

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2021

2120 My Most Unexpected Research Finding

By Gordon Sanson

'My most unexpected research finding'

One character in my ancestry, on my mother's side, is Agnes Prowse who lived in Devon, England between 1576 and 1672. I certainly didn't expect that through her, I'd work out a further 1000 years of my ancestry.

In August 2013 I watched an episode of *Who Do You Think You Are*, the celebrity was Cindy Crawford, an American supermodel who was finding out all about her family. Her first day pursuing genealogy, in the first part, she was given a 12 generation family tree and in the second part, she was given a 43 generation chart tracing her ancestry all the way back to Charlemagne by none other than historian and editor of *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage* 106th Edition, Charles Mosley. What stirred me was that her family tree included a Prowse. Agnes Prowse married John Trowbridge on 31 July 1597 in Tiverton, Devon. It was their son Thomas (1598-1672) who went to America in 1636, settling in the New Haven Plantation, from whom Cindy Crawford was descended.

Up to the point in seeing that show, the oldest ancestor I had got back to was John Prowse, christened on 8th November 1741 at the Parish Church of St. Buryan, county of Cornwall, England. I wanted to see if I could link back from him to Agnes Prowse, but I could only get back to Robert Prowse b1593 who was the father of Bednego Prowse b 1625, but there were simply no green leaves on either Robert or Bednego. I had hit a dead end.

COVID-19 afforded me the time to return and try afresh, and it was on 13 November 2020 that I made an amazing breakthrough, from a Pedigree Resource File database in Family Search, which linked Bednego Prowse born in St. Buryan, Cornwall in 1625 with the Prowse's from Devon. Submitted by a Randall Prowse, who had been researching Prowse Genealogy both traditional and with DNA for over 50 years, his family tree included both Robert and Bednego, and these linked back to Agnes Prowse. Both the Prowse's that went to America in 1650 and my family that came to Adelaide in 1860 came from this family line. Randall described visiting Tiverton, Devonshire, England for two weeks in September 2018. There he met other Prowse researchers and visited a home a few miles north of Tiverton where a Great Aunt lived in 1575 – it was the home of Agnes Prowse. He also described how another ancestor, Richarda Prowse, lived in Tiverton Castle, and Randall was privileged to stay there for two weeks. It was a great pity I did not know at the time or I could have joined them. Now I'll have to wait for the end of this Covid period before I can travel to Devon.

Getting back to Agnes Prowse in that way immediately linked me to the research of another American, Lt. Col Paul L Nichols (accepted by the Order of Charlemagne in USA), presented by Charles Mosley on the show, which took our tree down to Charlemagne. This connected me with original research which showed the way the Prowse spelling had evolved from the French adjective "Preuz" meaning gallant or valorous, to Preaux, Prouz, Prouse, and Prowse (and in some cases the Latin variation, Probus, was used).

In Family Search Books section, I found a Prowse Family History by Susan Prowse Tako on a celebration of the deeds and daring's of the descendants of Osbert Probus c 1080 son of Eudo de Preaux which revealed how my ancestors came to England from France, describing a village of Le Preaux near Rouen, Normandy, and Eudo de Preaux, owner of Castle Preaux. Eudo married the cousin of Guillaume de Normandie (William the Conqueror), who inherited the right to the throne of England as a child. Eudo was called the "family uncle" and served as cousin protector of him, and in that role, protected William from assassination (indeed four of my ancestors lost their lives in thwarting such assassination attempts on him). Over 50 of my ancestors served as leaders in William's army and arrived in England with him in 1066. They were also involved in the preparation of the famous Domesday Book. In recognition of their service, William as the new King of England granted them land at Chagford in Devon and our family occupied this site and still live there today. Many early Prowse's in England married into leading English aristocratic families, and several took an active part in major events in British history, they were involved in each of the 3 Crusades also Lawrence Prowse as Captain of a Fireships in 1588 Spanish Armada, and alongside Nelson at Trafalgar William Prowse commanded the "Sirius".

Following the link from Agnes to Eudo, it was easy to connect with my Viking ancestry (seen in my DNA with 7% Norway and a further 4% Denmark and Greenland). Eudo's wife, Rohaise de Clare, was a descendant of Rollo the Northman, as detailed in *Trowbridge Viking Ancestry and the Normans*. King Charles of France had allowed Rollo to settle with his people in Normandy on the provision of abandoning plundering and accepting life under Christian principles. As a reward for his success in governance, Rollo was made the first Duke of Normandy. His grandson Richard, the third Duke of Normandy with William the Conqueror the 7th.

Another source used to check the information describe above was *Ancestral Roots of certain American Colonists Who Came to America before 1700* Eighth Edition by Frederick Lewis Weis.

So really it has been a most unexpected research finding, all turning on the mention of Agnes Prowse in a TV show. It is just as Charles Mosley said, that through Agnes Prowse we were descended from European royalty in abundance. William the Conqueror 1027-1086 is my 23rd GGF, Hrolf Rognvaldson Rollo 842-931 is my 30th GGF, and Charlemagne 747-814 is my 39th GGF. It is all remarkably interesting and exciting to find all this family history.