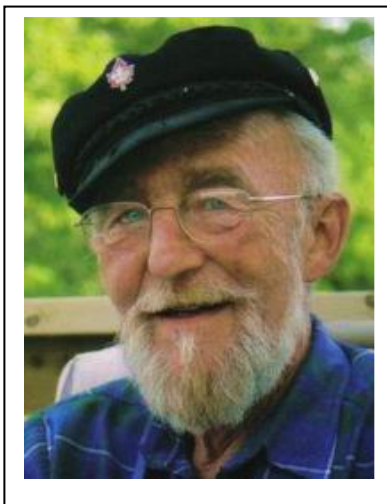


A Curious Notation



Helene Millard contacted me recently with an interesting query. She had been looking for the birth information of an individual in an 1810 English Parish Register on microfilm at a Family History Centre.

She found the entry with the full name of the child and his birth date but no indication of his parents. After the name was the notation 'Rofe' or 'Nofe' and she naturally wanted to know what they meant.

I had never seen them before so I consulted about six genealogical dictionaries, ten glossaries of genealogical terms including several English ones, and a selection of dictionaries that I have at home. Nothing. I called my daughter in California because she is the only individual I know who has the complete Oxford English Dictionary. No luck.

By this time, I was late for Happy Hour and naturally the family was curious about this aberrant behavior of mine. When I explained it to them, my sister-in-law, Joan Cronin, tried a different tack and asked "Could it mean 'Record of Family Excluded'?" – of course it could! Once we saw it as an acronym, various possibilities presented themselves but hers was the best.

I called my local mentor in Anglican affairs, Father Stewart Murray in Carp. He was not familiar with the notation but explained some of the intricacies of Baptismal recording and referred me to Glenn Lockwood, the archivist of the Anglican Church.

It was new to Glenn too but he offered to check with some of his sources. So far nothing further has come to light.

Pending further enlightenment, I would hypothesize the child was born to a family that was unable to care for it or it was illegitimate. In either case, it was placed in a foundling home or orphanage and had unknown or concealed parentage.

This would be corroborated if there were several other infants in the Register baptized at the same time and with the same notation because I have noted on many occasions that foundlings and orphans were baptized in bunches. I expect it was done at the home on a visit from the priest.

It would seem that the priest used the notation, which was either a local convention or his own shorthand, to indicate that the absence of family data was not inadvertent.

The fact that the child was given a family name is quite another question. Where does it come from? Before 1830, mothers of illegitimate children often gave the children whatever last name they wanted but, in this case, there were three families of this name living in the area and I don't see the priest gratuitously giving that name to the infant.

Perhaps one of the parents was from such a family or it may have been the name of a baptismal sponsor. It is sometimes possible to find records from foundling homes and hospitals but finding one from 1810 is a very, very long shot.

I don't think that this mystery can be cracked with conventional documentation and, much as I hate to admit it, it looks like a job for a DNA search. This would involve a DNA analysis of saliva from the descendant of the mystery child and comparing it to samples from known descendants of the families of that name that were in the area at that time. If any of them are involved in genealogy, this might be a possibility.

The subsequent history of the individual also supports the premise that he was raised without the benefit of family. His military records do not mention any family and his marriage certificate does not indicate his parentage.

I would love to hear from any readers who have information or views on this issue. Everyone who replies will receive a free copy of the next issue of this newspaper.