The Pilgrim Fathers Story Begins

The story begins hundreds of years ago in 16th Century Bassetlaw, in North Nottinghamshire England, where church congregations, in the villages of Babworth, Scrooby & Sturton-le-Steeple wanted to reform the church system in England - they were called Separatists and believed in greater freedom of worship and religious tolerance. However, their views fell foul of the Crown to such an extent that their lives were in danger.

Mid 18th century engraving of Scrooby

Two of the leading Separatists were a Scrooby postmaster called William Brewster and a parson from Babworth called Richard Clyfton. Fearing for their lives they left their homes and possessions behind and fled with their families to Holland. Soon, because of social and political changes, they were in danger and a group of Separatists, including William Brewster, decided to leave for a new life - in America.

A Terrible Journey

William Brewster, his wife Mary and their nine-year-old son Love reached North America in November 1620 and played a major part in founding the new society.

Showing Cramped Conditions on board the Mayflower

They were packed into a ship called the Mayflower - the length of just two double decker buses.

There were no beds or hammocks and they slept in the cold and wet, lying on the leaking decks and lifeboat, sharing their space with rats.
Food was scarce. There was no fresh meat and only a little water, and violent storms caused sea sickness and swept one of the passengers into the raging sea - amazingly, a giant wave swept him back onto the boat.

They endured 30-foot waves and the gales were so severe that the ship began to leak, but luckily the Pilgrims had tools which they used to repair the damage.

On 9th November 1620, just as they were about to give up hope, land was spotted - Cape Cod on the east coast of North America - over 3,000 miles from the start of their journey in Bassetlaw, North Nottinghamshire.

**A New Life - 3,000 Miles From Bassetlaw**

To their joy, the Pilgrims found a land, which was similar to Bassetlaw with cornfields, timber and rivers, which were teeming with fish. They set up a new colony called Plimoth - now modern Plymouth, Massachusetts - and formed close ties with the local Indians. The early years were harsh - half of the original Pilgrims died - but the settlement eventually flourished.

William Brewster enjoyed a senior position as the ruling Elder in the new society until his death on 10th April 1644 aged 78. When the colony became established his daughters crossed the Atlantic to join him and raised their own families.
Thanksgiving Day
The anniversary of the first harvest by the Pilgrims is now celebrated by millions of Americans as Thanksgiving Day. To celebrate the first harvest, the Pilgrims enjoyed a massive feast of cod, seabass and wildfowl - a far cry from the hardship of their voyage.

Pilgrim Facts

- In the Museum and at the Public Library in Worksop, North Nottinghamshire, there is an exhibition which is dedicated to “The Pilgrim Fathers' Story”.
- During the Mayflower voyage, one man died and one child was born - he was appropriately named Oceanus.
- It is estimated that the 102 Pilgrim Fathers now have over one million direct descendants living in the United States.
- Bassetlaw's Tudor architecture helped to form the basis for the famous timber framed buildings of Massachusetts. Some of these American buildings survive to this day. The stone and brick buildings associated with the Pilgrims still remain, including the Parish Churches at Babworth and Scrooby, plus Scrooby Manor House, the home of William Brewster.
- Ironically meetings of the Separatist Church, which had been outlawed by the Church of England, were held at Scrooby Manor House, which was owned by the Archbishop of York - the second highest prelate in the Church of England.
- It was the native Indians - despite their fearsome image - who helped ensure the Pilgrims' survival by showing the settlers how to farm the new land.

The Mayflower Trail
This is a circular tour of 38-40 miles visiting the historic villages and sites of Pilgrim Fathers' Country, in North Nottinghamshire. The tour will take approximately half a day, allowing you to complete the trail at an unhurried pace.

The tour includes visits to the following sites:

Babworth
The village of Babworth is two miles from the A1 and just outside of the market town of Retford. In 1503 Margaret Tudor, then only 14, stopped here on her way to marry King James IV of Scotland.

All Saints' Church
The origins of religious Separatism are closely connected with the rectory and church of Babworth.
Richard Clyfton was parson here from 1586 to 1605 and two of his friends were William Brewster and William Bradford, later to be Pilgrim Fathers on the Mayflower. The church contains many interesting items recalling the Pilgrim Fathers. At the side of the church a track known as the "Pilgrim Way" leads north.

All Saints' Church, Babworth

Babworth to Scrooby

The A638, England's Old Great North Road, the former haunt of the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin, leads to Scrooby. William Brewster who worked as "Master of the Postes" would have known of the exploits of Dick Turpin. Before arriving at Scrooby you will pass Ye Olde Bell Hotel at Barnby Moor, a famous old posting house for mail coaches, where Queen Victoria and her mother once stayed.

Scrooby

Scrooby existed as a settlement in 958 AD, then named Scroppenthorp, the property of the Archbishops of York. The Archbishops developed a Manor House in the village, but it's main claim to fame is that William Brewster resided here.

St Wilfrid's Church

The church lies in the centre of the village, where William Brewster was brought up. On the death of his father he inherited the appointment of bailiff to the Archbishops' estates and lived at the Manor House. It was here that became the meeting place for those who desired to worship according to the dictates of their own conscience. Brewster was fined for non attendance at St Wilfrid's Church.
St. Wilfred's Church, Scrooby

Scrooby Manor House

Located to the north of the church, the Manor House can be viewed from Station Road. Access to this private property is by arrangement only. The site was formerly occupied by the mediaeval Manor House or Palace of the Archbishops of York. It was visited by successive Archbishops and their many royal guests. In 1606-7 William Brewster held meetings of the Scrooby Separatist congregation here with William Bradford and Richard Clyfton.

Scrooby to Austerfield

The A638 leads north into South Yorkshire, passing through the lively market town of Bawtry.

Take the A614 to Austerfield, home of William Bradford.

Austerfield

Bradford was born in this Yorkshire village in the winter of 1589-90.

St Helena's Church

Bradford was christened in the village church. In 1591 his father died and he was sent to live with his grandfather. As a young man he grew increasingly interested in the scriptures.
St. Helena's Church, Austerfield.

He was so inspired by Richard Clyfton that he regularly walked the eight miles to Babworth, to hear him preach. Although not having a university education Bradford rose to become one of the principal figures in 17th century New England, being Governor form 1621 until his death in 1657. It is thanks to his writings that we have details of the lives of the Separatists in England, Holland and New England.

Austerfield to Gainsborough

From Bawtry the A631 leads towards Gainsborough, crossing into the town over the River Trent.

Great Hall, Gainsborough Old Hall

This is a large timber framed mediaeval manor house and one of the most complete to survive in the country. From 1596 to 1720 it was the home of the Hickman family.
Gainsborough Old Hall

The Hickmans had sympathetic leanings towards Separatists. It seems possible that they gave their patronage to John Smyth, who had regular meetings at Gainsborough. Amongst his congregation were William Bradford, William Brewster and John Robinson. Brewster's Manor House at Scrooby is believed to have looked very like Gainsborough Old Hall in the early 17th century.

Gainsborough to Babworth

Returning to Babworth west via the A631, then south via the A620 to Sturton-le-Steeple, the birthplace of John Robinson, one of the leaders of the Separatist movement in 1578. He joined the Separatist congregation at Scrooby as a teacher, later becoming their pastor in Leyden, in Holland, where he died in 1625.

Rejoining the A620 at North Wheatley, an attractive rural village and home of Hugh Bromhead, one of the Gainsborough Separatists.

The A620 continues via the villages of Clarborough and Welham, to the market town of Retford. Retford is full of history and interesting buildings (further details from the Tourist Information Centre in the town).