

# William Brewster

**William Brewster**, (born 1567, England—died April 1644, Plymouth, Massachusetts [U.S.]), leader of the Plymouth Colony in New England.

Brewster spent his early life at Scrooby, Nottinghamshire, and acquired his first Separatist ideas while at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, which he attended for a short time. In 1583 he became the personal secretary to William Davison, an Elizabethan diplomat. Because of disillusionment with diplomatic and court life and because of his father's illness, he returned to Scrooby (1589). There, from 1590 until September 1607, Brewster held the position of "Post," or postmaster responsible for relays of horses on the post road, having previously, for a time, assisted his father in that office. About 1602 his neighbours began to assemble for worship at his home, the manor house, and in 1606 he joined them in organizing the Separatist church of Scrooby.

Brewster and John Robinson led the Puritan migration to Amsterdam in 1608 and the move to Leiden in 1609. In Leiden, Brewster was chosen to be the ruling elder of the congregation. While in Holland, he made his living first by teaching English and then, as the partner of Thomas Brewer, by secretly printing for sale in England Puritan books that were banned by the English government. In 1619 Brewer and Brewster's type was seized, and Brewer was arrested by the authorities of the University of Leiden, who were acting at the instance of the British ambassador, Sir Dudley Carleton. Brewster, however, escaped and—in the same year, with Robert Cushman—obtained in London on behalf of his associates a land patent from the Virginia Company.

Brewster then accompanied the first group of Pilgrims on the *Mayflower* in 1620. The only university-trained member of the Plymouth community, he was the real leader of the church. As its senior elder, he dominated the formulation of its doctrines, worship, and practices. He was not a magistrate, but, by virtue of his close association with the governor, William Bradford, he played a major role in civil as well as religious affairs.



**Mayflower**

The Mayflower at sea; hand-coloured  
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