

Roger Morrice (1628–1702)

Only very recently has a Staffordshire Moorlands born man been given national recognition. He is Roger Morrice who died 300 years ago, and who described himself as of Leekfrith in his will (i.e. Meerbrook area near Leek), although mainly residing in London. As of 2011 he was entered in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography - <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/37/101037785/> - which has a good summary of his activities. A team of academics spent seven years transcribing the nearly one million words in his diaries (called "entering books") held at Dr. Williams Library in London, and then published in six volumes in 2007. His incisive reporting and comments on the politics and persons of the later Stuart dynasty cover A.D. 1679 to A.D.1691. His shorthand was necessary to protect himself from an intolerant and totalitarian regime fearing Nonconformists and anti Stuart dissenters

The only personal details previously known of him concerning North Staffordshire were that he left money to Meerbrook chapel for children's education, and bible distribution. This was on an engraving within Meerbrook church. He also left twenty pounds to support Congregationalist minister Josiah Hargreaves of Westwood, Leek. His extensive will spends much time on Leekfrith, including mention of a John Stubbs.

Roger Morrice grew up during the English Civil war and the rule of the generals under Oliver Cromwell. Roger had graduated in religious studies from St. Catherine's Hall, Cambridge University in 1654, becoming vicar in September 1658 of Duffield parish in Derbyshire, some 20 miles east of Ashbourne. But he was ejected from ministering there in 1662, as were many other clerics who had Puritan views, by the passing of an Act of Parliament on 24 July 1662. These clerics were also forbidden to continue preaching - a threat to state security.

Morrice continued as chaplain to Denzil Lord Holles (died 1680), collecting numerous religious texts, one being the 650 page "The Puritan Controversy". He also sponsored young student ministers, and distributed his books on his decease. He may have returned to Leekfrith from London after 1691, but died by 17th January 1702 in Hoxton, North London and was buried at Bunhill Fields, Middlesex (now in Islington parish). His pallbearers were senior presbyterian ministers. His will indicates his links to many prominent persons of the time. His main executor was the Puritan MP Edward Harley.

In fact Roger Morrice was baptised at Saint Werbergh's church in Kingsley in the Staffordshire Moorlands on 15TH July 1633, sixteen days after his father, also Roger, was buried. He was the youngest of nine children. His will hints that he may have moved with his mother Ellen to the Meerbrook area, as no other entries appear for the family in Kingsley parish (except perhaps Richard). This eldest brother Richard was over twenty years his senior. Roger junior appears to have been close throughout his life to Richard's son Isaac, of similar age to himself. The latter lived at Westwood outside Leek, near to a Congregationalist minister Josiah Hargreaves, that Morrice later sponsored. Roger names five of his siblings who had families, including

sisters Mary Stoddard and Sarah Colclough. These five siblings match precisely the baptismal names of children of Roger junior's parents at Kingsley. With limited search at present I have found few further register entries for the family. An outside chance is Stockmeadow farm being connected to his family at the time.

There is useful comment and extracts online from the 2007 academic publication, especially in national newspapers. Input Roger Morrice "entering" to google.