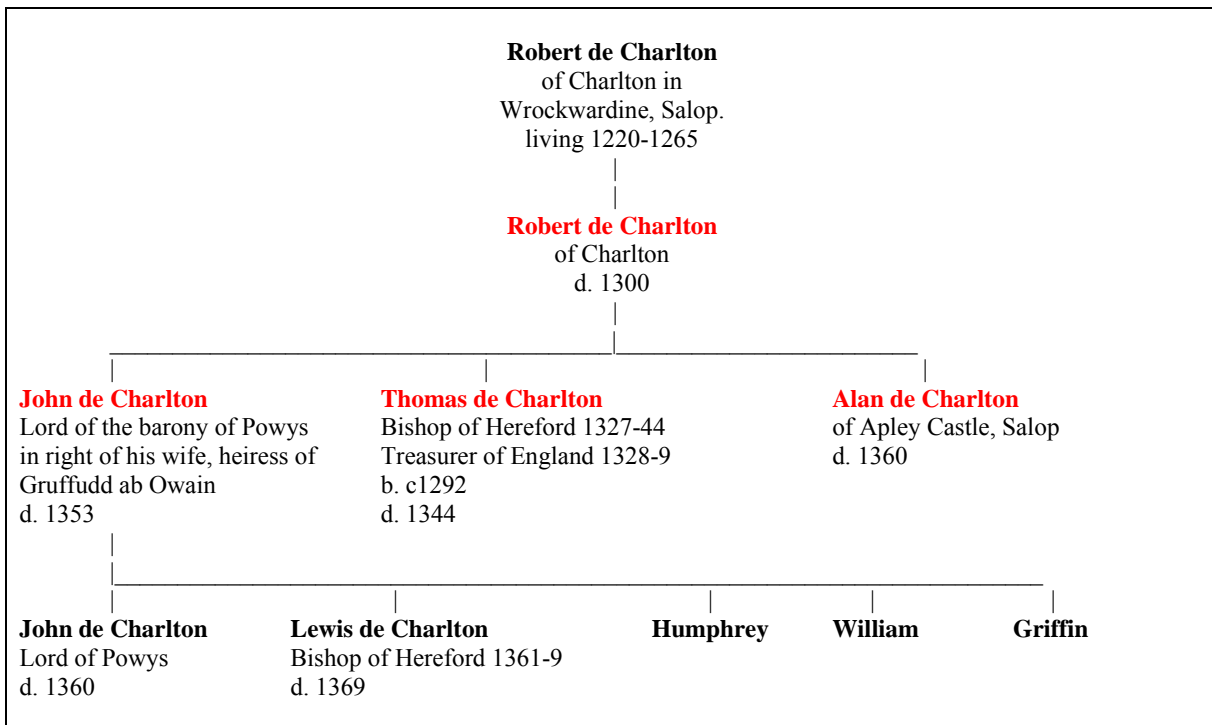


## Robert A. Tompkins and the Cantilupe connection

In his unpublished typescript notes on Tompkins ancestry, *The Clan of Tomkyns*, finished in 1957 and now in the Los Angeles Public Library, Robert A. Tompkins claimed that all Tompkinses (and Tomkinses, Tomkisses etc) are descended in direct male line from Charlemagne. In order to connect the genuine Tompkinses he found in late medieval records to this illustrious ancestry he had to declare that members of two well-known baronial families, the de Charltons and the de Cantilupes, among them two bishops of Hereford, were really surnamed Tomkyns. There is, of course, absolutely no historical evidence that any member of these families ever used the surname Tomkyns.<sup>1</sup> The entire connection was invented by Robert A. Tompkins.



**Fig. 1** The historical Charlton family, lords of Powys and bishops of Hereford.

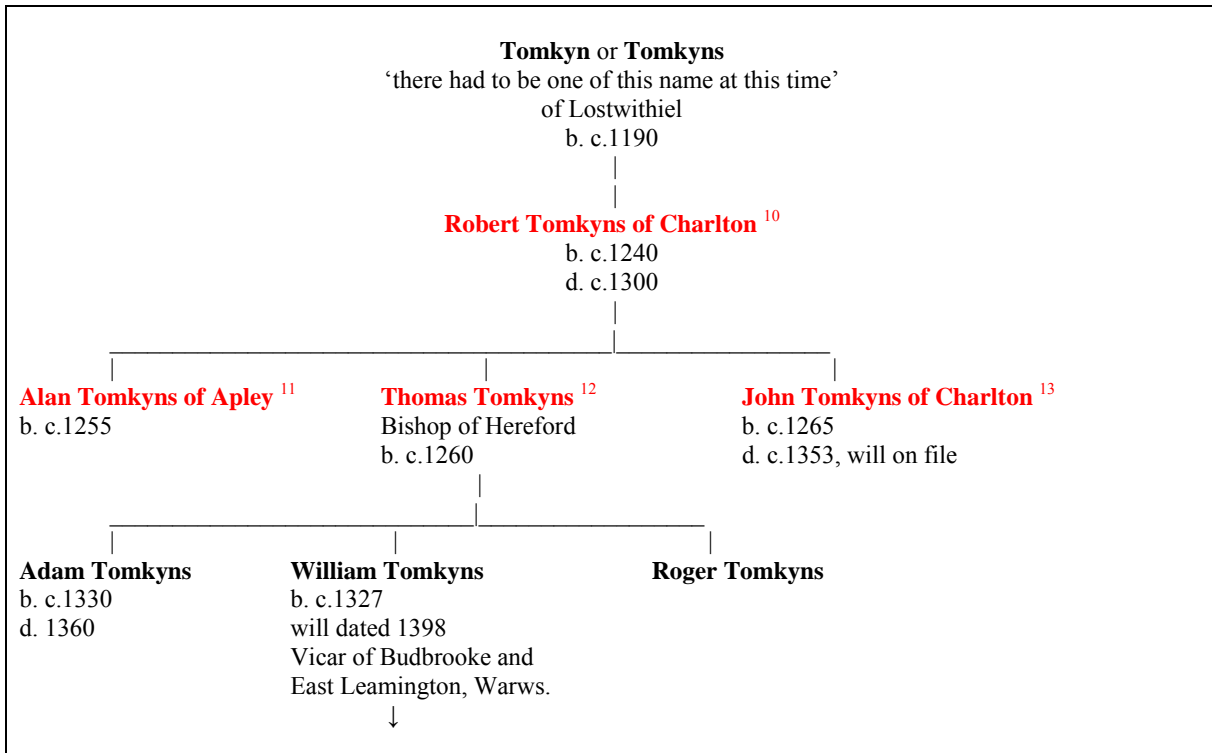
Source: *DNB*; Eyton, *Antiquities of Shropshire*, ix, pp. 32, 32.

In the thirteenth century the Charltons (see fig. 1) had been minor Shropshire landowners in Charlton in the parish of Wrockwardine. In the following century they became figures of national importance, as a result of the marriage in 1309 of John Charlton, a knight in the royal household, to Hawise de la Pole, sister and heiress of Gruffudd ab Owain, the last Welsh ruler of the barony of Powys (until recently an independent Welsh kingdom). John thereby became a powerful Marcher lord, establishing a Charlton dynasty which ruled Powys until 1421. A favourite of Edward II, whose chamberlain he was from 1310-18, he used his royal favour to ensure the advancement of his brother Thomas, a priest who from 1307 acquired various royal offices and

<sup>1</sup> And indeed it is highly improbable that they would have assumed such a name. Tomkyns is, in technical terms, a hypocoristic patronym, a type of surname adopted almost exclusively by the lowest classes of medieval society (R.A. McKinley, *A History of British Surnames* (Oxford, 1990), p. 101). Further its earliest known appearance in any record dates from the 1320s, nearly a century after Robert A. Tompkins has it adopted by the Cantilupes and Charltons.

ecclesiastical sinecures and was appointed bishop of Hereford in 1327. A third brother, Alan, founded a Charlton family seated at Apley Castle in Shropshire.<sup>2</sup>

The Cantilupe family was even more prominent. Throughout the thirteenth century they were one of the most powerful baronial families in England, active in national and international politics - two de Cantilupes were signatories of Magna Carta. One of the most well-known was Thomas de Cantilupe. Son of William de Cantilupe, second baron and steward to king John, nephew of Walter de Cantilupe, bishop of Worcester, and brother of William de Cantilupe, the third baron, he was himself bishop of Hereford, chancellor of England and a saint.<sup>3</sup>



**Fig. 2 Robert A. Tompkins' first medieval Tomkyns pedigree.**

Source: *Tomkins-Tompkins Genealogy*, pp. 4, 5.

Robert A. Tompkins has somehow formed the opinion that Robert de Charlton and his three sons, the lord of the barony of Powys, the bishop of Hereford and the founder of the Charltons of Apleys Castle, were all in truth surnamed Tomkyns, and that the bishop is the ancestor of all modern Tompkinses (through his son, a parish priest).

The invention of the fictitious Cantilupe-Charlton-Tompkins connection proceeded in two stages. First came the co-option of the de Charltons. On pages 4 and 5 of his 1942 book *Tomkins-Tompkins Ancestry* Robert A. Tompkins declared Robert de Charlton and his three sons John, lord

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, under 'John Charlton, first Lord Charlton of Powys' and 'Thomas Charlton [Cherleton], bishop of Hereford'.

R. Morgan, 'The barony of Powys, 1275-1360', *Welsh History Review*, 10 (1980-1), pp. 1-42.

J.R. Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster 1307-1322. A Study in the Reign of Edward II* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 140-7.

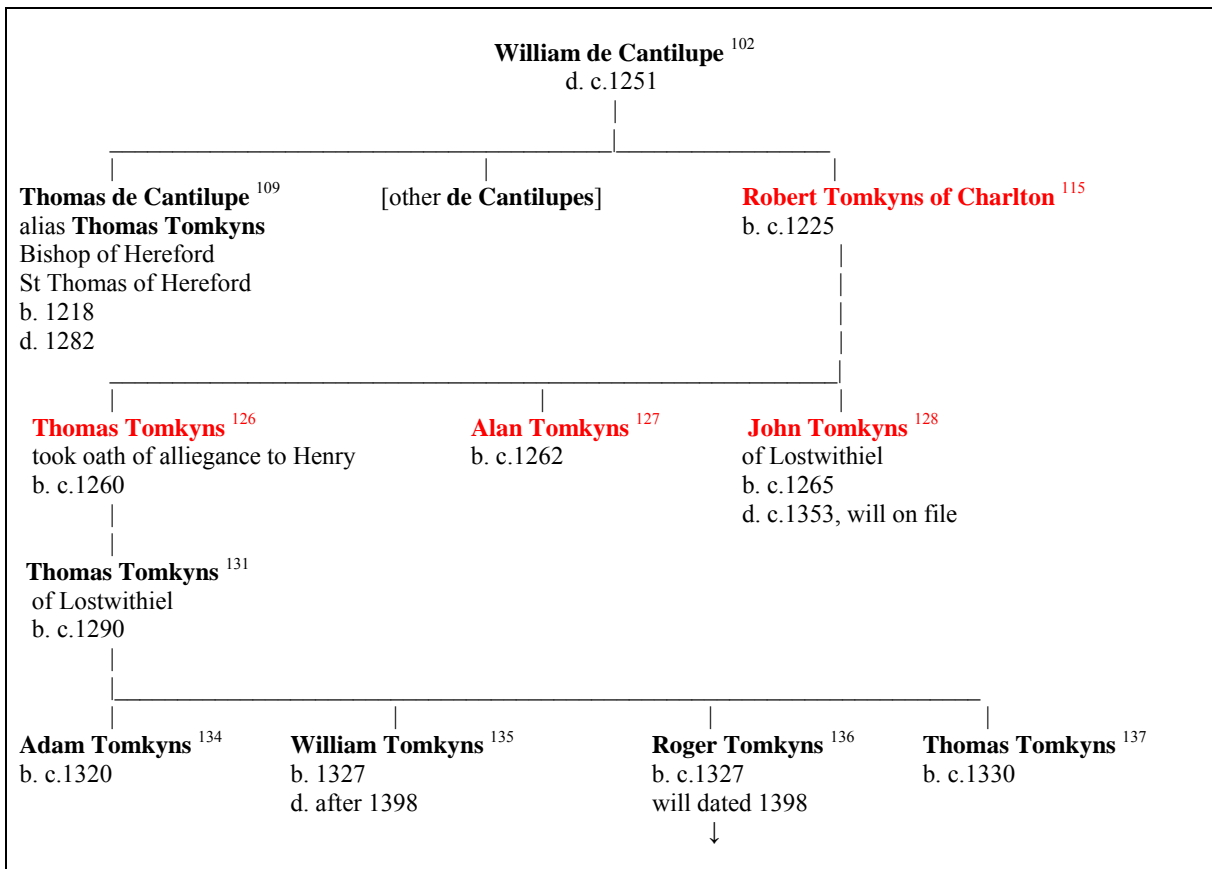
J. Conway Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II* (Cambridge, 1918), pp. 215-7.

R. W. Eyton, *Antiquities of Shropshire*, ix (London, 1859), pp. 30-4.

<sup>3</sup> This family hardly needs footnoting, but several of them, including Thomas of Hereford, have entries in *DNB*.

of Powys, Thomas, bishop of Hereford and Alan, progenitor of the Charltons of Apley Castle, to have all taken the surname Tomkyns (see fig. 2). Of course he did not acknowledge who they really were – they appear in his pedigree as ‘Robert of Charlton’, also explicitly called ‘Robert Tomkyns of Charlton’, or ‘John of Charlton’, later ‘John Tomkyns of Charlton’, though Thomas is explicitly identified as ‘Bishop of Hereford’. Nevertheless comparison of figs. 1 and 2 makes the real identity of these ‘Tomkynses of Charlton’ quite clear.

On the other hand Robert A. Tompkins’ reasons for deciding that these well-known medieval barons and bishops had an alternative surname unknown to history are quite unclear, as he seldom gave his sources. Fortunately in this case he did, uncharacteristically, give a hint as to them. On page 5 of *Tomkins-Tompkins Genealogy* he referred to ‘the records we saw re this group’, which seem (his comments are confused) to have consisted of some reference to the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Charlton family followed by an unconnected pedigree of a seventeenth-century family, possibly called Tomkyns, living in Ludford in Herefordshire and in London. That second part apparently began with a ‘Robert of Charlton ba. 1560 ... also called Robert Charlton Tomkyns’, but it is not clear how much of that is a quote from the source and how much is Robert A. Tompkins’ gloss.



After *Tomkins-Tompkins Genealogy* had been published Robert A. Tompkins decided that Robert de Charlton, whom he had re-named Robert Tomkyns of Charlton, was in fact a member of the de Cantilupe family and a brother of its most illustrious member, bishop Thomas de Cantilupe, who was also re-named, becoming Thomas Tomkyns (see fig. 3).<sup>4</sup> In *Clan of Tomkyns* he wrote (at page 12):

‘William de Cantilupe and Millicent de Gournay had:

Thomas b. 1218 d. Aug. 25 1282 Orvato Italy on mission to the Pope. Bishop of Hereford. Now St. Thomas of Hereford. Tomb in Hereford cathedral. Took Tomkyns as surname tho Catholic books call him Thomas de Cantelupe. English records and church authorities say family name was Tomkyns. We saw an entire book about him and have much material regarding him. He and brother Robert the first we find using Tomkyns as a surname.’.

In fact there are no ‘English records and church authorities’ which say bishop Thomas was surnamed Tomkyns. He was a major historical figure, mentioned in a large number of records of many different types, from England and the continent, none of which contains the slightest hint of this. The entire story is once again a fantasy of Robert A. Tompkins’ creation.

The inescapable consequence of this is that the pedigree from Charlemagne to the Cantilupes and Charltons, set out in pages 1-14 of *Clan of Tomkyns*, is irrelevant to Tompkins ancestry. We may well be descended from Charlemagne (most people of English descent are, though few can prove it, and none by direct male-line descent) but not in the manner set out in *Clan of Tomkyns*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Further, realising that medieval bishops and vicars were unable to marry and seldom left ancestors (not officially, anyway), he suppressed the references to Thomas as bishop of Hereford and William as vicar of Budbrook, and re-directed the subsequent descent away from William to pass through his supposed brother Roger.

<sup>5</sup> The subsequent English generations in *Clan of Tomkyns*, down to the various Tompkinses who emigrated to America, are hardly more reliable, being in the main also the result of invention and unevicenced supposition – but that is another story.