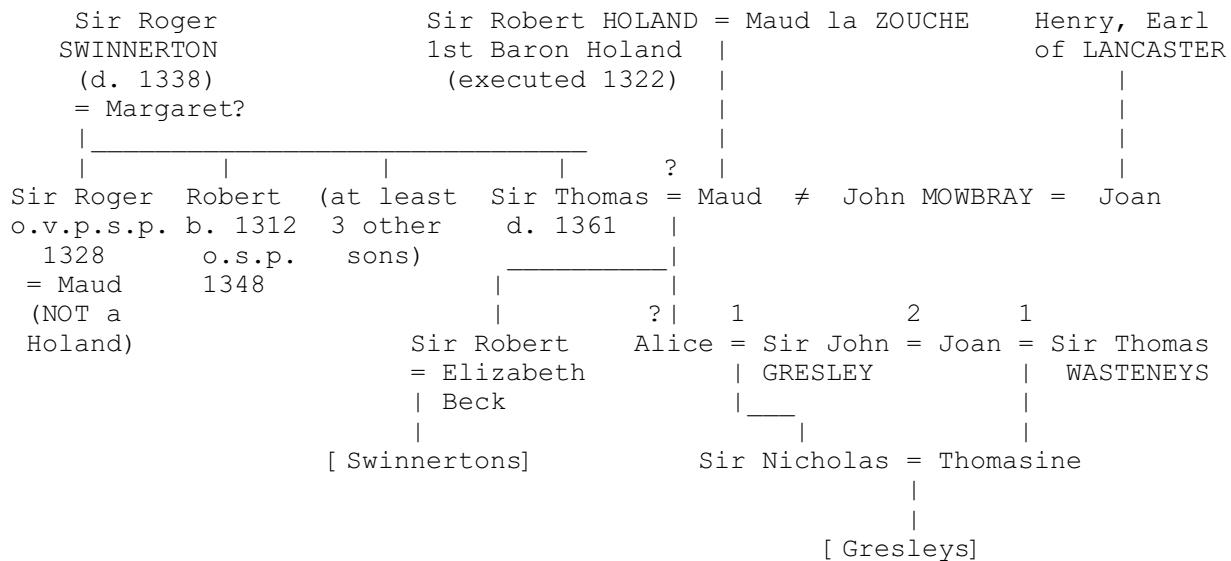
The Alleged Gresley-Swinnerton Marriage: A Closer Examination

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Alice, the first wife of Sir John Gresley of Drakelowe, Derbyshire, has been identified as the daughter of Thomas de Swinnerton and Maud de Holand, and as such is the crux of a line tracing descent (through Maud la Zouche) from King Henry II to various American colonists, including the only *Mayflower* passenger with known royal descent, Richard More.¹ Here is the crucial part of the line, with some collateral detail:



¹ Gary Roberts, *Royal Descents of 500 Immigrants* (Baltimore, 1993), 350-51, following George Thomas Orlando Bridgeman (1823-95), *An account of the family of Swynnerton, of Swynnerton and elsewhere in the county of Stafford* (London: William Salt Archaeological Society, 1886 [Collections for a history of Staffordshire, 7.2]), 24, 40-41; as well as Falconer Madan (1851-1935), *The Gresleys of Drakelowe: an account of the family, and notes of its connexions by marriage and descent from the Norman conquest to the present day* (Oxford: William Salt Archaeological Society, 1899 [Collections for a history of Staffordshire, n. ser., 1]), *passim*.

1. ALICE, FIRST WIFE OF SIR JOHN GRESLEY

The evidence that Sir John Gresley's first wife Alice (mother of his son Nicholas) was a Swinnerton is traditional. She is called a Swinnerton (without assigning parentage, but with a notation of the Swinnerton arms) in a Latin textual pedigree given in the enlarged, 1844 edition of Sampson Erdeswicke's *A survey of Staffordshire* (orig. pub. 1723), which may be the work of Sir Simon Degge (1612-1704) or one of the other antiquaries of his generation whose manuscript notes are confusingly amalgamated in the 1844 edition of Erdeswicke.² This same Alice (Swinnerton) Gresley is explicitly named as daughter of "Roger Swinnerton, knight, lord of Swinnerton" in a manuscript miscellany of Gresley pedigrees and deeds in the Chetham Library in Manchester, England, drawn up between 1598 and 1610 by the antiquary William Wyrley, and published in 1865 as the "Chartulary of the Gresleys of Derbyshire".³ She also appears named as daughter of Sir Roger de Swinnerton in at least one other manuscript genealogy of the Gresley family known to me, an eighteenth-century folio volume assembled by the Kentish antiquarian Edward Hasted (1732-1812).⁴ However, in his 1886 account of the Swinnerton family, Canon George T. O. Bridgeman stated his belief that Alice

² Sampson Erdeswicke (d. 1603), *A survey of Staffordshire; containing the antiquities of that county: collated with manuscript copies, and with additions and corrections, by Wyrley, Chetwynd, Degge, Smyth, Lyttelton, Buckeridge, and others; illustrative of the history and antiquities of that county, by the Rev. Thomas Harwood, new, expanded ed.* (London, 1844), at 215.

³ John Harland, "Chartulary of the Gresleys in Derbyshire," *Reliquary* 6 (1865-66), 29-37, 79-86, 139-47, at 33. On the "Chartulary" manuscript, date and authorship see Harland, 31-32; and Madan, *Gresley*, 211-15.

⁴ London, BL, MS Add. 5509, pp. 12-14 (old pagination), in which a long graphic pedigree has "Johannes de Gresley miles cuius uxor prima Alicia fuit filia Rogerii Swinerton militis fuit filia Rogerii Swinerton militis [sic repetition of these four words] domini de Swinerton." There also appear at this juncture the arms of Gresley (vairy ermine & gules) impaling argent, a cross florettée sable [I noted gules, but I must have misread the tincture letter], for Swinnerton. Found quite by accident when I was searching the papers of Edward Hasted for other material in July 1998.

(Swinnerton) Gresley was daughter of Thomas and Maud (Holand) Swinnerton.⁵ Bridgeman's guess was noted but not unhesitatingly accepted by Falconer Madan in his 1899 book *The Gresleys of Drakelowe*, whence it has been disseminated into American lineages.⁶

Canon Bridgeman, in tendering this guess about Alice's parentage, apparently didn't notice the awfully tight chronology necessitated by his identification of Alice as daughter of Sir Thomas Swinnerton and Maud Holand. Maud, Alice's alleged mother, was unmarried on 3 November 1332, when her ex-fiancé, John de Mowbray, already then married to Joan of Lancaster, granted her a life interest in two manors.⁷ In the abstract she is referred to in the style of an unmarried woman, "Matilda daughter of Robert de Holand", and the grant would not make sense if she were already married to another man. Assuming that her marriage to Sir Thomas Swinnerton happened after November, 1332, and that an eldest child could not have been born in this marriage before 1333, puts us in a tight space: the first notice of Sir John Gresley married to Alice is in 1346-7, when she could have been no more than 13 years old if child of Maud Holand and Sir Thomas Swinnerton. Alice was dead before 1352, when Sir John Gresley remarried to Joan de Wasteneys.⁸ Sir Nicholas

⁵ Bridgeman, *Swynnerton*, 41 { and 91??--cf. the Swynnerton pedigree in *Gresley*, 284}. As support Bridgeman cited only the anonymous Latin pedigree in Erdeswicke's *Staffordshire* (cited above, note 2), which assigns Alice only the surname and arms of Swinnerton with no explicit parentage; Bridgeman notes that Wyrley's pedigree (*supra* n. 3) gives a different parentage, but give no reason for rejecting it.

⁶ Madan, *Gresleys*, 49 and pedigree at 224, avoids any explicit statement of her parentage; but the tabular Swinnerton pedigree on 284 shows conjectural parentage following and citing Bridgeman.

⁷ *Cal. Pat. Rolls Edw. III*, 3 (1330-1334), 368; cited in AR7, p. 35.

⁸ Madan, *Gresleys*, 49 and 284. Madan says "she occurs as his wife in 1346-7 and 1348-9, but died soon after...", citing two deeds for those years from the manuscript "Gresley Chartulary," unfortunately neither of which is abstracted by Harland. Madan notes that John Gresley was remarried before 1352.

Gresley, Sir John's son by his first wife, may likely have been born even before his mother Alice first appears in 1346-7, as he was old enough to campaign in Aquitaine by September 1362 (in the retinue of the Black Prince) and had married by May 1364.⁹

While marriage and motherhood at thirteen years of age for Alice de Swinnerton, mother of Nicholas de Gresley, is not impossible, it certainly is unlikely enough to raise doubts about Canon Bridgeman's unsupported guess as to her parentage--particularly a guess that contradicts the only prior source to name her parentage (the Wyrley pedigree). Without knowing why Bridgeman, who knew of Wyrley's pedigree, rejected it, I know of no reason to reject the assignment made in the Wyrley pedigree, and assume that Alice, wife of Sir John Gresley, was sister, not daughter, of Sir Thomas Swinnerton, and daughter of Sir Roger Swinnerton.

3. THE MARRIAGE OF MAUD HOLAND AND THOMAS SWINNERTON

The Holand/Swinnerton marriage itself is an important crux for other Swinnerton descendants, if not for Gresleys.¹⁰ The existence (according to one antiquarian manuscript) of a fourteenth-century effigy in the Swinnerton church of a "Matildis de Swynnerton" with Holand arms suggests that Maud Holand **did** marry a Swinnerton, though which one is also uncertain.¹¹ The only evidence of Maud's identity as wife of Sir Thomas Swinnerton is a pedigree for the Savage family (who intermarried with the Swinnertons) in the 1580 Visitation of Cheshire.¹²

⁹ Madan, *Gresleys*, 50.

¹⁰ See note in AR7, line 32.

¹¹ The notation of the effigy is cited by Bridgeman, 42.

¹² Also noted in AR7, line 32: *The visitation of Cheshire in the year 1580 ...*, ed. John Paul Rylands (*Publications of the Harleian Society*, 18, London, 1882), 200-204, esp. 203 ("Savage of Clifton" [BL, MS Harleian 1424,

Bridgeman came up with only indirect evidence that Thomas' wife was named Maud at all: two deeds, of 1356-57 (30 Edward III) and of 1364 (38 Edward III) which involve regrants by John le Beck, rector of Checkley, of Swinnerton lands to Sir Robert de Swinnerton (son of Sir Thomas) & Elizabeth (Beck), which include one-third dower interest in some lands held as dower by a Dame Matilda de Swinnerton.¹³ Bridgeman was not sure that these referred to the same woman, following the rule that dower rights were only held after a husband's death, though traditionally rights over dower lands may have been granted to a woman in her husband's lifetime as well.

Another deed of 1356-57 deals with a Matilda. It is for the presentation of a clerk to the church of Swinnerton by Dame Matilda de Swynnerton, "who claimed the right of patronage for that turn by reason of holding the third part of the manor of Swynnerton in dower, inasmuch as Sir Thomas de Swynnerton, who holds two parts of the manor, had already presented for two turns."¹⁴ Bridgeman thought this applied to a widow of an earlier Swinnerton, specifically the elder Sir Roger: he argued that it would be highly unlikely for Maud, widow of the younger Sir Roger, who had predeceased his father, to be seized of a portion of the family seat in dower, and so concludes that she must have been widow of the previous lord, Sir Roger the elder. However, again this presupposes that the lady in question has to be a widow in order to be exercising her dower rights against those of the current

fo. 125b]). Note that this pedigree, as printed, cannot date from 1580, as it records events and offspring at least through 1600.

¹³ Bridgeman, 41-42. The 30 Edward III deed is cited in a manuscript by Sir William Dugdale, called by Bridgeman "Dugdale, MS, no. 39, at the Bodleian Library." It would make more sense if it were contemporaneous with the later one and after Sir Thomas' death; Bridgeman hints that he doubts the date. The later charter is part of a surviving pair (grant away by Sir Robert; regrant by John le Beck), Bridgeman cites Ormerod's *Cheshire* 2:185.

¹⁴ Bridgeman, 39 and n. 4, citing a document in the Lichfield diocesan register.

lord (Sir Thomas). Thus it is possible that all three of these deeds concern Maud, wife of Sir Thomas, who could very likely have been Maud Holand, though it may not be provable.¹⁵

Bridgeman's speculations seem somewhat incautious, and it is perhaps wisest to ignore not only his unsubstantiated guess that Alice Gresley was daughter of Sir Thomas Swinnerton, as well as other contradictions of his sources (for example his identification of a Maud de Swinnerton as widow of the elder Sir Roger, for whom an earlier pedigree had assigned a wife named Margaret (of unknown parentage)).¹⁶

With regret (as a Gresley descendant), I have to conclude that the identity of Alice, wife of Sir John Gresley, as a daughter of Sir Thomas Swinnerton and Maud Holand is not supported by the evidence found; furthermore, it is chronologically unlikely. Furthermore, the identity of Maud Holand as wife of Thomas de Swinnerton, while suggestive, is not supported by any explicit evidence earlier than the Savage visitation pedigree and needs further proof. The various fourteenth-century charters naming a Maud de Swinnerton do not explicitly identify her origin or identity as wife of Sir Thomas de Swinnerton (though this seems likely).

¹⁵ While Bridgeman's reasoning for the identity of a Maud as widow of the elder Sir Roger may not be ironclad, there was at least one other widow Maud in this generation: a Maud appears as widow of a Sir Roger Swinnerton (older brother of Sir Thomas) in 1326-27 (this Sir Roger having predeceased his father). She, however, could not have been Maud Holand as she appears to have borne a bend as her arms. Bridgeman, 26-27, and n. 3, citing a deed of 1326-27. However, if Maud Holand had been briefly married and then widowed in the 1320s, might the grant by John de Mowbray cited in the note in AR7, effectively releasing her from his betrothal, still make sense? Not clear.

¹⁶ Bridgeman cites "the Huntbache MSS" 2:67a for this datum, 35 n. 1.