

Mortimers of Devon in the 1642 Protestation Oath Lists

Research suggests that the Mortimers first settled in Devon in the 15th century or earlier. By 1523, the name had spread to 16 parishes and just 20 years later that number had grown to 19. By 1600, several branches of the Mortimer family had established themselves in Exeter, Devon's capital. Over the following centuries Mortimers continued to move to Exeter. By the time of the first census in 1841, 87 Mortimers lived in Devon's capital, out of 866 Mortimers who called Devon their home, more than any other county except Yorkshire.

This document is intended to be a useful resource for genealogists but also Mortimer one name researchers. The history of the Devon Mortimer family is of interest due to their inheritance of a medieval name of great note during the middle ages, the Mortimer family of Wigmore being one of the great dynastic families of the age. Edmund Mortimer and Philippa Plantaganet, Countess of Ulster married in 1368 in Reading Abbey, with Edward IV, a great grandson of the above couple successfully claiming the throne for the house of York during the Wars of the Roses. The long line of Mortimer of Wigmore became extinct upon the death of young Earl Edmund Mortimer in 1425, but other branches survived, including Hugh Mortimer, who died fighting on the Lancastrian side in the Battle of Wakefield, 1460. One branch that survived past 1400 is of particular interest to Mortimer family researchers, the Mortimers of Attleborough, who were prosperous during the Late Middle Ages but then faded into obscurity after 1387, when most of the Mortimer estates were inherited by female co-heirs.

The subject of this present study are the Mortimers in the 1642 Protestation Oath Lists from Devon. In 1641, Parliament had become incredibly frustrated with the king's Catholic sympathies and tendency towards absolute rule. With rumours spreading anxiety over Catholic insurrection, Parliament feared the Protestant Reformation was in serious danger. In response they formed a committee, who drafted a national declaration. An oath was to be signed stating the supremacy of Parliament and Protestantism, which was taken by Parliament on 3 May, and sworn by protestant peers the following day. On the 4th January 1641/2 the King's attempt to arrest five Members of parliament prompted the Speaker of the Commons to order that all males over eighteen in the country should take the oath, sending a letter to this effect on 18th January, a huge undertaking at the time.

This act was not unprecedented. National oaths of loyalty were a popular political device in the early modern era, and had occurred from 1534 onwards when the tyrannical Henry VIII ordered everyone to endorse his marriage to Ann Boleyn. The 1642 oath taken was to "live and die for the true Protestant religion, the liberties and rights of subjects and the privilege of Parliaments." All those who refused to take the oath were assumed to be Catholics and noted as such, called recusant papists, unfit to take up office in the state or the church. By 1642, the ruling elite had divided into two factions, the Parliamentary Roundheads and Royalist Cavaliers, with conflict inevitable. The resulting civil war shook the country, profoundly changing the politics and social fabric of the nation.

Taken as a whole, records only survive for about a third of the Protestation oath lists, although together, these records are the closest we have to a mid 17th century census, presenting a valuable resource for the study of names and populations just before the Civil War. In some areas, Catholics took the oath anyway, and so the lists are not seen as the most reliable indicator of religion. The protestation lists from Devon fare better than elsewhere in the country, with survival for a majority of the parishes.

Missing parishes from the oath lists

No Protestation lists survive for the following Devon parishes:

ALFINGTON	EXETER ST THOMAS	ROCKBEARE
ASHBURTON	FARRINGDON	ROUSDON
AXMINSTER	FARWAY	ST BUDEAUX
AYLESBEARE	GITTISHAM	SALCOMBE REGIS
BICTON	HARPFORD	SEATON
BITTADON	HORWOOD	SHOBROOKE
BRANSCOMBE	IVYBRIDGE	SHUTE
BRIXTON	KILMINGTON	SIDBURY
BUCKLAND TOUT SAINTS	KINGSTON	SIDMOUTH
CLYST HONITON	LITTLEHAM	SOUTHLEIGH
CLYST HYDON	LUPPITT	THORNCOMBE
CLYST ST GEORGE	LYMPSTONE	UPLYME
CLYST ST LAWRENCE	MEMBURY	UPOTTERY
CLYST ST MARY	MONKTON	VENN OTTERY
COLATON RALEIGH	MUSBURY	WHIMPLE
COMBE RALEIGH	NEWTON POPPLEFORD	WIDWORTHY
COMBPYNE	NORTHLEIGH	WITHYCOMBE RALEIGH
CORYTON	NOSS MAYO	WOODBURY
COTLEIGH	OFFWELL	YARCOMBE
DALWOOD	OTTERTON	
EAST BUDLEIGH	OTTERY ST MARY	

Index of Devon Mortimers

I have extracted Mortimer and its variants from the surviving lists. Spellings varied widely, but I have decided to utilise whichever was closest out of the two modern versions of the name, Mortimer and Mortimore, for the benefit of web search purposes. During the mid 17th century, spellings of the name varied widely and little significance was placed on how a name was spelt.

Because no other information was given other than the men's names, it is often impossible to distinguish between different people with the same name, the only aid being the identification of some men with the same name as senior or junior. This usually meant men of two successive generations, often father and son. In some instances, it meant brothers who had been given the same forename, which practice became much less common after the end of the 16th century.

This index is unfortunately incomplete, as I haven't yet been able to access the lists from Crediton, Tiverton and Exeter, some of the places where Mortimers lived. If there is any record that I might have missed, or other information that should be included, please contact online using the contact form at livinginthepasttoday.wordpress.com/contact. The list will be updated when I next visit Devon Heritage Centre.

Where possible, I have used parish records and wills to attempt to identify the different family members. This information is given in the notes section of the list. While not a definite guide, this information can be used to search for more details about a certain individual in the list. The industry of Devon at this time was overwhelmingly agricultural. From information in supporting records, the occupations of most on this list would have ranged from agricultural labourer, husbandman to yeoman. Some living on the coast might have been mariners, while those in Exeter were probably working in the wool manufacturing industry.

List of Mortimers in the Devon Protestation Oath Lists

Index arranged by alphabetical order.

Parish	Name	Notes	Approximate age
NYMET TRACEY/ BOW	John Mortimer	Born c.1600, father of Xer, Ptr & Jno Mortimer, 1627,30 & 33 Bow	41
	William Mortimer	Possibly older son of above	18
	William Mortimer	Possibly bro or nephew of Jno	
CHERITON BISHOP	John Mortimer		
	Thomas Mortimer	(c.1598-1654), father of Wm, Jno, Mark & Mary, PCC Will	43
	William Mortimer		

	William Mortimer jnr		
CHRISTOW	Matthew Mortimer	b.1607 Tedburn St Mary, d. 1679 Christow, m. Isett Osborne 1631 Christow, children: Ricd 1631, Tmsn 1634, Matw 1637, Wm 1640, Edw c.1648, Jno c.1652	34
DUNSFORD	Henry Mortimer	(c.1588-1668) son of Edw. Children: And 1613, Natl? c.1615, Hny II 1618, Joan 1621, Ann 1624, Jas 1625	53
	Simon Mortimer	(1611-75) son of Jno of Bridford. M. Eleanor Berry (c.1613-88) 1637 Bridford, children: Gbt 1639, Wmt 1641, Tho 1643, Smn 1645, Eliz c.1648, Mary c.1650	30
	Nathaniel Mortimer	(c.1615-88), m. Leticia (c.1622-82) Children: Jno 1644, Geo c.1646, Joan 1653, Hny 1655, Smn 1657	26
	Thomas Mortimer	(c.1592-1670?) son of Edw. M. 1622 to Mgy Bowden (b.c.1590), children: Jas 1625	49
	Thomas Mortimer	Possibly eldest son of above Tho	18
ERMINGTON	John Mortimer		
EXBOURNE	James Mortimer		
	Thomas Mortimer	Father of Mark b.1638 Exbourne	28
IDE	William Mortimore	(1608-c.1644) possibly son of Jno of Exeter St Sidwell. M. 1634 Alice Dunsard 1634 Alphington, children: Wm c.1635, Judt c.1642. D. before 1656	33
MORCHARD BISHOP	Simon Mortimer	(c.1617-aft 1662) presumably father of Mary 1662, possibly also father of Tho c.1644, Ben c.1646, Rogr 1649, Eliz c.1653, Ann c.1654, Fras c.1656, Joan 1658	24
	Thomas Mortimer	Possibly bro of above, perhaps b. 1623 son of Tho of Crediton	19
MORETONHAMPSTEAD	Henry Mortimore	Possibly b. 1618 Dunsford son of Hny	23
	John Mortimore	Possibly bro of above	
REWE	John Mortimer	B. 1614 son of Wm of Rewe	27
	Christopher Mortimer		
	John Mortimer		

	Thomas Mortimer		
SANDFORD	William Mortimer	(c.1582-1652), perhaps a relation of Jno Mortimer of Priorton, d. 1605. M. Grace Reed 1605 Sandford, children: Eln 1609, Juln 1611, Wm II 1614, Joan 1616, Jno 1619, Mgy 1622	59
	Gilbert Mortimer	Possibly son of Gbt (1570-1620) and bro of Mary d.1603 & Alce b.1606	42
	Roger Mortimer	(c.1600-59) of Ashridge Farm. Father of Tho b.1625 & Jno c.1628	41
	Robert Mortimer	Possibly b. 1614 son of Jno of Ranscombe, bro of below Rogr	27
	Roger Mortimer	B. 1617 son of Jno of Ranscombe, bro of above Robt	24
	Gilbert Mortimer	(1620-56), son of Jno of Levibrooke. M. Agnes Hill 1647 Sandford, children: Eliz 1649, Mgt 1654, Tmsn 1656	21
	Thomas Mortimer	Possibly b. 1615 son of Lwrc Mortimer, m. Ann Towle 1643 Crediton	26
	Thomas Mortimer	Possibly father of Tmsn b. 1623 Sandford	46
STOKE CANON	Hugh Mortimore	Born c.1606, a person we expect to find in Sandford. M 1627 Alice Elworthy, children: Jno 1628, Gra 1629	35
STOKENHAM	Nicholas Mortimer		
	Thomas Mortimer	Born c. 1608, perhaps son of Robt b. c.1582	33
GREAT TORRINGTON	William Mortimer, burgess	(c.1592-1674), yeoman. Probably related to Mortimer of Rewe family. M. Dorothy (c.1592-1635), children: Wm 1615, Wmt 1616, Ant 1619, Mgy 1620, Tho 1622-22, Jno 1623-4, Jno 1625-6, Geo 1627-87, Mary 1629, Tho 1631, Jno 1634	49
UPTON PYNE	Richard Mortimore	Probably b. 1598 Newton St Cyres. M. 1620 Eliz Pepperel, Upton Pyne, children: Alce 1620, Ttm 1624	43

Key to abbreviations used

Male		Female	
Abbreviation	Forename	Abbreviation	Forename
Jno	John	Wmt	Wilmot
Tho	Thomas	Tmsn	Thomasin / Thamsin
Wm	William	Eln	Eleanor/ Ellen
Jas	James	Juln	Julian/ Julianna
Edw	Edward	Eliz	Elizabeth/ Eliza
Ricd	Richard	Mgy	Margery/ Margeria
Geo	George	Mgt	Margaret
Hny	Henry	Judt	Judith
Matw	Matthew	Alce	Alice/ Alicia
Xer	Christopher	Gra	Grace
Ptr	Peter		
Gbt	Gilbert		
Smn	Simon		
Rogr	Roger		
And	Andrew		
Ant	Anthony		
Ttm	Tristram		

Analysis of the record

The average age of the men researched is 34. Many of them had young families. The lack of old men in the record shows the low life expectancy of the time. Of all in the list, only William Mortimer, burgess of Great Torrington achieved 80 years. The return also shows the distribution of Mortimers. Sandford had the highest number, with eight Mortimer men calling Sandford their home. The parish with the second highest Mortimer representation is Dunsford, with five Mortimers listed in the oath protestation.

Mortimers aren't to be seen in some parishes where we would expect to find them. Notably Ashton, Ashford, Bradninch, Bridford, Coldridge, Hennock, Kentisbury, Netherexe, Newton St Cyres, North Bovey, Poughill, Pyworthy, Silverton, Slapton, Spreyton, St Winnow, Tedburn St Mary, Thorverton, Totnes, Upton Hellions, Winkleigh, Witheridge. Some of these instances might be explained by Mortimers moving elsewhere or not having sons, or perhaps sons still under age, while their fathers have died young, for instance in Slapton. A widow being head of the household wouldn't have been recorded because women didn't feature in the list. Evidence shows there were also Mortimers residing in some of the parishes where lists didn't survive. Notably Farrington, Colaton Raleigh, Harpford, Aylesbeare, Rockbeare and Shobrooke. In these instances it is possible to infer individuals present using parish records.