

**GREAT MIGRATION TOUR TO ENGLAND  
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WINTHROP FLEET**

***TOUR TALK***

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**MARY FORTH, FIRST WIFE OF JOHN WINTHROP**

As Francis Bremer points out in his biography of John Winthrop, “Adam Winthrop [John’s father] had been engaged in a Great Stambridge land transaction with John Forth and his wife, Thomasine, in 1592” [*John Winthrop: America’s Forgotten Founding Father* (Oxford, 2003), p. 89]. John Forth was the sixth and youngest son of William Forth of Hadleigh, Essex. Great Stambridge was in the southeast corner of Essex, near the mouth of the river Stour, and John Forth had come into his lands there through his marriage to Thomasine Hilles.

In November of 1604 John Winthrop made his first recorded visit to Great Stambridge, travelling from Groton, across the breadth of Essex by way of Chelmsford, in the company of William Forth of Nayland, a nephew of John Forth. During that visit John Winthrop would have met Mary Forth, the daughter and only heir of John Forth. Although John was only sixteen years old at this time, and Mary was four years older, the courtship proceeded with unusual speed, and the couple were married at Great Stambridge on 16 April 1605, when John was just three months past his seventeenth birthday. This was an unusually young age for a man of Winthrop’s status to marry, and an immediate consequence was that he had to leave Cambridge without taking a degree.

The young couple split their time between Groton and Great Stambridge in the earliest years of their marriage, and their first two children, sons John and Henry, were born and baptized at Groton, in 1606 and 1608. For the next few years they seem to have been more firmly established at Great Stambridge, where they undoubtedly lived with Mary’s family at Stewards, the house that John Forth occupied as steward of the Rich family. Their third and fourth children, son Forth and daughter Mary, were baptized at Great Stambridge on 10 January 1609/10 and 19 January 1611/2. Evidence that John Winthrop participated in local community affairs during these years is provided by his signature as witness to the wills of Toby Hudson of Little Stambridge (28 January 1611/2) and widow Sara Meade of Great Stambridge (22 June 1612). (Bremer gives further details on interactions between the Winthrop and Forth families in his Chapter 5, “Turning Points.”)

An important aspect of John Winthrop’s connection with Great Stambridge is that the parish minister who married him to Mary Forth was Ezekiel Culverwell, a leading Puritan and member of the Dedham Classis (which we will discuss in a latter issue of *Tour Talk*). Although Culverwell was deprived of his living at Great Stambridge in 1609 and would remove to London for the rest of his life, he had a profound impact on Winthrop’s

spiritual life, thus becoming an important influence on Winthrop's eventual decision to come to New England in 1630. (For a detailed discussion of the Culverwell family and their wide connections among the Puritan ministry, see NEHGR 148 (1994):107-29.)

John Forth died in 1613, at which point John Winthrop and his wife apparently moved back to Groton, for their fifth and sixth children, both named Anne, were baptized there in 1614 and 1615 and each died soon after birth. Mary (Forth) Winthrop was buried at Groton on 26 June 1615, the same day as the baptism of her sixth child.

Of the six children of John and Mary (Forth) Winthrop, two would die in infancy (the daughters Anne), two would die in young adulthood without leaving issue (Henry, who married Elizabeth Fones in 1629, came to New England in 1630, but drowned almost as soon as he arrived; and Forth, who was buried at Groton on 23 November 1630, just short of his twenty-first birthday), and two would come to New England and have extensive families (John Jr., whose career is well-known, and Mary, who by 1633 had married Samuel Dudley, son of Thomas Dudley).

## **WINTHROP FLEET IMMIGRANTS FROM SUDBURY, SUFFOLK**

Sudbury, Suffolk, was and is a substantial market town in the southwest of Suffolk, about six miles west of Groton. Even in medieval times, the town was large enough to support three parishes – St. Peter at the top of the market square and All Saints and St. Gregory each a short distance to the west.

On Thursday, 16 August, the first full day of the tour, we will spend the morning visiting all three of these churches. The coach will drop us off near St. Peter, which we will visit first. This church was rendered redundant some decades ago, and is now used for community events, such as choral recitals. We will then walk down through the market to All Saints, no more than half a mile away. Finally, we will continue our walk across town to St. Gregory, less than half a mile from All Saints. When we are finished at St. Gregory, the coach will collect us again and take us the few miles north to Long Melford, where we will have lunch and explore that village.

In the late 1620s the lecturer (preacher) at All Saints was Rev. **John Wilson**, who had attended Eton and Cambridge, at the latter of which he obtained his B.A. from King's College in 1610 and his M.A. in 1613. By about 1617, Wilson had married Elizabeth Mansfield, whose sister Anne had at about the same time married Robert Keayne, an early investor in the Massachusetts Bay Company and a 1635 immigrant to New England, where he settled in Boston [GM 2:4:127-33]. Two of John Wilson's children, John and Elizabeth, were baptized at All Saints, on 19 October 1621 and 13 March 1624/5.

John Wilson and John Winthrop were certainly known to one another by 3 February 1627/8, when Wilson wrote to Winthrop in the latter's capacity as justice of the Court of Wards and Liveries [WP 2:57-58]. When the time came to organize the Winthrop Fleet in

1630, Winthrop recruited Wilson as one of the two ministers to sail to New England in that year. For the remainder of his life, Wilson was teacher and then pastor at the First Church of Boston.

Sometime in 1629, as part of his preparation for the sailing in 1630, John Winthrop compiled a list of those heads of family who might become passengers on the Winthrop Fleet [WP 2:276]. This list was arranged in three columns, with subdivisions within each column. Not all of the persons on this list came to New England, and not all those in the Winthrop Fleet were on this list. Nevertheless, the list is an important guide to the passengers in 1630.

The last name in the first column, separated by a space from other groups in that column, was “Mr. Wilson,” presumably Rev. John Wilson. The third column is separated into two groups, the names in the second group being “Sale, Bolston, Penne, Jo[hn] Ruggles, Milles, Waterburye, Jef[rey] Ruggles, Hawkins, Gosnold, Hamond, Reeder, Redby.”

Most of these names can be identified as 1630 arrivals to New England, and many of them were from Sudbury. In *The Great Migration Begins* are sketches for **Jeffrey Ruggles** and **John Ruggles**, noting that Jeffrey was from Sudbury, Suffolk, but not providing much information on him. There was also a sketch for a George Ruggles, who appeared in Boston in 1633, with a suggestion that he might be related to John Ruggles, although no origin was suggested for either of these men [GMB 1604-9]. Since those sketches were published, Myrtle Stevens Hyde FASG of Salt Lake City has undertaken extensive research on the Ruggles family, and in unpublished work has demonstrated that Jeffrey and John were both baptized at All Saints, Sudbury, and that they were brothers, sons of a George Ruggles. She has found two marriages for each of these men and baptismal records for several children of each, at all three of the Sudbury parishes. As it turns out, the George Ruggles of Boston was the eldest son of John Ruggles, and delayed his migration to New England until his marriage in England in early 1633. Furthermore, the eldest daughter of John Ruggles was Phillip Ruggles, baptized in 1599 and by 1616 married to George Hammond. She is, therefore, “Phillip Hammond widow” who was admitted to Boston church in late 1630 and also the “Hamond” in Winthrop’s 1629 list [GMB 850].

**William Waterbury** had settled in Boston in 1630 [GMB 1939-40]. Although previous researchers had noted records for a man of this name at Sudbury, we expressed some doubt about this identification because of tight chronology in later generations of the family. Given the presence of “Waterburye” in Winthrop’s 1629 list in close proximity to other Sudbury immigrants, we are prepared to reverse those doubts, and will undertake further research on the dates for his son and granddaughter in an attempt to relieve the chronological concerns.

Another couple who were admitted to Boston church in late 1630 were “**Henry Gosnall** and Mary his wife” [GMB 795]. On 16 January 1625/6, Henry Gosnall and Mary Howlen were married at All Saints, Sudbury. Again, based on the appearance of “Gosnold” in

Winthrop's list, we believe that this marriage is for the Winthrop Fleet passengers to New England. No children have been found for this couple.

Finally, while examining the All Saints registers for further details on all of these families, the baptism on 28 October 1626 of "Elizabeth, daughter of William Bolston," was found. **William Baulston**, who settled in Boston in 1630, had a daughter Elizabeth, whose birth we had estimated as "say 1628" and who was the only child of this immigrant known to have been born before his arrival in New England, and so we believe that the origin of this Winthrop Fleet passenger has been found [GMB 133-37].

The surname Reeder is also found in Sudbury parish records in the 1620s, but no Great Migration immigrant of that surname is known. No Sudbury records for the other surnames in this part of Winthrop's 1629 list have been found.

Also, there are many more Great Migration immigrants from Sudbury who came to New England after 1630, some related to the Ruggles family. These families will be discussed in a future issue of *Tour Talk*.

## **PARISH CHURCH ARCHITECTURE – THE ICONOCLASTS**

In the fourteenth, fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the devotional activities of the English laity proliferated in many directions. The centrality of the Eucharist to the Mass led to a wide variety of rituals, including processions around the churchyard and around the village and worship of the host at the moment of transubstantiation. Associated with these rituals were such objects as the monstrance, which held the host for adoration, and the pyx, where the host was housed.

Veneration of the saints was raised to new levels. More and more holy days were declared in honor of a large number of saints. Extensive participation in church services on these holy days made serious inroads in the daily routines of parishioners at all social and economic levels, with the result that much working time was lost, especially at harvest season.

Eamon Duffy has prepared a massive, detailed account of these phenomena, the first half of his book covering the years before the English Reformation of the 1530s, and the second half describing the results of the early decades of the Reformation [*The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven, 1992, 2005)].

The physical manifestations of these pious practices were seen everywhere in the parish churches. Most prominently, every church had a rood screen and associated rood loft dividing the nave from the chancel. The rood, or cross, was mounted on the nave side of the wall above the chancel arch. A wooden screen filled much of the space between the nave and chancel, and on this screen might be painted images of various saints. The worship of these saints involved the placement of candles before the images on certain days of the liturgical year.

The walls of the churches would be covered with paintings of Biblical scenes, as an aid to the devotions of the parishioners. In a period when most of the congregation were illiterate, and when everything was in Latin, these painted images served as “laymen’s books.”

When Henry VIII and his ministers broke with Rome in the 1530s, they took many actions to carry out this separation. Most famous, of course, was the dissolution of the monasteries. At the same time Cromwell and Cranmer attempted to expunge those features of lay piety which they felt were associated with the church at Rome, and which were not supported by scripture. They attempted to outlaw the veneration of the saints, and so discontinued many of the holy days. This was in part a practical matter, in hopes of regaining some of the economic productivity which had been lost to the endless fast days and processions and other interruptions.

They also tried to remove the physical concomitants of these pious practices. Roods and rood screens were torn down. Wall paintings were scraped off or painted over. Statues were removed or defaced. Stained glass windows were demolished.

These iconoclastic activities were not immediately successful in all places and occurred in waves of destruction. Even at the time of the break with Rome, the traditional forces were still strong. In some dioceses the destruction of images was widespread, while in others little was done. When Cromwell was overthrown, the traditionalists were able to slow down the work of the reformers. Iconoclastic activities increased again during the brief reign of Edward VI, then were reversed upon the accession of Queen Mary. Then again, the work of destruction resumed when Queen Elizabeth came to the throne, but she tempered the work of the reformers in all their activities.

So, by the 1620s and 1630s, when the Puritan reformers were again on the rise, there was still work for the iconoclasts to do. Thus, the Great Migration immigrants to New England would have experienced parish churches relatively impoverished in their religious decorations and imagery, by comparison with their ancestors three or four generations earlier. But there were still some manifestations of the old ways in those years, so that when another Cromwell came to power in the 1640s, the iconoclasts were unleashed one more time.

In our visits to several churches during the tour, we will search out the remaining evidence for these old features of the medieval pious activities of the churchgoers. In many churches, some of the paintings have been uncovered and may still be seen. In other churches we will find the cramped stairways that led up to the rood loft, but little or no sign of the rood loft itself.

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