The Roberts Family

This narrative should be read in conjunction with the chart showing the ancestors of Mary Roberts.

Richard Hodge of Botus Fleming, Cornwall 9x great grandfather

The Children of Richard Hodge baptised in Botus Fleming, Cornwall
Johan 10 November 1605
Agnes 25 February 1607/8
Anthony 28 December 1610
Prudence 12 December 1613

The story begins in the reign of Elizabeth I, with 9x great-grandfather, Richard Hodge. Living where he did, in the Cornish parish of Botus Fleming, just a few miles from the River Tamar, young Richard would probably have been aware of the amassing of the fleet in Plymouth, in the face of the threat from Spain. Very little is known about Richard, we don't know where or when he was born, or who he married. The first evidence we have for him is the baptism of his daughter, Johan, in Botus Fleming,[i] just days after Guido Fawkes, manipulated by Robert Catesby, was foiled in his plans to blow up the Houses of Parliament. This was also the year that the Guildhall and 'Flesh Shambles', where the butchers were located, were built in Plymouth.

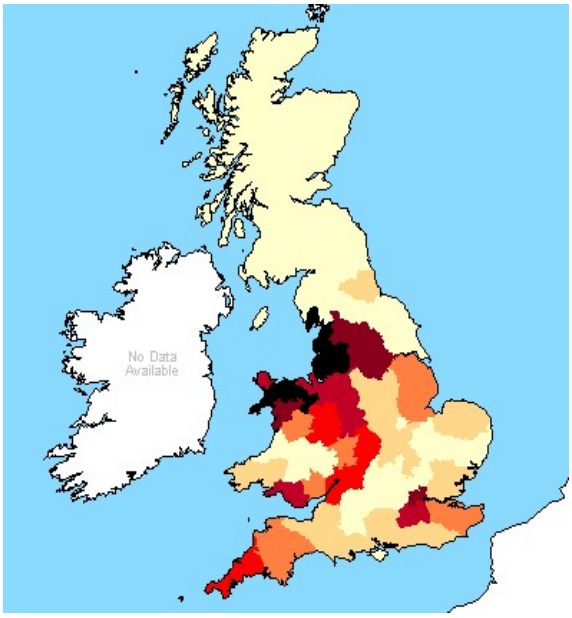
We don't know what Richard did for a living; it is very likely that he worked on the land and may have taken produce down the Tamar to the market in Plymouth. There is a quay at Kingsmill Lake, which is probably where parishioners loaded their goods for sale. The area was particularly suited to market gardening and at one time, Botus Fleming was known as 'The Cherry Vale'.

The winter when Johan was born was a particularly hard one, with heavy snowfall, unusual for the Tamar Valley. The following year saw the beginning of what was to become known as The Great Migration, with two ships sailing from Plymouth, carrying Puritans and others to the New World.

Three more children joined the Hodge family in the early years of the seventeenth century.[ii] In March 1641/2, Richard Hodge of Botus Fleming signed the Protestation Returns. This was the eve of the English Civil War, when there was a great fear of Catholicism. The returns were lists of adult males who agreed to "live and die for the true Protestant religion, the liberties and rights of subjects and the privilege of Parliaments."[iii] The returns for Botus Fleming are all in the same handwriting, indicating that the names were added by a clerk, so this is not Richard's actual signature.

John Roberts and Joane Hodge 8x great grandparents

On the 9th of October 1634, Joane Hodge married John Roberts in Botus Fleming.[iv] It is likely that John was the son of Anthony Roberts and his wife Pasco née Dingle but more evidence is needed as there are other possibilities.[v] Roberts is of course a much more common surname than the others that occur in this branch of the family. There were a reasonable number in Cornwall but most originated from north Wales and Lancashire.[vi]



Distribution of the Roberts Surname in 1881



St. Mary's, Botus Fleming

The Children of John and Joane Roberts née Hodge baptised in Botus Fleming, Cornwall

Elizabeth 1 March 1634/5
John 28 October 1636
Martha 24 February 1638/9
Anthony 1 August 1641

Again, very little is known about John and Joane. They had four children baptised in Botus Fleming in the 1630s and 1640s.[vii] Bringing up a young family in Botus Fleming, then often called Blowfleming, would not have been easy. The parish was a tiny one but it was sandwiched between the warring factions of royalist Cornwall and just down the Tamar, parliamentarian Plymouth. Saltash, the nearest town, just three miles away, changed from royalist to parliamentarian and back again several times. Individuals were expected to follow the current allegiance of their landlords and employers and may well have had to take up arms in support of a trained band being raised by the local gentry. Regardless of personal opinions, unless he owned his own land, John Roberts would have had no choice in the matter. Despite being in predominantly royalist Cornwall, the leading gentry family in Botus Fleming was the Waddons at Moditonham House. John Waddon was MP for Plymouth and a staunch parliamentarian. The royalist cause was upheld locally by the influential Coryton family who held land in Hatt. A man of John's age would almost certainly have been called upon to fight on one side or the other, depending on whether he worked for, or lived on, the Moditonham or Hatt estates. Waddon's tenants suffered for his

parliamentarian sympathies, as they were subject to higher rates of the 'weekly assessment' taxes that were levied on Cornish parishes.

Given its position, there were frequent troop movements in the area. The soldiers were entitled to 'free quarter'. Joane may have found herself obliged to provide food and accommodation for the men and their horses. Crops and livestock could be forcibly acquisitioned, leaving local families starving. Locals tried to circumvent this by hiding livestock in the surrounding woodland. The war also disrupted the local economy. Whilst Plymouth was under royalist siege, trade was banned so that the supplies did not reach the besieged parliamentarians. Cherries and other vegetables could no longer be shipped down from Kingsmill to Plymouth. Royalist soldiers captured those of Waddon's tenants who tried to smuggle goods into the city. Coryton's tenants, who tried to supply the royalist besiegers, were subject to parliamentarian raids.

Ultimately, the ordinary people of Botus Fleming survived the 1640s by keeping their heads down, hiding their livestock in the dense Cornish woods when armies marched past and praying for the conflict to end so that they could return to the quiet rhythm of the cherry harvest.

John Roberts and Anne Spry 7x great grandparents

On the 26th of June 1666, a few months before the Great Fire was to ravage London, John and Johan's son, John, married Anne Spry at Charles the Martyr church in Plymouth.[viii] The will of Anthony Roberts, son of John and Johan, written in 1712, links the family.[ix] Anthony provides for some of his brother John's children. John's son, John junior, was given land in Plymouth and Landrake, Spry was given Notter Mill, James and Mary, now the wife of Job Lander, are mentioned and Anne is named as his executrix. Anthony also made provision for the maintenance of his sister,

Martha.[x] An index to leases refers to Anthony as a 'gent', leasing property at Popham in Botus Fleming from the Fortescues of Philleigh in 1706.[xi] The 1664 Hearth Tax Records show that the John Roberts' house in Botus Fleming had two fireplaces, for which a tax of two shillings per hearth was payable. This could be John husband of Anne Spry or his father.[xii]

In 1739, a case came before Chancery, between John and Ann's son John and his nephew Robert Couch, who was son of John and Ann's daughter, Ann. Richard and Elizabeth Blake were also involved on John junior's side.[xiii]

The Children of John and Anne Roberts née Spry baptised in Botus Fleming, Cornwall

Sarah 17 August 1668
Edward 19 October 1669
Anthony 1 December 1671
Agnes 10 July 1673
Joane 4 April 1675
James 28 November 1676
Mary 26 December 1678
Spry 5 January 1680/1 died 1683
Anne
John
Spry 12 November 1692

Edward Spry and Amye Pinner 8x great grandparents

John Roberts' wife, Ann Spry, had been baptised at Plymouth St. Andrew in 1644. She was the daughter of Edward and Amye Spry.[xiv] The Sprys were a notable family, working as limners,[xv] painters and map makers in the city in the sixteenth century[xvi] but it is uncertain how or indeed if, Edward was related to these Sprys. Edward married Amye Pinner on the 11th of November 1643 at Plymouth St. Andrew.[xvii] No other children have been found for the couple but this may be due to defective parish registers at this time. From 1695 to 1700, an Edward Spry appears as a free tenant in Plymouth rate books but it isn't certain that this is the correct Edward.[xviii]

Amey Spry was buried at Charles church in Plymouth in 1692 as the 'wife of Edward Spry', suggesting that Edward was alive at this time.[xix] The burial of Edward Spry in 1702, also at Charles, is almost certainly our Edward.[xx] This Edward left a will but sadly it is one that was destroyed in the second world war.[xxi]

Spry Roberts c.1692-1746 and Frances Geach 6x great grandparents

Edward Spry's grandson, Spry Roberts, was probably the youngest of John and Anne Roberts née Spry's eleven children. He was baptised in Botus Fleming in 1692 and named for a short-lived elder brother. In 1710, Spry was one of several Botus Fleming parishioners to sign a settlement certificate. His flamboyant signature suggests a confident hand.[xxii] Spry was about twenty-one when his uncle, Anthony Roberts, died and left him Notter Mill in the parish of St. Stephens in Saltash. The land was situated on the banks of the River Lynher, which marked the boundary with Landrake parish. Leases confirm the assignment of the 'water grist mill' to Spry.[xxiii]



Cottages at Notter Bridge

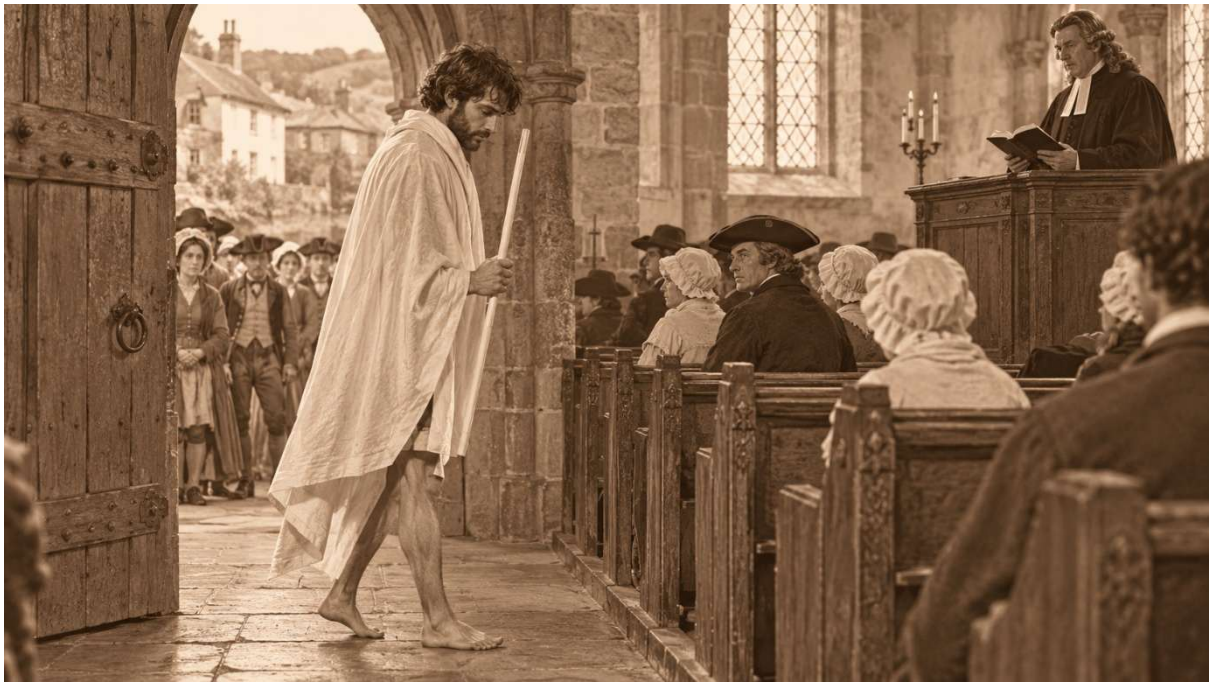
On the 24th of March 1725/6, a young woman, Frances Geach, took her daughter to the church of St. Melanus in St. Mellion, some four miles away from Notter Bridge, for baptism. The child was named Mary Roberts Geach.[xxiv]



St. Melanus, St. Mellion

On the 9th of July in the same year, Spry Roberts was summoned to the archdeacon's court on a charge of fornication and fathering Frances Geach's 'base child'. He was required to undergo public penance and was to, said the summons, 'on the next Sunday after the receipt hereof immediately after the reading of the second lesson in the forenoon enter into the south door of the parish church of St. Stephens by Saltash bare footed and bare legged your head uncovered with a white sheet hanging over your shoulders and a white rod in your hand and shall pass through the middle ally of the said church soe far forth as the Minister's Desk, before which you are to stand until the end of the Nicene Creed and at the end thereof you are to say and repeat the words following, viz. I Spry Roberts doe in the presence of God and of this congregation humbly confess and acknowledge that I have highly offended Almighty God by committing the foull sin of fornication with Frances Geach who hath been delivered of a base child for which I doe hereby declare my hearty sorrow and penitence and promise by God's assistance amendment of life for the future beseeching God to pardon me and desiring you to pray for me and thereupon you are with an audible voice to say and repeat the Lord's Prayer upon your knees and of your performance hereof you are to bring to the said court an authentick certificate under the minister and

churchwardens' hands of your said parish at or before the last day of this instant, July.'[xxv]



Spry's Act of Penitence, as imagined by ChatGPT

There is no record indicating that Frances was also summonsed, which is surprising, as women were usually more likely to be required to do penance than men. In any case, this humiliation had little effect as, three years later, Frances had a second illegitimate child. She named her son Spry Roberts and he was baptised back in Spry senior's birthplace, Botus Fleming.[xxvi] Despite this disgrace, Spry held positions of respect in his home parish. In 1737, he was overseer of the poor for St. Stephens by Saltash[xxvii] and was paying two shillings poor rate for Notter Mills.[xxviii] In 1741, he held the post of churchwarden.[xxix] On the 28th of November 1743, now in his fifties, Spry married at St. Stephen's, Saltash. His wife was Anne Dobbin.[xxx] In 1745, Spry again paid two shillings poor rate for Notter Mills[xxxi] but also one shilling and sixpence for Dobins, presumably acquired from his new wife, one shilling for 'mills' and three pence for 'Pumeries at Buraton'.[xxxii] The Geachs and the Roberts appear to have

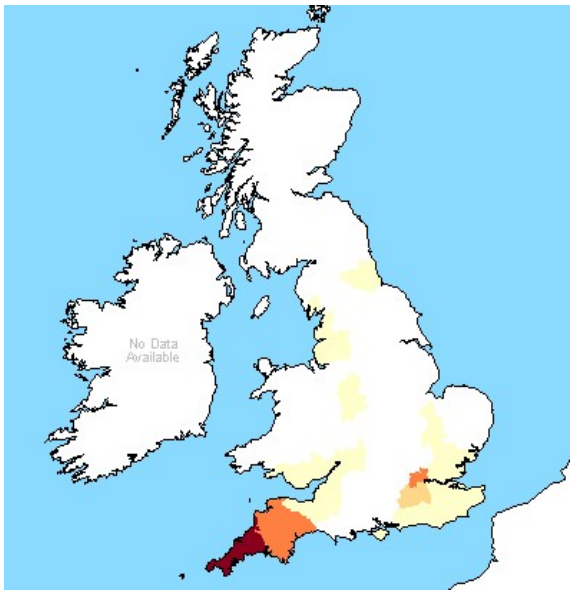
held their own land so would have had some prominence in the area.[xxxiii] It is impossible to guess why Spry and Frances did not marry.

On the 3rd of August 1746, describing himself as a yeoman, Spry wrote his will. He and Anne were childless, yet his will makes no reference whatsoever to his children by Frances Geach. It is possible that Mary had died, as there is no confirmed record of her after her baptism but young Spry was eighteen years old and probably living close by in Landrake. Apart from providing for his wife, Spry's legacies were to his nieces and nephews, children of his brother John and late sister, Anne.[xxxiv]

Frances could be the Francis Geach 'a poor stranger', who was buried in Linkinhorne on the 6th of January 1755. 'A poor stranger' indicating that they did not qualify for settlement in Linkinhorne.[xxxv] It certainly seems that Spry Roberts washed his hands of Frances and her children.

Peter Geach and Ann White 7x great grandparents

Before continuing with the story of the Roberts line, it is time to look at the ancestors of Frances Geach. Geach is yet another surname found almost exclusively in Cornwall, predominantly in the area around Falmouth.[xxxvi] The name may derive from 'geek', a term that originally meant 'simple'.[xxxvii] Frances Geach, 6x great grandmother and the mother of Spry Roberts senior's two illegitimate children, was baptised at St. Dominick, Cornwall on the 9th of April 1703.[xxxviii] Her parents were Peter and



Distribution of the Geach Surname in 1881

The Children of Peter and Anne Geach née White baptised in St. Dominick, Cornwall

Peter 16 April 1699
Frances 9 April 1703
Samuel 21 March 1704/5
Thomas 27 December 1708



St. Dominick

Anne Geach née White[xxxix] who had married at St. Mellion on the 23rd of April 1698.[xl] Peter and Anne had three sons, who were also baptised at St. Dominick.[xli]

Peter and Frances are names that repeat in the Geach family, so it is a little difficult to disentangle them. It is likely that Peter remarried to marriage to Abigail Vinton in 1713.[xlii] If this is so, Anne was presumably dead by the but no burial has been confirmed. Peter was buried on the 17th of May 1721 at St. Mellion.[xliii]

Peter Geach and Frances Adams 8x great grandparents

Peter Geach had been baptised on the 7th of October 1675; the son of another Peter and Frances Geach née Addams,[xliv] who thus are 8x great grandparents.[xlv] It is likely that Peter senior was the son of yet another Peter Gaych (sic) of St Mellion and was baptised in 1648 but more evidence is needed. Peter and Frances married in St. Mellion on the 1st of May 1674.[xlvi] They also had a daughter, Mary, who was baptised in St.

Mellion on the 3rd of December 1681.[xlvii] Both children are mentioned in a lease for lives, that Peter senior, a husbandman, took out in 1687 for Forse Field, Viverdon Common. St Mellion was associated with the Corytons of Pentillie Estate.[xlviii] It seems that the family moved to St. Germans as Frances was buried there on the 5th of March 1727/8.[xlix] There is also a possible burial for Peter in St. Germans in 1689.[l] There are earlier generations of Geachs, including Peters, in St. Mellion but once again the links are broken by the 'Commonwealth Gap' in parish register entries.[li]

Spry Roberts and Anne 5x great grandparents

The christian name Spry was perpetuated by several of John Roberts and Anne Spry's descendants, making distinguishing between same-named cousins problematic.

The Children of Spry and Anne Roberts baptised in Landrake, Cornwall

Frances 11 August 1754
Anne 26 February 1756
Peter Geach 27 December 1757
Elizabeth 25 November 1760
Spry 11 April 1763.
Mary 9 April 1765
Samuel 28 September 1767
John 15 July 1773

5x great grandfather Spry had been baptised at Botus Fleming on the 4th of March 1728/9.[lii] No marriage has been found[liii] but he and his wife, Anne, had eight children baptised in Landrake.[liv]

Although the soil was not good, agriculture was the main form of employment in the parish, with the proximity to the River Lynher, allowing produce to reach Plymouth and beyond. Limekilns were sited along the river, to produce lime for improving the soil. A school had been established early in the eighteenth century but it seems that Spry's children, the girls at least, did not benefit from this, as his daughter, Mary, signed the marriage register with a mark.[lv]

Spry Roberts was buried at Landrake on the 24th of August 1792, at the age of sixty five.[lvi] His wife, Anne, was probably buried there three years later.[lvii] Spry did leave a will but this is another that sadly has not survived. [lviii]

Mary Roberts 4x great grandmother

This part of the story concludes with the marriage of Spry and Anne's daughter, Mary, on the 15th of December 1785, at St. Michael's, Landrake, to 4x great grandfather.[lix]

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[i] Index to the baptism registers of St. Mary's Botus Fleming, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[ii] Index to the baptism registers of St. Mary's Botus Fleming, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[iii] Image of the original Protestation Returns for Botus Fleming available via https://archives.parliament.uk/collections/getrecord/GB61_HL_PO_JO_10_1_79_1
[iv] Index to the marriage registers of St. Mary's Botus Fleming, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[v] Index to the baptism registers of St. Mary's Botus Fleming, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[vi] *The British C19th Surname Atlas* Archer Software 2003.
[vii] Index to the baptism registers of St. Mary's Botus Fleming, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[viii] Parish registers of Charles, Plymouth, Devon, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk.
[ix] The will of Anthony Roberts written 1712, proved 1713, from the Principal Probate Registry PROB 11/540 folio 109 accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk
[x] The will of Anthony Roberts written 1712, proved 1713, from the Principal Probate Registry PROB 11/540 folio 109 accessed via www.ancestry.co.uk
[xi] National Archives discovery catalogue www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
[xii] Note on Family Search Tree.
[xiii] Chancery Case Blake and Roberts .v. Couch 1739 C11/2467/14, held at the National Archives.
[xiv] Parish registers of Plymouth St. Andrew, Devon, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk.
[xv] Manuscript illustrators.
[xvi] https://societyofcartographers.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/26-2-brayshay.pdf.
[xvii] Parish registers of Plymouth St. Andrew, Devon, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk.
[xviii] Plymouth Rate Books 1695-1799, originals at The Box, Plymouth ref. 1-273 and 1-274 , accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk.
[xix] Parish registers of Charles, Plymouth, Devon, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk.
[xx] Parish registers of Charles, Plymouth, Devon, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk.
[xxi] Devon Wills Index.
[xxii] Settlement certificate from Botus Fleming overseers of the poor 1710 signed Spry Roberts, held at Kresen Kernow, accessed via www.familysearch.org full text search.

[xxiii] Lease for Notter Mill, St, Stephens by Saltash, Cornwall, assigned to Spry Roberts 1728, held at Kresen Kernow R332, R333 and R334.
[xxiv] Index to the parish registers of St. Melanus, St, Mellion, Cornwall, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk.
[xxv] Archdeacon's Court Record regarding Spry Roberts' being charged with fornication, 1726, original at Kresen Kernow ARD 163.6.
[xxvi] Bishops' transcripts for St. Mary the Virgin, Botus Fleming, Cornwall via www.familysearch.org full text search.
[xxvii] St. Stephens Saltash, Overseers of the Poor Accounts 1737, held at Kresen Kernow, accessed via www.familysearch.org.
[xxviii] St. Stephens Saltash, Overseers of the Poor Accounts 1737, held at Kresen Kernow, accessed via www.familysearch.org.
[xxix] St. Stephens Saltash, Churchwardens' Accounts 1741, held at Kresen Kernow, accessed via www.familysearch.org.
[xxx] Parish registers of St. Stephen's, Saltash, Cornwall, held at Kresen Kernow.
[xxxi] St. Stephens Saltash, Overseers of the Poor Accounts 1737, held at Kresen Kernow, accessed via www.familysearch.org.
[xxxii] St. Stephens Saltash, Churchwardens' Accounts 1745, held at Kresen Kernow, accessed via www.familysearch.org.
[xxxiii] St. Stephens Saltash, Overseers of the Poor Accounts 1745, held at Kresen Kernow, accessed via www.familysearch.org.
[xxxiv] The will of Spry Roberts written and proved 1746, held at Kresen Kernow.
[xxxv] Parish registers of St. Melor, Linkinhorne, Cornwall, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk.
[xxxvi] *The British C19th Surname Atlas* Archer Software 2003.
[xxxvii] www.surnamedb.com.
[xxxviii] www.familysearch.org.
[xxxix] According to *The British C19th Surname Atlas* Archer Software 2003, White is a very common surname, spread throughout England, although with far fewer instances in Scotland and Wales. It is normally considered to be a name that derives form physical characteristics.
[xl] Cornwall online parish clerks' database www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/ .
[xli] www.familysearch.org.
[xlii] Index to the parish registers of St. Melanus, St, Mellion, Cornwall, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk.
[xliii] Index to the parish registers of St. Melanus, St, Mellion, Cornwall, accessed via www.findmypast.co.uk.
[xliv] According to *The British C19th Surname Atlas* Archer Software 2003, Adams is a very common surname, with no real regional focus. The variant 'Addams' is more prominent in the West Country. It is a patronymic surname.
[xlv] Index to the baptism registers of St. Mellion, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[xlvi] Index to the marriage registers of St. Mellion, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[xlvii] Index to the baptism registers of St. Mellion, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[xlviii] Transcript of a 1687 lease relating to Peter Geach of St. Mellion, Cornwall, held at Kresen Kernow, accessed via www.familysearch.org full text search.
[xlix] Index to the burials of St. Germans, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database http://www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[l] Index to the burials of St. Germans, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database http://www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[li] Index to the parish registers of St. Mellion, accessed via Cornwall online parish clerks' database www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/
[lii] Parish registers of St. Michael's, Landrake, Cornwall, held at Kresen Kernow.
[liii] Baptism registers of St. Michael's, Landrake, Cornwall, held at Kresen Kernow.

[liv] Baptism registers of St. Michael's, Landrake, Cornwall, held at Kresen Kernow.
[lv] Marriage registers of St. Michael's, Landrake, Cornwall, held at Kresen Kernow.
[lvi] Burial registers of St. Michael's, Landrake, Cornwall, held at Kresen Kernow.
[lvii] Burial registers of St. Michael's, Landrake, Cornwall, held at Kresen Kernow.
[lviii] Devon Wills Index.
[lix] Marriage registers of St. Michael's, Landrake, Cornwall, held at Kresen Kernow.