

# **William Brewster - Pilgrim Father**

## **Malcolm Dolby**

William Brewster's date and place of birth are uncertain, but in 1609 he declared himself to be 'aged about 42 years', so his birth lays around 1567.

His father was also named William. William Brewster Sr was a resident of Scrooby in 1571 and from 1575 he held the position of Bailiff of the Archbishop of York's estates at Scrooby and Master of the Queen's Posts, living at Scrooby Manor House.

A little more detail is known about the life of William Brewster Jr. On 3 December 1580 he is recorded as entering Peterhouse College, Cambridge as a pensioner (a student who paid rent for his lodgings), although there is no record of his length of stay at Cambridge. Around 1583 Brewster entered the service of William Davison, Secretary of State to Queen Elizabeth I, and her representative in the Netherlands in 1585. Brewster was probably ranked as assistant or secretary to his master.

However, around 1588 Brewster seems to have arrived back in Scrooby, where he assisted his father until the latter's death in 1590. Following his father's death but not immediately, Brewster was appointed to his father's position as Master of the Queen's Posts, bailiff and receiver at Scrooby.

Brewster was married to Mary around 1591-2. Mary had five children Jonathan (baptised 12 August 1593), Patience, a daughter named Fear, and two sons named Love and Wrestling.

In 1606 Brewster appears to have been a member of the Gainsborough Separatist Church led by John Smyth. After Smyth was obliged to leave the country for Holland, Brewster's home, Scrooby Manor House, became the meeting place for the Separatist Church. On 30 September 1607

Brewster resigned his position at Scrooby and became outlawed for his separatist views. After a period of imprisonment at Boston with other leading members of the Scrooby Church, Brewster eventually reached Amsterdam in 1608 and rejoined John Smyth's church. In the following year

Brewster left Amsterdam with other members of the Scrooby church and settled in Leyden. Brewster's eldest child Jonathan was married in Leyden in the same year.

In 1620 Brewster left England on board the ship Mayflower as the elder of the Separatist group later known as the Pilgrim Fathers. They became the founders of Plymouth colony in New England.

Brewster's daughter Patience married Thomas Prentice in 1624, and his daughter Fear married Isaac Allerton two years later.

On 18 April 1643 Brewster died, aged about 77.