

The Father of the Pilgrim Fathers
FROM PILGRIM FOOTPRINTS
by **Dr. Ken Connolly**

PILGRIM WILLIAM BREWSTER

Father of the Pilgrim Fathers

1567-1643



Statue of Faith, Pilgrim Monument

"Her eyes look toward the sea. For ever she beholds upon the waves the incoming 'Mayflower'; she sees the Pilgrims land. They vanish, but she, the monument remains, and tells their story to the world. This our generation too shall pass away, and its successors for centuries-to-come; but she will stand, and overlooking our forgotten memory, will speak of them and of their foundation of the Republic on the Plymouth Rocks of Liberty, Law, Morality and Education."

The village of Scrooby is about 146 miles north of London, on the main road between London to Berwick, and in a corner of Nottinghamshire, which lies adjacent to both Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. It had a large manor house that, according to the *Domesday Book*, once belonged to the Archbishops of York. It provided a stopping place for travellers, and a post office "for the Queens correspondence."

Margaret, Queen of Scotland, daughter of Henry VII slept there in 1503. In 1530, when Cardinal Wolsey was given the Archbishopric of York, he stayed there for three months on his way to York. He also appears to have slept there on his fatal return journey. Henry VIII, who ordered his return, also slept there in 1541. And a letter, dated

1530, was addressed there to Thomas Cromwell, Henry's Secretary of State, while he resided there.

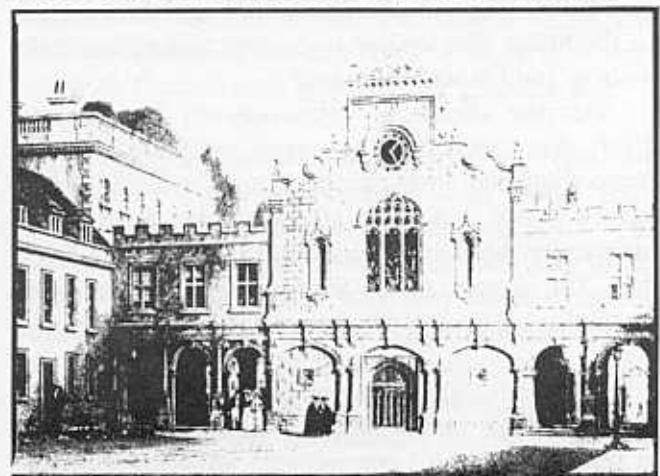
1576 The Brewster family was related to Thomas Cromwell maternally, and moved into the manor house in January of 1576, when his father was awarded "all its liberties", by Archbishop Sandys. His father became bailiff, and also held the office of Post.

Education and employment

1580 Young William received his first formal training in education at a nearby school in Scrooby, and later enrolled at the Peterhouse College in Cambridge, where he matriculated on December 3, 1580. He was exposed to the strongest influence of Puritan theology. We are not able to determine the goal of his academic pursuit.

1583 William was at home on the occasion of a visit from a William Davidson. Davidson was a member of Queen Elizabeth's secret service. He later, in 1585, became an assistant to Sir Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State. On this occasion, Davidson was on his way to intercept an envoy from France, who was attempting to create an alliance between France and James VI of Scotland. It was Davidson's assignment to frustrate the envoy's objectives.

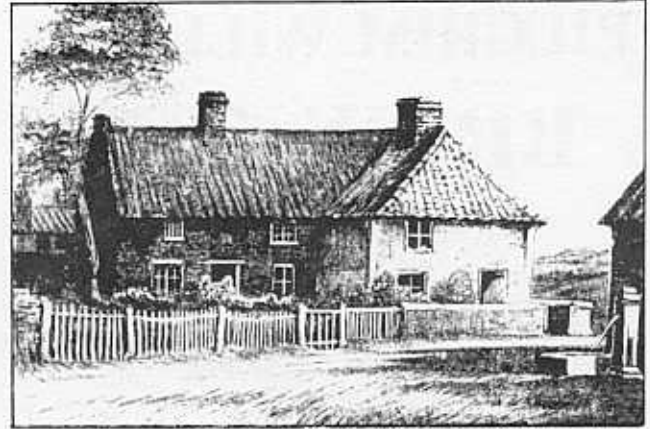
The conversation which occurred in the Scrooby manor that night, is not recorded. Brewster may have become enamored by the story of Elizabeth's 53 agents in foreign courts, and the other 18 agents, whose assignments were without classification most secretive. The contact made an impression on young Brewster, and he attached



Peterhouse College, Cambridge



Brewster's home, Scrooby



Bradford's home, Austerfield

himself to Davidson, and became Davidson's assistant.

Their assignments took them overseas, and in and out of the royal court, on several occasions. They helped to serve a spinal function between the phalanges of the Empire and the brain center at Whitehall. Brewster met many important people, on both sides of the English Channel. His experiences obviously helped to mold him for his future ministry.

1587 Brewster may have gone on to climb the ladder in politics had it not been for an incident which occurred in 1587. Queen Elizabeth had papers before her for several months, awaiting her signature. They called for the death of Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary was of the same royal blood, and mother of Elizabeth's successor to the throne. Elizabeth disliked the assignment, and vacillated between obedience to her heart, or her head. On this occasion, while Davidson was present, she hurriedly signed papers and threw them at Davidson, and told him to see to the affair. She wished to have nothing else to do with it, until it was "finished".

Hearing about the execution on February 9, 1587, she called for the arrest of Davidson, for "exceeding" her instructions. Poor Davidson went before a jury, was fined 10,000 marks, deprived of his secretaryship and confined at the Tower of London. The domino effect automatically left Brewster unemployed. He returned to the manor at Scrooby.

Ministry at Scrooby

Brewster's father was having health problems at the time, and his son became an aid to him. In the summer of 1590, his father died. Due to

controversy, the positions held by his father did not immediately become William's, but eventually they did. During the controversy, Davidson gave evidence of the close bond which had developed between them, arguing, through correspondence, on William's behalf. Brewster then served as bailiff, as well as caretaker of the Post, for the next eighteen years.

Brewster was 23 years old when he assumed those positions. In that same year, a child was born in Austerfield, Yorkshire, only three miles away. The family named the child: William Bradford. He grew up under the influence of Brewster, and other men of great piety. He became Brewster's life long associate.

Religion without Freedom

In the neighbor village of Babworth, there was a godly minister by the name of Richard Clyfton. Brewster and Bradford would walk the few miles to hear him expound the Scriptures. Or, they would walk to Worksop, another village, to hear another godly vicar in the Church of England: Richard Bernard. Bernard was a saved soul with a social conscience. He fought for "*applied Christianity*", and became a genuine pioneer for prison reform, long before John Howard ever wrote his: *Survey of the State of Prisons*. A close bond developed among all the god fearing men of the community, and William Brewster seemed to have been the mortar which held them together.

1602 A Separatist church began in Gainsborough in 1602. It was the first Separatist church in the North. Though Gainsborough was 12 miles away, it was within walking distance to Scrooby, and both men

would travel the distance, with deepest gratitude for its very existence. The church had called John Smyth, a Cambridge educated man, as their pastor. He was a knowledgeable man, highly gifted and of great piety. He remained faithful, in spite of great persecution, until 1606. He, and several of his flock, were finally driven into exile. He later practiced as a physician in Amsterdam.

1606 Services, for the people of Separatist persuasion, who lived south on the river Trent, transferred to the manor at Scrooby. A Mr. John Robinson fellowshipped with the new assembly. He had previously pastored a flock in Norwich, the birthplace of the Brownist. He had been obliged to flee for his safety, due to bitter persecution.

But the city of York, in whose See, or parish, the area surrounding Gainsborough fell, was a governmental center and stronghold for Anglicanism. It was constantly calling people to face an ecclesiastical trial for *Brownism*. Their Congregationalism was intolerable to the authorities. Many of the victims lost their property, faced heavy fines, and, or were sentenced to still imprisonment, without "*any liberty or conference*".

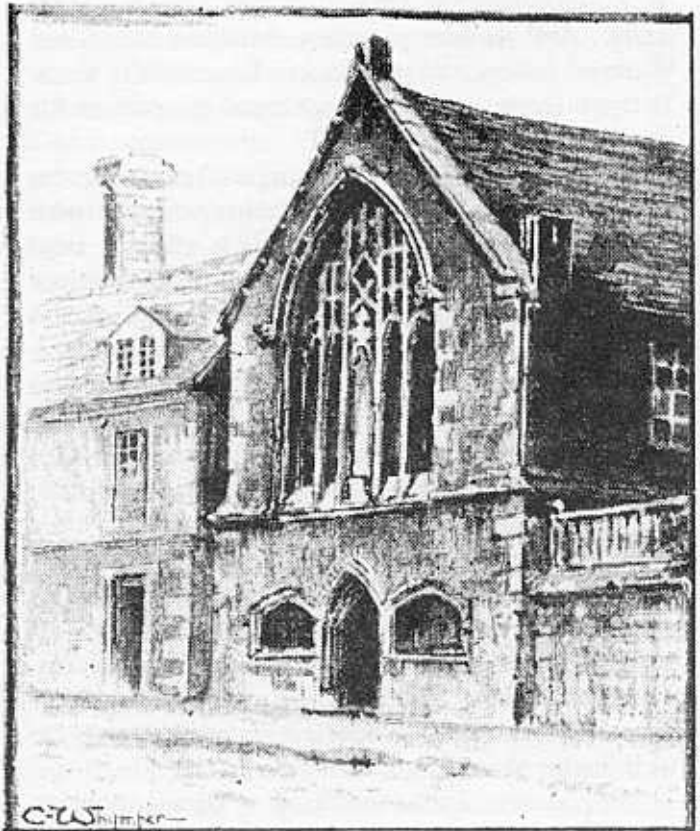
Forced to Escape

1607 The subpoena was awarded around September 15, 1607, for the apprehension of William Brewster for "*Brownism*". The authorities were unable to locate him. It was unlawful to emigrate without a license, by "statute 13, Richard II", yet others had preceded them to Holland. All this forced outbound passages to become associated with stealth, bribery and exorbitant prices.

This climate of dealings was as foreign as another language to these innocent Puritans. They



The Old Hall, Gainsborough



The Guildhall, Boston

negotiated with a Dutch captain to meet them in the marshy waters of the "Wash" delta, near Fishtoft. After they loaded their goods and their families, presumably waiting on the tide to rise, they discovered that he had betrayed them. They were immediately surrounded by "catchpoles". The officers searched them and confiscated all money hidden on their person. The women were searched beyond modesty. They were then transported to Boston, and the seven leaders were imprisoned in two cells at the Guildhall. The record shows that William Brewster "was the chief of those that were taken at Boston, and suffered the greatest loss."

1608 Because the records are lost, we cannot calculate how long their incarceration lasted in Boston. The victims however, spoke favorably of their stay in the city. We do not know why they were extended courtesies, but, when 900 Puritan colonists sailed for New England, a decade later, with John Winthrop; the group included Boston's recorder, a past mayor and an alderman. In fact, some of Boston's citizens later became governors of Massachusetts. John Cotton, the minister of the Massachusetts Church, previously pastored Boston's

St. Botolph Church, known as "The Stump", for 20 years. And their new settlement was to be called "Boston" in honor of this eastern Lincolnshire town. Perhaps there were deep and latent sympathies for the cause of these pilgrims.

The Puritan's next attempt was made in the early summer of 1608. It was also wrought with grief. It involved another Dutch captain who owned his own vessel, and agreed that the fugitives could embark somewhere near the mouth of the river Humber, some 60 miles north of Boston. The women and children were to arrive at the location by boat, coming down the Trent; and the men would travel over land. Every precaution was taken to disguise their intentions. The men arrived first, but while waiting on the others, observed that they were being pursued by the authorities. The frightened captain took off with the men on board, and headed for the open sea. The women and children were left to face the arresting officers. The tensions, concerns and emotions which crowded into that moment of separation may be well imagined.

Providence again was kind. The authorities were frustrated, not knowing what they could do with women and children. Sensitive to public opinion, they released them; and, by winter, the families were reunited in Holland, and settled in Amsterdam.

Their new Home

Holland, the new home for these pious pilgrims,

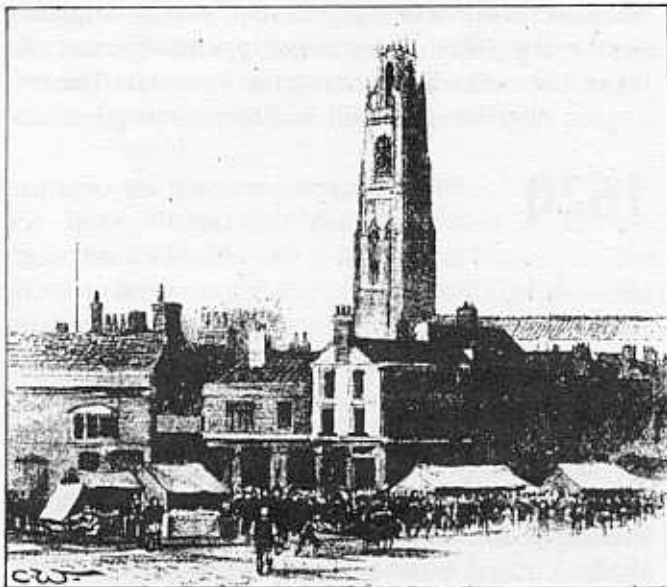
was between wars. A 25 year war with Spain had just terminated, and the "Thirty Years War" would not begin until 1620, the year the Pilgrims left. Amsterdam was an asylum for freedom fighters. The city was bustling with foreign refugees, fleeing for civil or religious freedom. Consequently, there was a thriving English community in the city.

This band of escapees, together with those who had earlier left Gainsborough, numbered about 100. Most of them had left a country life of farming behind them. They were now forced to compete in a world of trade. They had surrendered lands and livings, at the threat of life, for the liberty of conscience. They were plain folks, utterly honest, hard workers and conscientious to a fault. They were now to strive in a new land, and to succeed, they needed to learn a new language. All of this must be remembered to evaluate their reactions in Amsterdam.

1609 The English church was pastored by Mr. Francis Johnson, and was sound in the faith, but Presbyterian in structure. The John Robinson group mingled but maintained themselves as a separate entity. After one year, they collectively appealed to the City of Leyden, about 35 miles southwest, for permission "of coming to live in this city". They promised to carry on their trades, and become a burden to no one. They were assured that the City would "refuse no honest persons free ingress". They all migrated once more, and finally established



The Pilgrim Cells in Boston



Boston's market place

themselves.

There is ample evidence of their exemplary character. In their 11 years, the church grew to 300, making it numerically equivalent to the church in Amsterdam. Further, pastor Robinson was received as an honorable member of the University. This was a position of prestige and reflects the image carried by the pastor. Their reputation was such that their products were sought, they were quickly employed by other tradesmen, and any member of the church was given "credit", if occasion should necessitate it. Travelling English tradesmen, such as Edward Winslow, Thomas Brewer, John Carver, Robert Cushman and Miles Standish, noticing the spirit and affection of the membership, not only cast their lots to join their fellowship, but some even sailed the Atlantic with them.

Reasons for another change

Beneath the placid surface, however, there was a strong undercurrent. Five specific conditions made another migration inevitable. There were *personal* problems. First: financial, some could never raise the level of their income sufficiently, had spent their estate and moved back to England. Second, there were the children. Some of them were suffering under the physical strain, others were being lured to serve in the Netherlands' army, while many others were submitting to the temptations of the city. The latter conditions could

not be altered merely by Puritan influence.

There were two *political* problems. First, there was a problem of national interest. The minority status was threatening their absorption into the Dutch community. They were too patriotic to accept this foreign image. Add to that, the international problems that required the Dutch to have friendly relationships with England, because the peace with Spain was coming to an end. These pilgrims would threaten their safety by staying.

Finally, the handwriting was on the wall. Their new home was not as safe as they had assumed. There was a *persecution* beginning to reach them from England. Two books had been printed in the Netherlands which had railed the ire of James I. He wanted the culprits brought to justice. Investigation proved that William Brewster had added the printing business to his teaching of English. Though unknown to the authorities, he was in partnership with a Kentish man named Thomas Brewer. They had no open shop, but, operated behind closed doors. Their sole purpose was to supply information "about their principles".

The books in question had not been printed by these men. But by now, Brewster could no longer conceal his subterfuge. He went into hiding and they mistakenly captured Brewer, his partner,



England's Boston is the city from which the American Boston was named. The famous Puritan, John Cotton, was the bishop of its Anglican church, "The Stump", for 21 years. He became a fugitive when the high commission court began legal action against him. He was prosecuted because he refused to observe certain mandatory ceremonies in his church. He went into hiding in London, for several months, and then stealthily migrated to the colonies in 1633. He became as popular in the new Boston as he had been in the old city. He was appointed the "teacher" of the "First Church of Boston" (Congregational), until his death in 1652.

St. Botolph's Church, or "The Stump"

thinking that he was Brewster. This unmasked their entire operation. Complicated efforts by James I, to get Brewer to answer charges against him in England, failed. However, Brewer volunteered to make the trip, under a "safe conduct" agreement. He kept his word, against the strongest urging of his friends, and the English government kept theirs. But the affair made it evident that another migration was necessary.

Trying to find another home

1618 Migration was discussed in Leyden, having been prayed over for several years before they reached a final decision. What were the choices? As far back as 1572, state papers endorsed by Lord Burleigh, suggested solving the "Puritan problem" by having them all migrate to Ireland. That failed because he was unable to get the endorsement of Her Majesty.

Pastor Robinson suggested Guiana, based on a 1595 description given by Sir Walter Raleigh. He had described it as a true Eldorado, rich, with perpetual spring. They decided against that because such lands had dangerous diseases and were surrounded by dreaded Spaniards.

The other option was to appeal to the Virginia Company, operating on a patent received from King James in 1606, and governed by London merchants. A ruling spirit in the Company was Sir Edwin Sandys, a personal friend of William Brewster. The question was, could they find a guarantee of religious freedom under that grant? Under the charter, conformity to the Church of England was mandatory.

Freedom must mean "freedom"

For example; for missing a daily service, the third offense required condemnation to six months at the galleys. The punishment for missing a Sunday service, for the third time, was death. Loss of wages and whipping were the common punishments for nonconformity to the State Church.

Repeated efforts made it clear that no formal grant for liberty of worship could be obtained from the king, not even from a bishop. The fugitives appointed a day for prayer and fasting, and put the matter before the Lord. They concluded, like David in I Sam. 23:4, to go "to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thy hand."

In spite of obstacles, they were determined to pursue their destiny. In March, 1619, fifty migrants arrived in Virginia from the Amsterdam Church.

They were the sole survivors of a ship originally numbering 180. Overcrowding and disease had taken the other lives during the journey. The Leyden pilgrims were still determined to go.

1620 Dutch merchants made an overture to transport the entire group, for settlement on Manhattan, and allowed the colony to enjoy self-government in all their internal affairs. The offer was rejected on February 12, 1620, due to a disagreement over certain conditions.

Then a group of 70 London merchants came up with the proposal which the Pilgrims finally accepted. They had obtained, from the Plymouth Company, the right to a tract of land near the Hudson, along with the right of self-government.



On board the Mayflower

The shares in this company were sold for ten pounds each. The settlers were to take the colony's possessions and earnings, at the end of seven years, and divide them equally between the shareholders and the inhabitants. A contingency from England were to join the Leyden group and aid in the settlement. They would cross the Atlantic in two vessels; the "Mayflower", mastered by Thomas Jones and weighing 180 tons; and 60 ton pinnace, called the "Speedwell". The Speedwell was to remain with the colony for a year, during their settlement.

The Speedwell came to Holland to pick up the Leyden pilgrims. The Mayflower, in London at the time, was to travel to Southampton for a rendezvous, before facing the Atlantic. The ship carried the entire group, on a warm summer day,

through miles of canals to where the Speedwell was docked. The pastor, and those who were to remain behind, separated with strong hugs, floods of tears, earnest prayers and last minute cautions.

A sea going adventure

With 90 on the Mayflower, and 30 on the Speedwell, on August 5, 1620, the journey to the new world began. After battling contrary winds for three days, Captain Reynolds reported a dangerous leak in the Speedwell and the vessels had to dock at Dartmouth for repairs. She was overhauled from stem to stern, and then both ships put to sea again. The next time, 300 miles beyond Land's End, the same ship complained of another dangerous leak. Again, they both returned, this time to Plymouth. 18 passengers had grown faint-hearted, and declined to continue. They then crowded the 102 passengers onto the Mayflower and, on September 6, they turned their prow into waters, facing west.

The first half of the journey was uneventful. Then, gales came with terrific force. One gale twisted one of the main beams out of its place. Fortunately, one of the passengers had a powerful screw in his possessions, and, with his help, they were able to secure their beam. Storm succeeded storm. A passenger, John Howland, ventured

above the grating and was instantly swept overboard. Miraculously, he caught hold of a coil of the topsail-halyards that was trailing in the waters behind them, and, at some personal risk to themselves, sailors pulled him back on board.

Land at last

Land was sighted on November 9, nine weeks after leaving England, and three days after burying one of Samuel Fuller's servants. He had died during the voyage. That death was their only fatality, and the birth of one baby numerically compensated the loss.

The New England area where they landed was beyond the jurisdiction of the Virginia Company. As there was no recognized authority there, it caused an uneasiness. Some of the hired hands assumed that it meant their freedom to do as they pleased. The adult males gathered together and drafted the *Mayflower Compact*, and 41 men signed it. The document is reputed to have rested on William Brewster's clothes chest when it was signed by them.

Expeditions ventured into the area while the rest continued to lodge on the Mayflower. They were looking for a suitable site to establish their settlement. The third and final expedition set out



The Pilgrims arrive safely at their new home



The Mayflower Barn

on December 6. After they had "sounded" the harbor, the Mayflower sailed into the bay on the final lap of her momentous voyage.

The several delays in leaving England, and the severe storms on the Atlantic, caused the Pilgrims to face a most critical winter. Half of their number were buried on Cole's Hill. The rest had to level

*We owe so much . . .
to so few !*

the graves and plant over them, in order to hide the calamity from the indians.

The saga comes to an end

The senior, and the only qualified candidate, William Brewster, became their spiritual leader and "taught twice every Saboth", until the arrival of Ralph Smith in 1629. He had a library of some 400 volumes, "wore a violet-colored coat, black silk stockings, and a ruff", etc., and worked in the fields beside all the other workers.

Brewster was one of the eight who signed the colony's debts, and was greatly missed when he passed into Immanuel's Land. His funeral happend in 1643, one month before four colonies met to subscribe to the Articles of Confederation.

It was April 5, 1621 before the Mayflower hoisted her sail and set out toward the open sea, for her return voyage to England. The future of the Mayflower was uncertain. She sailed the oceans for several years, but it appears that it may have been the Mayflower which was broken up at Rotherhithe. An application was made to the Admiralty Court by Joan Jones, the captain's widow, asking that its "ruinis" be valued. It was appraised at "128 pounds, 8 shillings and 4 pence". The evidence suggests that it was sold to a farmer, living in Beaconsfield. The timber was used to construct a barn, and, as such, it still stands today.



Signing the "Compact" on the Mayflower