

The 17th-Century Great Migration to New England and Beyond
Conventicles, Companies, Congregations, Dispersal
Class 1: Conventicles and Godly Households
Robert Charles Anderson, FASG
THE BRUE FAMILY LEARNING CENTER
AmericanAncestors.
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Meet today's presenter



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OVERVIEW

- **Presentation (60 mins.)**
 - Course overview
 - English Reformation
- **Q&A (30 mins.)**

Overview

- Narrative of networking of migration and religion over three centuries (1550 to 1850), from old England to New England to American West
- Conventicles: private reformed meetings in old England (Lesson One)
- Companies: organized migrating groups in the 1630 and 1640s (Lessons Two and Three)
- Congregations: new groupings in early New England (Lesson Four)
- Diaspora: filling the American West (Lesson Five)

Overview of English Reformation

- Henry VIII (Part One)
- Henry VIII (Part Two)
- Edward VI
- Mary
- Elizabeth I
- James I
- Charles I



Marian Exiles

- Mary took the throne in 1553 with the aim of taking the Church of England back to Rome.
- Her actions were initially mild, but became more draconian within a year or so, eventually resulting in about 300 executions.
- About 800 English men, women, and children left for the Continent, mostly in Germany and Switzerland.
- Alexander Nowell (c1517-1602), eventually Dean of St. Paul's, joined this migration.
- Increase Nowell (1593-1655), greatnephew of Alexander, came to New England in 1630. [PP 79-105]



Prophesying I

- “Exercises in prophesying” were “conferences of the preaching clergy devoted to systematic Biblical exposition” which arose in the 1560s.
- Became very popular in the 1570s, with extensive participation of laymen.
- These sessions could consider theological positions antithetical to the Elizabethan Settlement.
- In June 1576 Elizabeth issued an order to suppress prophesying.



Prophesying II

- Edmund Grindal (1519-1583) was president of Pembroke College, Cambridge, when Mary took the throne; in 1554 he decamped for Strasbourg.
- He returned to England in 1559 and was made Bishop of London, then in 1568 Archbishop of York and in 1575 Archbishop of Canterbury.
- Grindal had only been in office a few months when he received Elizabeth’s order. He refused to comply and was sidelined for the last few years of his life. [PP 144-47]



Prophesying III

- William Wilson (1542-1615) became chaplain to Grindal shortly after 1576 and in 1579 married Grindal’s niece, Isabel Woodhall, at Lambeth, Surrey. [PP 147-61]
- At Grindal’s death in 1583, Wilson became canon of St. George’s chapel at Windsor.
- William’s son John Wilson (c1591-1667) attended Eton and then King’s College, Cambridge.
- During the 1620s he was lecturer at All Saints Sudbury, Suffolk.

Classis System

- After the demise of prophesying, the classis system arose, which was basically prophesying without laymen.
- A classis was a group of reform-minded ministers, one or more to a county. They gathered to engage in Bible interpretation, and also to train and find positions for young ministers.
- The only surviving records are for the Dedham classis, organized in 1582, which comprised ministers at several parishes along the Stour River in eastern Essex and Suffolk.
- Suppressed in 1589 in the wake of the Spanish Armada and other contemporary events.



QUESTIONS?

Thomas Stoughton

- Thomas Stoughton (c1557-1622) was born at Sandwich, Kent, and took his degrees at Cambridge [BA 1577; MA 1580].
- By 1582 Stoughton was a preacher in East Anglia and a founding and active member of the Dedham Classis. He held livings at Naughton, Suffolk, Great Burstead, Essex, and Coggeshall, Essex.
- In 1606 he was deprived of his living and eventually returned to Sandwich where he died. He was remembered in many wills in Kent and East Anglia.
- His son John became a minister and moved to Aller, Somerset, where he made connections with the puritan network there.
- Most of the rest of his surviving children migrated to New England: sons Thomas and Israel and several daughters. [PP 215-45]

Conventicles

- “A religious meeting of a private, clandestine, or illegal kind; a meeting for the exercise of religion otherwise than as sanctioned by law.” [Oxford English Dictionary]
- Can be led by a minister or a layman.
- May be held on Sabbath or not.
- Not held in church.
- No sacraments.

Sudbury, Suffolk

- John Wilson was lecturer at All Saints, Sudbury, from 1620 until 1630, when he sailed for New England.
- On 24 January 1632/3, “Alice Blower wife of Thomas Blower of the parish of St. Peter in Sudbury” was presented at the Court of High Commission “for the holding of private conventicles” about three years earlier and found to be “a pragmatial, audacious and busy woman and one that taking upon her the practice of surgery and the office of a midwife had opportunity to dissuade many silly persons men and women from their obedience to the laws and order of the Church of England.”
- Alice sailed for New England in 1634. [PP 164-70]

Limehouse, Stepney, Middlesex

- 26 December 1633: Eighteen people from Limehouse, including “Ralph Shepherd & Thancklord his wife,” presented for attending a conventicle, led by Shepherd.
- Over the next six months the case of “Ralph Shepard, of Limehouse, tailor,” was brought before the court on several more occasions; charges against all others were dropped.
- On 30 June 1635, Ralph Shepard (29), Thanks Shepard (23), and Sarah Shepard (2) sailed for New England.
- From 1635 to 1650 they lived at Watertown, Dedham, and Weymouth, without joining church.
- In 1650 they moved to Malden when Rev. Marmaduke Matthews moved there. [PP 170-73; GM 2:6:262-69]

Godly Households

- “The Winthrops maintained a godly household, in which the family, including servants, gathered in the morning for prayer and scriptural readings, and repeated the activity in the evening. On the Lord’s Day, after returning from the church service in the morning, the household might gather again in the afternoon or evening to discuss the sermon delivered that day.” [PP 47-48]
- Unlike a conventicle, a godly household was legal if limited to members of one household.
- Usually met more frequently than a conventicle.

John Bruen

- John Bruen (1560-1626) was born into an affluent Cheshire family and lived a sporting life until the death of his father in 1587, at which time the son experienced a spiritual rebirth.
- “At this point Bruen established a rigorous program of religious discipline in his extensive household, with all family members, including sermons, taking part in prayer, Psalm-singing, and Bible readings in the morning and evening.” [PP 125]
- Charged in episcopal court with running a conventicle, but apparently not convicted.
- Son Obadiah Bruen came to New England in 1640.



Ignatius Jurdaine

- Ignatius Jurdaine (1561-1640) in his will bequeathed to “the poor of Lyme where he was born and to the poor of Gernesey where I was new born.”
- He was a wealthy Exeter merchant who maintained a godly household, similar to Bruen’s. On one occasion, Jurdaine “wrote to his Bishop in defense of some of his neighbors who had been accused of running a conventicle”.
- Three of his daughters married men who removed early to New England: JOHN COGGAN {1633, Dorchester, GMB 401}; NATHANIEL DUNCAN {1633, Dorchester, GMB 595} and WILLIAM HILL {1633, Dorchester, GMB 937}. [PP 336-38]

Jacob-Lathrop Church

- Henry Jacob (1563-1624) established a semi-separatist congregation in London in 1616.
- John Lothrop (1584-1653) was born at Etton, Yorkshire, matriculated at Oxford, but received his degrees from Cambridge. Between 1609 and 1624 he was curate at Little Chart, Kent, and then at Egerton, Kent.
- In 1624 he joined the Jacob church and was chosen pastor there in 1625, following the death of Jacob.
- He had children baptized at Eastwell, Kent, in 1624 and 1626.
- In 1634 he migrated to New England, settling at Scituate and then removing to Barnstable. [GM 2:4:345-51]

Some Arithmetic

- Thesis of continuity of conventicles to companies to congregations to diaspora
- 4,000,000: population of England 1630
- 20,000: number of migrants to New England 1620 to 1630
- 100: number of ministers
- How many godly persons in England?
- Average size of migrating companies?

QUESTIONS?

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The 17th-Century Great Migration to New England and Beyond 2024

Thank you for registering for the online seminar, *The 17th-Century Great Migration to New England and Beyond: Conventicles, Companies, Congregations, Dispersal!*

The participants in the 17th-century Great Migration to New England were drawn from the most committed English protestant reformers, those who most wanted the Church of England to make a full break with the Church of Rome. In this five-week course, Director of the Great Migration Study Project Robert Charles Anderson will explain the who, what, and why of the mass movement of people to New England from Old England in the 1620s and 1630s and the subsequent migrations in the generations to follow.

The colonists to New England in the early 17th century were largely men and women who began to form networks across England as early as the 1520s, meeting together in conventicles and godly households. As the decades passed, many of these reformers became more and more frustrated as one monarch after another refused to make the desired reforms. A breaking point was reached in the 1620s and a small stream of English men, women and children began to move to the New World. The pace of migration increased in the later 1630s, when thousands of migrants crossed the Atlantic each year. They were organized in companies, led by a minister or an affluent layman, based on the existing conventicles. Initially, many of the members of these migrating companies settled together in one New England town, but they soon began a process of sorting themselves out in different ways. Traces of the old English connections may still be seen decades later, even so late as the settlement of the American West two centuries on. Don't miss this opportunity to explore the 300-year sweep of history and the context surrounding your early 'immigrant ancestors' movement!

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