

William Arthurbury, Brownist and Seditious Publisher

William Arthurburie may have been the longest-lived citizen of Morden Parish in the 17th and 18th centuries, having attained the remarkable age of 97 years. According to historian, Daniel Lysons, the tombstone of William Atterbury stood in the St. Lawrence churchyard indicating he died in 1690 [prob. 1697] aged 97. However, longevity is not the most remarkable aspect of William's extraordinarily long life as he very likely could also claim the distinction of having been the great-grandfather of William Arterbury, the progenitor of most Atteberrys living in America, as well as having been a member of a small, seldom heard of religious sect known as "brownists". William first appeared in the vicinity of Morden when his marriage to Anne Olliver was recorded in the register of St. Peter and St. Paul Church in Mitcham Parish in 1638. From the register of St. Lawrence Church William and Anne Arthurburie continued to reside in Morden Parish from before 1650 until their burials in 1697 and 1683, respectively.

William probably farmed a small tenancy in Lower Morden, where he was several times recorded as a juror, and once as the Parish tithingman. William was reported on the 1664 Hearth Tax roll in a home with two hearths, placing him in the upper lower-classes of the community. His two sons appear to have been afforded apprenticeships, with William as a stone mason and Richard as a chandler. During his relatively long life William would have witnessed the death of the Tudor monarchy and the turbulent rise of the reign of the Stewarts, interrupted by the English Civil War and Interregnum. The latter half of William's life is known with some certainty, but the first half of his existence prior to his marriage to Anne Olliver is less certain. The following history of William's early years and ancestry is based on extensive research and the author's best reasoning and analysis.

Prior to his marriage to Anne Olliver, William is believed to have lived at Mortlake between about 1613 and 1635, where he resided with his first wife working as a Thames waterman and fathering six daughters (Katherine, Anne, Elizabeth, Hannah, Jane and Alice) and one son named William, who died young. William is believed to have been a son of William Atterbury, porter and obstinate brownist, and his wife, Katherine. William's grandparents are believed to have been William Addersbury, basketmaker, and Alice Lyon. The families of both his parents and grandparents are believed to have resided in St. Giles Cripplegate parish, northwest London, probably on Grub Street. It is further believed that through protracted exposure to dissident and non-conforming religious influences widely existing within St. Giles, William's family would have been persuaded to join the separatist church founded in part by Robert Brown and Robert Harrison. It also seems possible that William Addersbury, basketmaker, may have been introduced in his youth to the Mennonite faith through the Dutch basketmakers in residence in St. Andrew Hubbard, London, where he likely served his apprenticeship. Regardless of its origins, it is clear from court records that William Atterbury, porter, of St. Giles Cripplegate was active in the separatist church when he was arraigned in 1613 as an "obstinate brownist", and again in 1617 for not attending his parish church.

What, might you ask, does this have to do with William Arthurbury of Morden? The answer to this question may be found in the publication in Nov1646 by a William Arthurburie of a seditious religious tract entitled "*The Sealed Fountaine*", ostensibly written by John Wilkinson while a prisoner at Colchester in 1613. It is the author's belief that the William Arthurburie that

published the Wilkinson tract was the same person as William Arthurbury of Morden parish. This belief is predicated on numerous factors, including the matching given and surname, the rarity of the Arthurbury surname, the doctrinal connection between the subject matter contained in the Wilkinson tract and the brownist separatist movement, and the historical timing of the seditious publication:

1. *Surname Rarity* - The author was able to find only two other instances of the "Arthurbury" surname, both having been in late 16th and early 17th century in the vicinity of Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire, and neither carried beyond a single generation, and none included the given name of William. Only the Arthurbury family of Morden was an exact match of both given and surname, was contemporaneous with the Wilkinson tract publication, and survived for multiple generations, all the way to the late-18th century in Chester County, South Carolina.
2. *Doctrinal Connection* - John Wilkinson appears to have been a lay-minister, trained as a weaver, who was connected with the "ancient church" of London founded by John Greenwood and Henry Barrowes. *The Sealed Fountaine* was intended to confute the beliefs of John Merton, Thomas Helwys, et al., regarding the practice of infant baptism. While Merton and Helwys believed all infant baptisms to be voided by the absence of cognizant development, Wilkinson's treatise argues that children born of true-believers have inherited their parent's state of grace and, therefore, may be baptized. While this distinction alone is not sufficient to tie John Wilkinson to the "brownists", other factors as Wilkinson's reported possession of a "Barrowe's book" would show a clear association between Wilkinson and the London separatist church of which William Atterbury, obstinate brownist, would have been an active member.
3. *Historical Timing* - It seems probable that William Atterbury, porter and obstinate brownist, would have been the person to whom the Wilkinson tract was entrusted. William Atterbury probably visited Wilkinson in prison at Colchester. Wilkinson (late of London, and a so-called Brownist) had been arrested and arraigned in 1611 at Stepney for non-attendance of his parish church, resulting in his being ordered banished in Mar1612 for transport to Amsterdam. Publication of the Wilkinson tract prior to the arrest of King Charles I in Jun1646 would have been considered an act of sedition, punishable by death. It is the author's belief that the Wilkinson tract remained in the Atterbury family's possession until it was published in Nov1646. The author further believes that the publication of this tract in Nov1646 was not coincidental, but timed to occur after the King's arrest at which time the printing could be done with impunity. Further, it seems likely that the "Arthurbury" surname was adopted as an alias as a further protection against detection and persecution. After all, William Arthurbury had been recorded in Mortlake and Mitcham with the surname of Atterbury. Why else would he have suddenly adopted the surname of Arthurbury when he moved into Morden parish?

Admittedly, the conclusions presented in this article are based primarily on circumstantial evidence, but not without fairly exhaustive research and rational analysis. Anyone interested in the more finite details of this work may contact the author at battebe@yahoo.com. By Robert Atteberry.