

English Origin of Roger, Ann, and William Billings of Dorchester, Massachusetts

Rachelle Child and Helen Schatvet Ullmann

There were three Billings in early Dorchester, Massachusetts: Roger Billings, his sister Ann (Billings) Gill, and William Billings, who moved to Stonington, Connecticut.

Roger “Billindge” was admitted to the Dorchester church on “9^{no}: 4 mo [June]:1640.”^[1] He died in Dorchester on 15 November 1683^[2] at age 63, and was buried in the Hancock Cemetery^[3] in what is now Quincy, Massachusetts.^[4] Assuming his age at death was accurately reported, he was born about 1620.^[5]

Roger’s sister Ann, wife of John Gill of Milton, Massachusetts, made her will on 16 July 1683 naming “my loveing brother Roger Billings Sen^r of Dorchester” her executor.^[6] While Ann was probably the “goodwife Gill” admitted to the Dorchester church on 20 November 1640, a few months after Roger,^[7] that might have been an otherwise unknown first wife of John Gill. The John Gill baptized there on 23 November 1640 “went to Boston,” but that annotation must have been added years later.^[8] John and Ann (Billings) Gill’s daughter Rebecca was baptized in Dorchester on 7 July 1650.^[9] John was “of Boston” when he made his will on 8 October 1678, naming wife Anne and daughter Rebecca, wife of Joseph Belcher.^[10] Unfortunately, since Rebecca was Ann’s only known child, we have no way of estimating her birth date. It may be that earlier children died young or that Ann had trouble carrying children.

¹ *Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England, 1636–1734* (Boston: G. H. Ellis, 1891), 5.

² *[Twenty-first] Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston Containing Dorchester Births, Marriages, and Deaths to the End of 1825* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1890), 31.

³ Dr. Wm. S. Pattee, “Quincy Inscriptions,” *Register* 9 (1855):152; Waldo Chamberlain Sprague, *Genealogies of the Families of Braintree, Mass., 1640–1850*, CD-ROM (Boston: NEHGS, 2001), ref. #666, read from “his well preserved gravestone in Hancock Cem., Quincy.” Sprague worked in the 1940s and 1950s.

⁴ While Quincy was incorporated from part of Braintree in 1792, it was only in 1814 that “that part of Dorchester called ‘Squantum and the farms’” was annexed (William Francis Galvin, *Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities and Towns in Massachusetts*, 5th ed. [Boston: NEHGS, 1997], 95).

⁵ Helen Schatvet Ullmann, CG, FASG, *Some Descendants of Roger Billings of Dorchester, Massachusetts* (Boston: Newbury Street Press, 2012), 1.

⁶ Suffolk County Probate, 6:424.

⁷ *Records of the First Church at Dorchester* [note 1], 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁰ Suffolk County Probate, 6:286; 12 (New Series):282.

As for William, he was married in Dorchester on “12. 12. [January] 57,” i.e., 1657/8, to Mary ____.^[11] He moved to Stonington, Connecticut, where he died on 16 March 1712/3, having made a will on 3 October 1712, proved 14 April 1713, naming wife Mary, children William, Lydia, Margaret, Mary, Dorothy, Marcy, Patience, and Ebenezer, daughter Abigail’s four daughters (unnamed), and grandchildren Beriah “Greant” and Mary “Leeays”[?]^[12] One reading of William’s gravestone in the 1920s says he “died in the 85th year of his age.”^[13] Unfortunately the stone in the Old Plain Cemetery in Stonington is no longer legible.^[14] If the age is accurate, he was born about 1629.

Earlier articles on these Billings state that Roger and William came from Taunton, Somerset.^[15] This theory, however, was proved to be fraudulent by Paul C. Reed in 1999.^[16] Recently, author Rachele Child found entries in the parish registers of Prescott, Lancashire, which appear to belong to this family. Rainford/Rainforth/Raynforth was a chapelry in the northern part of Prescott.

First, from *The Parish Register of Prescott, 1573–1631*:^[17]

Baptisms:

Raynforth	Roger fs. Richardi Billindge	25 July 1620	p. 72
Rainforth	Anna fa. Rici Billindge	2 April 1622	p. 77
Raynforth	Johannes fs. Richardi Billing	6 November 1627	p. 90
Rainforth	Willus fs. Richi: Bellinge	24 April 1631	p. 100

Burials:

Rainforth	Margareta fa. Rici Billings	3 May 1618	p. 192
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Then from *The Register of Prescott Parish Church Part II: 1632–1666*:^[18]

Baptisms:

Rd.	Margerata fa. Richardi Billinge	22 September 1633	p. 3
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Burials:

Rd.	Eliz: us. Richardi Billindge	27 September 1633	p. 74
Rd.	Richardus Billinge	16 December 1640	p. 85

¹¹ *Dorchester Births, Marriages, and Deaths to the End of 1825* [note 2], 20.

¹² New London District Probate, File 549, the date of death on the inventory.

¹³ Creighton Spencer-Mounsey, “The Billings Family of Connecticut,” *Register* 81 (1927):136.

¹⁴ Of three photographs of the gravestone at FindaGrave.com, memorial no. 6823325, one has been touched up to read “85 year,” and the others are illegible.

¹⁵ Harold Ward Dana, “Roger Billings of Milton, Mass., and Some of His Descendants,” *Register* 92 (1938): 261, probably copying from Spencer-Mounsey, “Billings Family of Connecticut” [note 13], *Register* 81:156.

¹⁶ Paul C. Reed, “The Fraudulent Ancestry of Roger¹ and William¹ Billing(s) of Dorchester, Massachusetts,” *The American Genealogist* 74 (1999):28–30.

¹⁷ F. V. Driffeld, ed., *The Parish Register of Prescott, 1573–1631*, Lancashire Parish Register Society, Vol. 76 (Preston, Lancs., 1938). Abbreviations: fa. = *filia*; fs. = *filius*.

¹⁸ Robert Dickinson and Florence Dickinson, *The Register of Prescott Parish Church Part II: 1632–1666*, Lancashire Parish Register Society, Vol. 114 (Leyland, Lancs., 1975). Abbreviations: Rd. = Rainford; us. = *uxor*.

Unfortunately, no probate has been found for Richard or Elizabeth Billings/Billenge. But the dates for Roger, Ann, and William, children of Richard and Elizabeth, coincide with what we know of them in New England:

- Roger's age at death suggests that he was born in or about 1620.
- Ann could have married about age 17 and joined the Dorchester Church in 1640.
- If William's age at death was slightly rounded off to his 85th year, he could well have been born in 1631.

Other Dorchester residents came from the same area. Roger Billings and his son Ebenezer had several real estate dealings with four sons of John¹ Glover,^[19] who was baptized in Prescot 12 August 1600. Glover came to Boston in 1635 and to Dorchester in 1636.^[20] He almost certainly came with Richard Mather, minister in Dorchester, who had frequently preached in Prescot.^[21]

Two more connections are worth mentioning. The curate of St. Helen's chapel in Prescot from 1628 to 1637 was George Moxon, who came to New England in 1637 and first settled in Dorchester, although he soon joined Pynchon in Springfield and then returned to England in 1652, perhaps in sympathy with Pynchon.^[22] St. Helen's and Rainford were adjacent chapels in the parish of Prescot, and it seems likely the Billings siblings sailed for New England with Moxon in 1637.^[23] Edward Breck of Dorchester was also of Rainford in Prescot, first seen in New England in 1638, so he may also have come with Moxon.^[24]

Finally, note that Roger² Billings named a son William, born in Dorchester 27 July 1686 and baptized there 29 August 1686.^[25] And Ebenezer² Billings named his first son Richard.^[26]

Further research in English records has revealed a number of wills, some of which mention a Richard Billings or Billenge, particularly in the chapelry of Billenge in the parish of Wigan, Lancashire, which is adjacent to Rainford. However, none of them shows a relationship with Richard of Rainford. The visitation of "Billenge of Billenge" in 1664–1665 presents a long line of Billings

¹⁹ Ullmann, *Descendants of Roger Billings* [note 5], 6–7, 9, 16–17.

²⁰ Robert Charles Anderson, *The Great Migration: Immigrants to New England 1634–1635, Volume III, G–H* (Boston: NEHGS, 2003), 72–76 (John Glover).

²¹ Robert Charles Anderson, *The Great Migration: Immigrants to New England, 1634–1635, Volume V, M–P* (Boston: NEHGS, 2007), 84–90 (Richard Mather); R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), 141 n. 100.

²² Susan Hardman Moore, *Abandoning America* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2013), 213–214.

²³ The earliest record for Roger Billings is his admission to the church in Dorchester on 9 June 1640 (see note 1), which implies that he had arrived in New England in 1639 or even earlier.

²⁴ Doris Schreiber Willcox, "Edward¹ Breck's Baptismal Record and Identification of His 'Daughter Blake,'" *Register* 164 (2010):175. Our thanks to Robert Charles Anderson, FASG, for these connections and the related citations.

²⁵ *Records of the First Church at Dorchester* [note 1], 198–99; Ullmann, *Descendants of Roger Billings* [note 5], 12–13.

²⁶ Ullmann, *Descendants of Roger Billings* [note 5], 19.

with the name Richard appearing in several generations.^[27] However, none of them fit chronologically with a man having children in the 1620s, nor do any entries in the parish registers of Wigan.

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²⁷ Rev. F. R. Raines, ed., *The Visitation of the County Palatine of Lancaster, Made in the Year 1664–5, by Sir William Dugdale, Knight*, 3 vols. (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1872–1873), 1:30. The authors thank Clifford L. Stott, CG, AG, FASG, for his assistance researching the wills and this visitation.