

Robert Royce of Connecticut

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Robert Royce (Abt 1606-1676) of New London, Connecticut, is probably the ancestor of most Royces in North America today, but his origins in England (specifically Martok, Somerset) have proven a headache for those attempting to take the record back further. Records of Robert Royce's birth in Somerset and of his early family there have never been found. This discrepancy has led to a cycle of inference and speculation that has created, among other things, about 20 different birthdates for Robert Royce in Somerset and about 20 different surnames for his wife Mary – most often "Sims", though this proposal has been disproved, as Michael Dobson notes on his Royce family website.

"The often claimed marriage to Mary Sims on Jun 04, 1634 cannot be substantiated. Extensive research in the Long Sutton, Martok and Lubenham, Somerset, England parish churches failed to show any marriage in 1634 between a Robert Royce by any spelling and a Mary Sims (Syms). The closest that could be found was between a Robert Rayce and a Mary Sims on Jun 04, 1624 in Long Sutton. Clarence Leslie Hewitt, Jr. in an article originally published in the NEGHS Register and later in 'English Origins of New England Families', Series 2, Volume 3 pp 42-45 titled 'Some Light on the Marriage of Robert and Mary Royce of Connecticut' concludes this could not be the correct date because the earliest recorded birth of a child, Sarah, was 1633-34 and they had seven children total."

(<http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/d/o/b/Michael-E-Dobson>, accessed FEB 2006)

This gives just some idea of the problem. In researching my own Royce family (I am not a descendant of Robert Royce) I may inadvertently have found the answer.

On hearing mention of Somerset as a possible point of origin for the Royces of Ireland (my line), I started investigating the Royces of Somerset. Initially I thought that sorting out this family would take a long time since there are over 1250 entries for Royces in Somerset on the IGI alone. On closer inspection, however, I found that at least 1200 of these entries are in fact entries for Robert Royce himself and for various members of his family as contributed anonymously by over a thousand people. Of these records, not one is from a genuine parish roster.

If you comb these 1200 + records, the total number of genuine birth record entries from County Somerset parishes is: eleven. And a fairly random eleven at that: there are twenty or thirty Royce marriages on record in the county but virtually all of these appear to have been fly by night, with few Royces having had more than one child christened there.

At the time of the 1881 census, stray births aside, there is only one Royce family (arguably two) in all of Somerset.

Factor in official records from the four counties that surround Somerset (Devon, Dorset, Wiltshire, Gloucester), and there is still nothing.

All this makes clear that there is not, and evidently there never has been, a viable Royce presence in Somerset or in any county of Southwestern England. Far from being a Royce epicentre some 1200 people strong, County Somerset and surroundings are a veritable No-Man's-Land when it comes to people with the surname Royce.

This begs the question, "Was Robert Royce really from Somerset?" Records of his birth, of his marriage, of the christenings of his known children, have never been found there, even though every conceivable parish at which he and his wife Mary {Unknown} might have been parishioners have records pertaining to the time that he and his family are believed to have resided there. In short, and in spite of folk legend, whether primary or secondary, there is really no evidence for Robert Royce's (b. Abt 1606) family having been from Martok or from anywhere in Somerset. The county itself located on England's southwest coast, and

has numerous ports, and consequently, while it may have been the location from which Robert Royce departed England for the New World, it may not have been the county of his own birth and residence.

Once the above suspicion had been adopted as a hypothesis, and once it was taken into account that early discovery of the Robert Rayce and Mary Simms document in Somerset may itself have been the impetus for a belief in the Martok origin of Robert Royce, answers came swiftly. Locations in England aside, here is what is known about Robert Royce's family, with dates postulated on the basis of death records etc as found at Connecticut.

I Robert Royce

... + Mary

- 2 Jonathan Royce, b. Bet. 1631-1635 England, d. JUL 1690 New London, CT.
- 2 Sarah Royce b. Bet. 1633-1634 England, d. 01 MAY 1711 New London, CT.
- 2 Nehemiah Royce b. Abt 1636 England, d. 01 NOV 1706 New Haven, CT.
- 2 Samuel Royce b. 01 NOV 1644 New London, CT, d. Bef. 24 DEC 1711 New Haven, CT.
- 2 Ruth Royce b. 07 DEC 1645 New Haven, CT, d. MAY 1695 New Haven, CT.
- 2 Nathaniel Royce b. 24 APR 1647 New Haven, CT, d. 08 FEB 1726/1727 New Haven, CT.
- 2 Isaac Royce b. Abt 1648 New Haven, CT, d. Abt 1681 New Haven, CT.

The first three children of Robert and Mary are known to have been born in England during the dates given above. "Nehemiah" is the oddest name out. A search for Nehemiah Royce b. England, any year, leads to only a single official batch record (plus about forty 'extras' from Martok):

I Robert Royce

... + Mary

- 2 Nehemiah Royce chr. 30 MAY 1637 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

There is only one Nehemiah Royce in all of England, coincidentally christened 1637, whose parents coincidentally are named Robert and Mary. What are the odds? Next let's check the Saint Michael, Stamford batch (1560-1949) for all occurrences of the name Royce.

I Richard Royse

... + Unknown

- 2 Rebeckah Royse chr. 13 JAN 1626 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 John Royse chr. 15 FEB 1628 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

I Robert Royse

... + Mary

- 2 John Royse chr. 21 APR 1633 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Sarah Royse chr. 08 FEB 1634 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Nehemiah Royse chr. 30 MAY 1637 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

I John Royse

... + Anne

- 2 Elisabeth Royse chr. 10 MAY 1638 Saint Michael, Stamford Lincoln.

I William Royce

... + Susanna

- 2 George Royse chr. 27 APR 1772 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Thomas Royse chr. 28 MAR 1774 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

Not only do Nehemiah's birth year and the names of Nehemiah's parents match Nehemiah Royce of CT exactly, he has two siblings with precisely the same names that Robert and Mary's children have, born during exactly the times that those children were born. Again, what are the odds. Did a Robert Royce ever marry a Mary in County Lincolnshire?

1 Robert Royce

... + Mary Jugkson 08 APR 1627 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

There is one match, and coincidentally it is just a few years before John Royce was born. Still, six years between a marriage and the first child is something of a stretch. Did a Robert and Mary Royce have any other children christened at any other Lincolnshire churches in the 1600s?

1 Robert Royce

... + Mary

..... 2 John Royce chr. 20 DEC 1627 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln, d. 29 MAY 1628.

..... 2 John Royce chr. 29 JUN 1629 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 Mary Royce chr. 10 JUL 1631 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 John Royce chr. 21 APR 1633 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 Sarah Royce chr. 08 FEB 1634 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 Nehemiah Royce chr. 30 MAY 1637 Saint Michael Stamford, Lincoln.

From the records it would appear so – a John Royce who died, followed by a second John Royce who presumably also died before a third John Royce was born in 1633, and a daughter Mary, who – if we take this to be Robert Royce of CT and his wife Mary, and I do – it would appear also died. There are no children of a Robert and Mary Royce on record in Lincolnshire following Nehemiah Royce. Can we clear up the "John and Anne" who also christened their children at the same church in Stamford at about this time?

1 John Royce

... + Anne Jackson 02 NOV 1636 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 Elizabeth Royce chr. 10 MAY 1638 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln, d. 05 MAY 1638.

"Anne Jackson". This entry would seem to suggest that the bizarre surname of what is probably John Royce's sister-in-law, "Jugkson", is somebody's odd rendering of the surname Jackson. Robert Royce married Mary Jackson on 08 APR 1627 in Stamford, Lincolnshire; John Royce married Anne Jackson on 02 NOV 1636 in Stamford, Lincolnshire.

An interesting development in having apparently located Robert Royce of CT in Stamford, Lincolnshire, is that this district (South Kesteven) borders on Rutland, Bedford and Leicester Counties – and in contrast to Somerset and the counties of southwestern England, Royces abound in this region; it was the birthplace of more than 40% of England's Royce population in the 1881 UK census. This part of the East Midlands is also the only clear epicentre of Royces that I have found which predates a later arrival of Huguenot Royces (e.g. Le Roy, De Roy > Royse / Royce) in the area of Kent and Greater London, and the surname Royce in this part of the Midlands is "as old as the hills" so to speak.

Tracing the line of Robert of Stamford with any certainty will prove more difficult without first-hand research on the ground, although the IGI can provide some preliminary leads. Are there any batch record occurrences of a Robert Royce b. late 1500s or early 1600s in the Lincolnshire area?

- 1 William Royce
- ... + Unknown
- 2 Robert Royce chr. 03 NOV 1605 Ketton Cum Tixover, Rutland.
- 2 George Royce chr. 18 JUN 1608 Ketton Cum Tixover, Rutland.

One match, and geographically it is a perfect fit – Ketton is a mere 3 ½ miles down the road from Stamford. Does Robert Royce have a brother John lying around anywhere in another parish – John Royce b. early 1600s with a father named William?

- 1 William Royce
- ... + Unknown
- 2 Joan Royce chr. 31 MAY 1600 Kingston Bagpuize, Berkshire, d. 02 JUN 1600.
- 2 David Royce chr. 09 AUG 1601 Kingston Bagpuize, Berkshire.
- 2 Matthew Royce chr. 18 SEP 1604 Kingston Bagpuize, Berkshire.
- 2 Robert Royce chr. 03 NOV 1605 Ketton Cum Tixover, Rutland.
- 2 Elizabeth Royce chr. 21 JUN 1607 Kingston Bagpuize, Berkshire.
- 2 George Royce chr. 18 JUN 1608 Ketton Cum Tixover, Rutland.
- 2 John Royce chr. 13 NOV 1609 Kingston Bagpuize, Berkshire.
- 2 Richard Royce chr. 21 MAR 1612 Kingston Bagpuize, Berkshire.
- 2 Hester Royce chr. 21 MAY 1616 Kingston Bagpuize, Berkshire.

Here has been incorporated the family of the only John Royce born to a father William Royce in the 1600s. Now, Berkshire is more than a few counties removed from Rutland, but the dates of christenings at the two parishes fit well. "William Royce" is also the only Royce on record at either of these parishes, although by year the available records are admittedly somewhat limited. Are there any William Royce marriages dating from this period?

- 1 William Royce
- ... + Joan Casebird 01 OCT 1598 Kingston Bagpuize, Berkshire.

Bullseye. However, the question remains: is William of Berkshire the father of Robert of Ketton, and is Robert of Ketton also Robert of Stamford? The lack of the given names "William" (the father) and "George" (a brother) in the known Stamford lines and among Robert's children is puzzling if William of Ketton is indeed Robert's father. If we next take into account all Royces on record in all of the available Stamford batch records, the names seem not to accord with the Ketton and Berkshire lines.

ROYCES OF STAMFORD, previous to 1650

- 1 Sara Royse
- ... + John Wildman 04 SEP 1617 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

- 1 John Royse
- ... + Unknown
- 2 Elner Royse chr. 23 FEB 1622 Saint Mary, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Hanna Royse chr. 05 DEC 1624 Saint Mary, Stamford, Lincoln.

- 1 Richard Royse
- ... + Joane [this name occurs only on the Margit Roice record]

- 2 Rebeckah Royce chr. 13 JAN 1626 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 John Royce chr. 15 FEB 1628 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Abigail Roise chr. 09 NOV 1634 Saint John, Stamford, Lincoln, d. 28 NOV 1634.
- 2 Margit Roice chr. 06 JUL 1646 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln.

1 Robert Royce

- ... + Mary Jugkson 08 APR 1627 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 John Royce chr. 30 DEC 1627 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln, d. 29 MAY 1628.
- 2 John Royce chr. 29 JUN 1629 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Mary Royce chr. 10 JUL 1631 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 John Royce chr. 21 APR 1633 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Sara Royce chr. 08 FEB 1634 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Nehemiah Royce chr. 30 MAY 1637 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

1 John Royce

- ... + Anne Jackson 02 NOV 1636 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Elizabeth Royce chr. 10 MAY 1638 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

These Royces of Stamford seem to have arrived c. 1617: parish records are available 60 years previous to this, and non-occurrence of the name Royce before 1617 shows that the family is not long seated in the city but rather moved there later (Stamford is an urban centre in the East Midlands). From the available data there appears to have been, in addition to John Royce and Robert Royce, a Sarah Royce and Richard Royce of comparable age, as well as an older John Royce. Might the latter John Royce have been the "John" for whom Robert was intent on naming his eldest son? The name "Richard" matches our Berkshire lead, but William of Berkshire's son Richard is not old enough to have been Richard of Stamford, and apart from Richard there is no apparent correspondence of given names across these two (or three) Royce families.

The Royces of Stamford were probably from England's East Midlands, and probably from a settlement not at all far removed from the city, but theoretically they may have come from anywhere. Robert Royce was a shoemaker, and this is prototypically an urban profession, but he may have been about ten years-old when his family arrived in Stamford and so the occupation will then not necessarily have been an inherited one. If Robert's father was a farmer then the family is likely to have come from the nearby surroundings. If Robert's father was also a cobbler or another urban professional, however, the family may have come from another urban centre further off. And we are still left with the question, was Robert's father William Royce of Ketton, John Royce the elder of Stamford, or another Royce? Who were these Royces and what were their origins and professions? Future research can hopefully resolve these questions, and other researchers are encouraged to publish whatever they might be able to turn up with regard to Robert Royce's ancestry.

Finally, turning briefly to our Stamford Jackson lead, we find that records of this family begin appearing in Stamford c. 1581, quite a bit earlier than the Royces, and while the gap at the beginning might be due to missing records, there are so few Stamford Jacksons that the family was probably newly arrived c. 1580.

JACKSONS OF STAMFORD, previous to 1650

1 Peter Jaxon

- ... + Unknown
- 2 Eme Jaxon chr. 20 AUG 1581 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Ysbell Jackson chr. 14 MAR 1584 Saint George, Stamford, Lincoln.
- 2 Elizabeth Jackson chr. 14 MAR 1584 Saint George, Stamford, Lincoln. (?)

1 Anne Jackson chr. 23 OCT 1587 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

- ... + Philip Shelltonn 28 JAN 1604 Saint John, Stamford, Lincoln.

1 William Jackson chr. 22 MAY 1590 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

(The father of Anne and William Jackson is not stated, but probably it was Peter.)

1 Anthony Jacsonn

... + Ann Jellyon 02 APR 1591 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 Jane Jaxone chr. 20 APR 1593 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 Anthony Jackson chr. 18 JUL 1596 Saint John, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... + Bridget Crumwell 23 OCT 1627 Saint John, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 Marye Jackson chr. 06 OCT 1599 Saint John, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 Richard Jackson chr. 16 MAY 1602 Saint John, Stamford, Lincoln.

1 Annes Jaxon

... + Robart Dockeyley 14 OCT 1593 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

1 Robert Jackson

... + Saray Ryve 20 OCT 1602 Saint Mary, Stamford, Lincoln.

1 Thomas Jackson

... + Anne Foster 25 FEB 1605 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 John Jackson chr. 08 FEB 1606 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... + Amy

..... 3 Amy Jackson chr. 30 SEP 1636 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln, d. 14 OCT 1636.

..... 2 Bridget Jackson chr. 13 AUG 1609 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln.

..... 2 Thomas Jackson chr. 26 MAY 1616 All Saints, Stamford, Lincoln.

1 Elizabeth Jackson

... + Richard Spring 10 AUG 1617 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

1 Robart Jackson

... + Unknown

..... 2 Robart Jackson chr. 12 JUL 1618 Saint George, Stamford, Lincoln.

1 Mary Jugkson

... + Robert Royse 08 APR 1627 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

1 Anne Jackson

... + John Royse 02 NOV 1636 Saint Michael, Stamford, Lincoln.

Some records are clearly missing (e.g. the birth of a younger Anne Royce) but from the data at hand there appear to have been two early Jackson patriarchs, Peter Jackson and Anthony Jackson, and Peter is possibly also the father of Anthony. Mary Jackson who married Robert Royce may have been the daughter of Anthony Jackson, chr. 06 OCT 1599, though this would make Robert's wife about seven years his senior and I'm unaware as to there being a tradition to this effect. If she were born 1599 it would put the birth of Isaac Royce in her 49th year, and her death in 1696 at age 97, which would have been quite an age in those days. Again, research on the ground is probably the only way to resolve the identity of Robert Royce's wife with any certainty, and researchers are encouraged to turn up what they can.