

Wish You Were Here!

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This is the story of people who wanted to be free to live their lives according to their own religious teachings.

It begins in England, but it will take these people to Europe and then across the ocean to America.

Four hundred years ago, Worksop was a small market town. It bought and sold the produce from the surrounding farms and brought in things that couldn't be made locally.

Most people lived in houses made from wood, although the very rich had fine stone houses.

At this time, there was fighting between different groups of Christians across the whole of Europe. This also happened in England. Some people were driven from their homes, and some had even been killed.

William Brewster was born near Worksop in 1568 and was a wealthy educated man. He worked for the English ambassador to Holland for a while, and then became postmaster.

He and his wife had lived through some violent changes in England's religion and had joined a group who wanted religion to be centred on the family and community and separate from the official church.

The government was afraid of groups like this, and they tried to ban them from meeting.

Wanting the freedom to worship as they thought right, William, his family and others tried to flee to Holland.

Their first attempt to leave the country failed, they were captured by the government and imprisoned in Boston. Eventually they were released, only to make a second attempt to flee, via the Humber, which succeeded.

In Holland they were allowed to meet and worship as they wanted.

Although William and his friends were safe for a while in Holland, it was hard for some to find work and there was a threat of war between Holland and Spain.

So William and others organised two ships to take them to America where they would start a new community in a new land.

Together and with the help of rich merchants they bought two ships. The Mayflower, a large cargo ship, and the Speedwell, a smaller passenger ship. The ships were old and needed repairs before they were ready to set sail.

To cross the Atlantic ocean and reach America would take two months. The ships needed supplies for this time and all the food, clothing and tools the passengers would need when they arrived in a new land.

On the first two attempts, the Speedwell started to leak and they turned back before it sank. Then the Mayflower started again on its own.

It was a dangerous journey with many days of storms. There wasn't much space for the passengers and people were ill and afraid.

At last, they sighted the eastern shore of America.

Everyone wanted to get off the cramped ship, but there were still dangers.

It was agreed that the passengers would stay on board while small boats went out to find a safe landing place.

So William, his family and his friends stayed on the ship at anchor at a place called Cape Cod, and made prayers of thanks for their safe arrival.

The land that the Mayflower had arrived at was the home of a people called the Wampanoag. This was a confederation of several tribes of hunters, farmers and fishermen.

As it was winter, the people had left their coastal homes and were gathered in larger villages inland.

When the crew of the small boats found a Wampanoag village, it was deserted. Desperate for food, the sailors took the food that the Wampanoag had stored for the next year.

Because the Mayflower had drifted off course, the passengers did not have permission from the King of England to form a colony. To overcome this they drew up an agreement to govern themselves until permission could be obtained. This was called the Mayflower Covenant.

They didn't ask permission of the Wampanoag.

Once the weather had improved, the colonists began building a settlement like the ones that had been built in Ireland called Plantations.

This would be named after the port they had departed from - Plymouth.

The leader, or Sachem, of the Wampanoag was a man called Massasoit. He carried the great Wampum belt that recorded the Wampanoag's history and constitution.

Despite the fact that the colonists had taken food from Wampanoag villages and settled on Wampanoag lands, he decided to make peace with the new arrivals.

The Wampanoag helped the colonists with growing crops, hunting and fishing.

Over time, the colony grew, and prospered. More colonists arrived from England and fish and produce were sent back to pay off the merchants that had funded the journey.

Today New England is a State of America and all across the country Americans descended from European colonists celebrate the establishment of New Plymouth with the holiday of Thanksgiving. The Thanksgiving dinner represents the food shared with the colonists by the Wampanoag.

The Wampanoag, however, have no reason to celebrate. The peace between them and the colonists did not last. Their great Sachem was killed and the Wampum taken. It is now lost.

Only a small number of this once numerous tribe survive on small parcels of land granted by the State government. There is a fear that they in years to come may even lose what little they have.

Despite these fears the Wampanoag are still maintaining their language and traditions and have begun weaving a new Wampum belt to inspire future generations.