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The Mayflower *and Historical Culture in Britain, 1620–2020*[*]

In September 1620, after two false starts, an unremarkable English merchant ship departed Plymouth in Devon. On board the *Mayflower*, apart from the thirty or so crew, were 102 passengers, the core group of which would go on to be immortalised as the 'Pilgrim Fathers' who settled 'New England'. A body of religious English 'Separatists', they had been searching for freedom of worship outside the Church of England for some time.[1] After more than a decade in Leiden in the early seventeenth century—which eventually did not suit their tastes either, too much freedom being a corroding influence on morality—they had decided to relocate to the 'remote' so-called 'New World'.[2] Supported by merchant investors and permitted to settle in the Colony of Virginia, and accompanied by other planters, they set sail.[3] After a sixty-six-day voyage, they landed further north than they had planned (and outside the area for which they were licensed). Over several weeks, a small company of men explored the area of present-day Cape Cod. Eventually, they established a fortified settlement at the recently and serendipitously named New Plimoth (the site of a former Patuxet village, the inhabitants of which had recently been devastated by disease brought by Europeans).[4] Most passengers and crew stayed

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1. The Pilgrims were known as Brownists in reference to Robert Browne, the preacher who separated from the Church of England *c.*1580 before rejoining in 1585: M.L. Sargent, 'William Bradford's "Dialogue" with History', *New England Quarterly*, lxv (1992), pp. 407–8. The Pilgrims' separatism distinguished them from Puritans, who wished to reform the Church from within, though succeeding generations have not always recognised this distinction.

2. Bradford described how the youth of the congregation were 'drawn away' by the 'manifold Temptations' and 'Evil examples' of Leiden, though language difficulties, financial hardship and the Thirty Years War informed their decision too. New England, they hoped, would offer an easier life and an opportunity to advance the 'gospel of the kingdom of Christ': William Bradford, *Of Plimoth Plantation*, ed. K.P. Minkema, F.J. Bremer and J.D. Bangs (Boston, MA, 2020), pp. 118–19.

3. There is no consensus on how many passengers had been part of the Leiden congregation. G.F. Willison, in an influential work, distinguished between Pilgrims ('saints') and other passengers ('strangers'), the latter being colonists interested in profit, not piety: G.F. Willison, *Saints and Strangers: Being the Lives of the Pilgrim Fathers and Their Families, with Their Friends and Foes* (New York, 1945), and critique by J.D. Bangs, *New Light on the Old Colony: Plymouth, the Dutch Context of Toleration, and Patterns of Pilgrim Commemoration* (Leiden, 2018), p. 21.

4. John Smith, best known as one of the founders of Jamestown in Virginia in 1607, charted and drew a map of 'New England' in 1616; he recorded Native place names, but, following the

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on the ship in these early months, and many did not survive the first winter. A reduced number of settlers finally disembarked in March 1621 and, soon after, negotiated a vital treaty with Ousamequin, the Massasoit (or supreme leader) of the Wampanoag.[5] In October 1621, a harvest festival—now popularly deemed the first Thanksgiving—was held by the remaining fifty-three settlers and around eighty of the Wampanoag people.[6] By 1660 there were over 33,000 English in southern New England, almost the same number as the indigenous population; on the eve of the American Revolution, Massachusetts alone had expanded to 235,000 people, with the indigenous population reduced—by aggressive land deals, disease and massacres—to barely 1 per cent of that figure.[7]

Critical academic work in the US has deconstructed the facts and fictions of this famous tale, and explained the popular currency of its central narrative of American liberty – even if the Pilgrims often took an intolerant stance towards Christians of other sects, and superimposed European ideas of land ownership upon indigenous peoples.[8] The centrality of Plymouth to the American mythos declined somewhat following commemorations in 1920, as both the ethnic and geographical locus of power in the US shifted. Pilgrim memory, however, is still propagated through several enterprises: 'Plimoth Plantation', a living history museum created in 1947 near the original colony; the General Society of Mayflower Descendants (founded 1897), which confirms genealogical lineage and 'join[s] together people who share this heritage'; occasional documentaries and dramatisations; and monuments and memorials throughout New England.[9]

In comparison with the American historiography, little academic attention has been given to the cultural legacies of the *Mayflower* voyage

instructions of Prince Charles, renamed them after the important English and Scottish towns of the day, including Plymouth, which the Pilgrims retained.

5. The treaty between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag was imbued with European understandings of authority. Massasoit Ousamequin would not have understood how his consent to being a 'friend and ally' of King James also meant obligation and subjugation to his rule. See D.J. Silverman, *This Land is Their Land: The Wampanoag Indians, Plymouth Colony, and the Troubled History of Thanksgiving* (New York, 2019) and P. Peters, 'Of Patuxet', in Bradford, *Of Plimoth Plantation*. Others have corrected the imbalance of popular Pilgrim-focused retellings, such as B.B. Donohue, *Bradford's Indian Book: Being the True Roote and Rise of American Letters as Revealed by the Native Text Embedded in Of Plimoth Plantation* (Gainesville, FL, 2011).

6. Accessible and academic histories have continued to appear; see, respectively, N. Philbrick, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community and War* (New York, 2006) and F.J. Bremer, *One Small Candle: The Story of the Plymouth Puritans and the Beginning of English New England* (Oxford, 2020).

7. Silverman, *This Land is their Land*.

8. For the development of this mythology, see especially J. Seelye, *Memory's Nation: The Place of Plymouth Rock* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), and M.L. Sargent, 'The Conservative Covenant: The Rise of the Mayflower Compact in American Myth', *New England Quarterly*, lxi (1988).

9. General Society of Mayflower Descendants (The Mayflower Society) at https://www.themayflowersociety.org/ (accessed 13 May 2020).

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in Britain. Erik Goldstein has demonstrated how improving relations between the US and Britain meant the symbolism of the *Mayflower* could provide a cultural and diplomatic basis for an ideological insistence on Anglo-American global superiority at the end of the nineteenth century.[10] Robert Hendershot has used Pilgrim memorials to show how the 'special relationship' then became embedded in the landscape of both countries in the decades following.[11] Anna Scott, meanwhile, has investigated the role of the Pilgrims in contemporary heritage-making, and critiqued the gendered constructions of the story.[12] There is, however, a wider history of interest in the *Mayflower* in Britain, which goes back into the early eighteenth century and has ebbed and flowed to the present day, amid the recent 400th anniversary celebrations. It is important to emphasise, as we do here, that the story owes its longevity to popular as well as professional explorations of history, to regional as well as national aims, and to domestic as well as international concerns. Moreover, evocations of the 'Pilgrim spirit' in Britain were not just shaped by ideas and understandings imported from across the Atlantic but also by domestic concerns about identity, politics and society.

We approach this afterlife of the *Mayflower* as a form of dialogic historical culture, a methodology that one practitioner in the field describes as seeking to 'historicise the existing fields of memory, public history, popular history, and historiography', and to acknowledge 'similarities and continuities between various forms of historical "sense-making"'.[13] Studies of historical culture go beyond the long-standing intellectual histories of history: they attempt instead to understand the origins and development of popular, or simply 'non-professional', notions of the documented past—what Daniel Woolf calls the '1066 and all that' view of history—that have hitherto proved elusive.[14] Understanding the complexities of the now-fabled *Mayflower* story demonstrates the processes of history-making more broadly. This approach is timely. Commemorations give us—both historians and the public at large—an opportunity to reflect, and to understand the urge to 'remember' in its historical perspective. Such reflections can lead to questions about the

10. E. Goldstein, 'Diplomacy in the Service of History: Anglo-American Relations and the Return of the Bradford History of Plymouth Colony, 1898', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, xxv (2014), pp. 26–40.

11. R.M. Hendershot, 'Anglo-American Narratives in Public Space: Evaluating Commemoration and Generational Transmission of the Special Relationship', in R.M. Hendershot and S. Marsh, eds, *Culture Matters: Anglo-American Relations and the Intangibles of 'Specialness'* (Manchester, 2020), pp. 193–5.

12. A. Scott, 'It's a Man's World. Or is it? The "Pilgrim Fathers", Religion, Patriarchy, Nationalism and Tourism', in W. Grahn and R.J. Wilson, eds, *Gender and Heritage: Performance, Place and Politics* (London, 2018), pp. 81–98.

13. J. Rüsen, ed., *Meaning and Representation in History* (Oxford, 2006), p. x.

14. See D.R. Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500–1730* (Oxford, 2003).

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diverse character of 'history' itself.[15] Historical culture shares some aims in common with memory studies and other forms of public-facing discourse, but also departs from those fields in important ways.[16] Distant pasts that develop slowly, accreting layers of meaning over time while maintaining a core of historical 'fact' at their centre, are arguably distinct from the *lieux de memoire* that serve as sites of memorialisation for more recent events.[17] The analysis of the *Mayflower* story offered here consequently includes not just professional or academic histories but popular and amateur narratives too, written by individuals as varied as artists and poets, politicians and antiquarians. We integrate factual retellings with works in more imaginative, politicised and romanticised modes. Focusing on the portrayal of one event over a long period makes it possible to emphasise the uniqueness of its telling to satisfy specific demands at particular moments. But it also means excavating the cumulative processes by which historical ideas take hold over generations and so become part of the 'popular history-consciousness' that, as Paul Readman has argued, was the 'normative basis for the conceptualisation of national identity' among ordinary people.[18]

We first outline the earliest response to the story of the *Mayflower*, from ecclesiastical historians at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and the shifting debate following the declaration of American independence. Gradually, the Pilgrims went from being just one facet of a transatlantic conversation about religious ideals and the expansion of British interests to a symbol of colonial breakdown. We then account for the emergence of the *Mayflower* story in a more popular sense in the early nineteenth century, particularly through the story's attraction for romantic authors.[19] We explore how the Pilgrims, throughout the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century when interest was at its height, were consequently positioned as shared ancestors within a specifically Anglo-American story. Here, we suggest revised historical narratives served to overcome the tensions of the more recent past by shoring up supranational forms of identity. These stories rested on arguments for cultural and religious continuity: firstly, through the language of Anglo-Saxonism and a colonising destiny; and secondly, through the

15. M. Vandrei, *Queen Boudica and Historical Culture in Britain: An Image of Truth* (Oxford, 2018).

16. The seminal text is P. Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les lieuxs de memoire*', *Representations*, xxvi (1989), pp. 7–24. The literature here is vast, but for a good introduction, see A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge, 2012), and, for critique, W. Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', *History and Theory*, xli (2002), pp. 179–97. For memory and the recent past in the early modern period, D. Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London, 1989).

17. Vandrei, *Queen Boudica*, pp. 13–14.

18. P. Readman, 'The Place of the Past in English Culture, *c.*1890–1914', *Past and Present*, no. 186 (2005), pp. 147–99, at 150.

19. M. Phillips, 'Macaulay, Scott, and the Literary Challenge to Historiography', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, l (1989), pp. 117–33.

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cosmopolitan nature of nonconformist religion, which required the papering over of conflicts between the Pilgrims and other dissenting Protestants. We also trace how this Anglo-American understanding became embedded in local community practice and identity formation from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Finally, we suggest that this local and increasingly multimedia history was gradually detached from grand narratives of racial destiny and cultural diplomacy in the later twentieth century. The earlier radicalism of the *Mayflower* was played down, and the guarding of the memory of the Pilgrims ironically returned to the religious communities from which they had originally separated.

I

Mythologising began immediately after New Plimoth's settlement in 1620/21, long before the voyage was articulated in terms of 'the *Mayflower*' or 'Pilgrim Fathers'. To attract investment and people to the fledgling colony and to provide a sense of legitimacy—given their settlement in an area for which they had not been licensed by the Crown—required transmitting knowledge that emphasised the Separatists' success; reactions in England, however, could be dismissive.[20] In keeping with the general trend towards the politicisation of historical writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though, works gradually appeared that endorsed or decried the religious *present* through the story of New England's settlement.[21] Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana, or the Ecclesiastical History of New England* (1702) was the most overtly hagiographical. Mather, a New England Puritan minister, cast the region's churches as 'very like unto those that were in the *First Ages of Christianity*' and the settlement as a project of divine providence with its inhabitants moved by religious enthusiasm—their efforts, though attended by suffering, ultimately blessed by God's providence.[22] He also emphasised the strong and abiding connections ensured by the Church of England between old and New England—or 'Mother England' and her 'Little Daughter', as the minister of Salem,

20. *Relation or Journall of the Beginning and Proceedings of the English Plantation Settled at Plimoth in New-England, by Certaine English Adventureres both Merchants and Others* (London, 1622). A. Delbanco and A. Heimert, eds, *The Puritans in America* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), p. 45, note the work is 'commonly described as a promotional tract'. See also *'Good News from New England' by Edward Winslow: A Scholarly Edition*, ed. K. Wisecup (Amherst, MA, 2014), p. 8. Both the adventurer John Smith and rival settler Thomas Morton were dismissive about the Separatists' success and supposed godliness: see John Smith, *Advertisement for the Unexperienced Planters of New England or Any Where* (London, 1631), pp. 17–21, and Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan, or, New Canaan Containing an Abstract of New England* (London, 1637).

21. R.C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* (1977; Manchester, 1998), ch. 2; L. Okie, *Augustan Historical Writing: Histories of England in the English Enlightenment* (Lanham, MD, 1991).

22. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), 'A General Introduction'.

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John Higginson, put it in the preface.[23] Daniel Neal's *History of New England* (1720) was the first truly heroic testimony of the Pilgrims to emerge from outside the community at New Plimoth and at some distance from the first generation of settlers. An independent minister in London and staunch apologist for nonconformity, Neal cast New England as a bastion of liberty and virtue, free from the vice and false religion that gnawed at the heart of the Old World. He included a chapter on the suffering of Puritans in Europe as a precursor to the later glory of New England, and idolised the Pilgrims as emblems of religious liberty—a means of criticising contemporary attitudes to nonconformity within the religious establishment in Britain.[24] The story of New Plimoth was also alive in civil histories. John Oldmixon's much-expanded 1741 edition of *The British Empire in America* (1708) was glowingly complimentary of Neal's history—especially in comparison with the 'Puns, Anagrams, Acrosticks, Miracles, Prodigies, Witches, Speeches, Epistles, and other Incumberences' of Mather's text.[25]

Neal's overtly pro-Puritan views were thus not a barrier to the basic facts of the story being incorporated into subsequent histories; if anything, these works endorsed his interpretation. William Robertson's *History of America* (1796), for example, used Neal to cement his understanding of the persecution of the Puritans as a key part of the prehistory that led to New England's establishment.[26] Throughout the eighteenth century, then, both corrective and confirmatory interpretations percolated in Britain. The story was not yet of wide symbolic importance; the colonists were real people, not above criticism, and simply a part of a larger narrative of commercial and religious colonial expansion in New England. This narrative was intermingled with the confessional troubles of the Atlantic world. Through transnational publishing exchange, however, certain aspects of Puritan settlement in New England were becoming embedded in contemporary historical culture: the Pilgrims were brave men of conscience; tyrannical government and irrational religion had encouraged their search for a form of freedom that was still considered specifically 'English' in nature; and the Americas were wild and hostile lands, peopled by mysterious pagans, and seemingly untouched by the ecclesiastical history that Mather sought to universalise.

The American Revolution in the 1760s was a tipping point because it marked a sharp break in the narrative of amicable separation over acrimonious divorce that had been emphasised by writers such as Mather. The accompanying charged political debate in Britain provided an

23. John Higginson, 'An Attestation to this Church-History of New-England', in Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, p. 16.

24. Daniel Neal, *The History of New England* (London, 1720), p. iii.

25. John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America* (London, 1708), p. ix.

26. William Robertson, *History of America* (London, 1796).

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opportunity to reflect on the historical roots and past treatment of the New England colonies by the mother country. In April 1774, one pseudonymous contributor to *The Gazetteer*—'B.T. A Plain Citizen'—argued for greater autonomy by retelling the story of how the 'sober conscientious' yet 'cruelly persecuted' Pilgrims had been obliged to find freedom elsewhere. Crucially, 'the natives' had 'freely consented' to the treaty the settlers proposed. Plymouth was New England's 'first settlement made … without any expense to, or assistance from the Crown' and the Pilgrim descendants—the 'Bostonians' of the 1770s—thus 'justiced, by laws of Nature and self-preservation' to protect their 'right' to not be 'dispossessed of their property without their consent'.[27] The 'Citizen'—a charged, anti-monarchical term popular with political radicals—evoked developing ideas of popular sovereignty, drawn from Enlightenment concepts of 'government by consent', while also implicitly critiquing contemporary Britain as a distant tyrannical society. Other pamphlets, tracts and newspapers took a similar approach in this fraught period, as political language began to take precedence over confessional.[28] Yet the Revolution also led to greater openness about the behaviour of the New England colonists after 1620. In his *General History of the British Empire in America* (1776), John Wynne, though celebrating the strides made in 'civilising' the indigenous population, noted that some were rightly suspicious of the humanity of the would-be civilisers, and that the 'New Englanders' 'persecute[d] their brethren … with more severity, than they had formerly been treated with by the church of England'. This led him to the melancholy conclusion that the history of New England's settlement was 'proof at once of the weakness and of the depravity of human nature, where pride and self-love are suffered to predominate … which defeats the ends intended to be answered by true religion'.[29]

The *Mayflower* story had thus emerged mostly within civil and ecclesiastical histories—both common forms of historical production at the time. Literary reimaginings did not appear until the beginning of the nineteenth century, which also heralded a more expressly commemorative culture around the Pilgrims. This too was in keeping with the trends of historical culture, which saw historical reality reimagined for popular consumption through poetry, drama and more accessible commercialised histories.[30] Older stories of the English past, however,

27. *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 15 Apr. 1774, pp. 1–2.

28. See 'A Dialogue between a North American and a Courtier', *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 17 Aug. 1765, p. 1; and *An Argument in Defence of the Exclusive Right Claimed by the Colonies to Tax Themselves* (London, 1774).

29. John Wynne, *A General History of the British Empire in America* (London, 1776), pp. 78–83.

30. Vandrei, *Queen Boudica*, ch. 4; L. Howsam, *Past into Print: The Publishing of History in Britain, 1850–1950* (London, 2009); K. O'Brien, 'The History Market', in I. Rivers, ed., *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays* (London, 2003), pp. 105–33.

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especially those popularised by Shakespeare and then Restoration dramatists, were more obviously embedded in historical culture than relatively recent ones like the *Mayflower*. The *Mayflower* thus occupied an ambiguous position in Britain following the American Revolution. With the transition from the so-called 'first' to 'second' empire, Britain was forced to reassess both its present relationship with its former colony, and the story of its own intervention in colonial America. As Gould argues, the racialisation of Britain's empire after the 'swing to the east' helped to demarcate the 'Anglo' metropole from its eastern dominions.[31] Predictably, it was racial affinity, not difference, that would later come into play in the Anglo-American relationship. At first, however, it was in the young nation in search of a heroic origin story that the *Mayflower* voyage took on legendary status.

Members of the Old Colony Club in Plymouth, MA, first celebrated 'Forefathers' Day' in 1769, using the colony's 'uncelebrated, indistinct, even obscure history' to create a 'mythologized regional past'.[32] Not long after, the Boston-based Sons of Liberty took stewardship of Forefathers' Day to bolster increasing pro-Revolutionary anti-British sentiment. After the War of Independence, Forefathers' Day lapsed until the 1790s, when it was taken up by Federalists who saw New England's traditions as one foundation for an American national identity. The bicentenary of the voyage in 1820 marked a turning point. It was enthusiastically celebrated in Plymouth, MA, in late December 1820; the address by statesman Daniel Webster extolled how 'widely different, from all these instances of emigration and plantation, were the condition, the purposes, and the prospects' of the anti-slavery 'Pilgrim Fathers', and how 'a government, and a country, were to commence' from their 'very first foundations laid under the divine light'.[33] The Pilgrims could be lauded as virtuous colonisers, with Plymouth and New England portrayed as the cradle of America—even today an enduring narrative.[34]

II

No mention was made of the 200th anniversary in the British press. In early 1825, however, a description of the 'augmented demonstration

31. E.H. Gould, 'The American Revolution in Britain's Imperial Identity', in F.M. Leventhal and R. Quinault, eds, *Anglo-American Attitudes: From Revolution to Partnership* (London, 2017), pp. 23–37.

32. J.A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), pp. 176–8.

33. Daniel Webster, *A Discourse, Delivered at Plymouth, December 22, 1820, In Commemoration of the First Settlement of New-England* (Boston, MA, 1821), pp. 40–42.

34. There were certainly alternatives to the Pilgrims, however: A.U. Abrams, *The Pilgrims and Pocahontas: Rival Myths of American Origin* (Boulder, CO, 1999) details the Jamestown, VA, story—and thus Southern challenge—in the decades before the Civil War.

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of gratitude and festivity' of the 204th anniversary celebrations at Plymouth, MA, was taken from the Boston-based *Centinel* and reprinted in British newspapers.[35] That same year, the Liverpool merchant Adam Hodgson published a volume of letters about his travels in North America and included an account of the 1820 celebration.[36] Felicia Hemans, a British literary celebrity, recorded in her notebook the influence Hodgson's letters had on her, and wrote a poem: 'The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England' (1825).[37] She focused on natural imagery and personal emotion, epitomised by the famous opening lines: 'The breaking waves dash'd high / On a stern and rock-bound coast / And the woods against a stormy sky / Their giant branches toss'd'. Like Webster, Hemans stressed the uniqueness of the Pilgrims' colonial mission, and that it was not 'Bright jewels of the Mine', 'the wealth of seas' or 'the spoils of war' that brought the noble 'band of exiles' to New England, but rather 'The Freedom to worship God'. The pathos of the Pilgrims was another feature; these were people who had left 'their childhood's land' and come to 'the wild New-England shore'.[38] 'The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers' was a watershed moment in Britain, popularising the 'Pilgrim Fathers' both in terminology and the popular imagination. Hemans's poetry dealt with a growing sense of national feeling and identity in Britain, delving into history, myth and folklore for inspiration. The motifs and meanings she had crafted for the *Mayflower* story quickly became embedded in other cultural media.[39] In the 1830s, her poem was set to music by her composer sister Harriet Browne, and became a popular parlour song (reprinted until at least the 1930s). Later in the century, it was incorporated into lavish illustrated editions and gift books, such as Anne Lydia Bond's *Three Gems in One Setting* (1860), which set Hemans alongside Alfred Tennyson and Thomas Campbell, attesting to the poem's canonical reputation. Bond's illustrations, with interlaced floral borders, imitated medieval illuminated manuscripts—a style popularised by the Pre-Raphaelites and common in mid-century art.[40]

For mid-Victorians, Hemans's description of the Pilgrims served as an imperial educational tool, demonstrating the Christian values of piety, devotion and stoicism in the face of danger and the unknown

35. For example, see *London Courier and Evening Gazette*, 27 Jan. 1825, p. 3.

36. Adam Hodgson, *Letters from North America Written During a Tour in the United States and Canada* (London, 1825).

37. *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*, ed. S.J. Wolfson (Princeton, NJ, 2010), p. 417.

38. Felicia Hemans, 'The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England', *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, xiv (1825), pp. 402–3.

39. E. Downey, '"The Breaking Waves Dashed High": Felicia Hemans, Romantic Poetry, and the Mayflower Voyage in Anglo-American Historical Culture', *European Romantic Review* (forthcoming).

40. Anne L. Bond, *Three Gems in One Setting* (London, 1860); A. Fowler, *The Mind of the Book: Pictorial Title Pages* (Oxford, 2017), p. 68.

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in a foreign land. Such ideals, it was hoped, would mitigate the individualism and self-interest that came with laissez-faire capitalism, and promote societal collective benefit.[41] Similar principles were present in the visual portrayals that began to appear. Charles Lucy's dramatic oil painting 'The Departure of the Pilgrim Fathers' (1847) shows the Pilgrims preparing to leave Holland on their journey back to England in 1620 (fig. 1). Lucy entered the 10 × 3 ft work in a competition to find decorative art for the new Houses of Parliament in the 1840s, a project that was infused with the belief that 'historical painting' would uplift the nation.[42] At the centre of Lucy's piece, the Pilgrim pastor, John Robinson, throws his arms towards the heavens, preaching to his exhausted yet stoical congregants. As the accompanying catalogue explained, these were 'the little band of Christian adventurers' who 'resolved to remove to some part of America, under the protection of England, where they might enjoy liberty of conscience'.[43] Lucy was one of three to win a

Figure 1. Charles Lucy, 'The Departure of the Pilgrim Fathers, for America, A.D. 1620' (1847), engraved by John Burnet *c.*1854. Reproduced by permission of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

41. I.M. Blumberg, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels* (Columbus, OH, 2013), pp. 1–2.

42. T.S.R. Boase, 'The Decoration of the New Palace of Westminster, 1841–1863', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xvii (1954), pp. 319–58.

43. 'The Fine Arts', *Hereford Times*, 3 July 1847, p. 5.

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third-class prize, but 'The Departure of the Pilgrim Fathers' was not chosen to decorate the new buildings—much to the surprise of the *Morning Post*, which declared that 'none of the prize paintings' equalled Lucy's.[44] After his painting was engraved in 1852, however, a renewed enthusiasm blossomed, and the following year the original was taken on a popular voyage of its own around Britain. Preachers in concert halls, town councils and museums gave accompanying lectures that celebrated the Pilgrim conscience, and insisted local inhabitants follow what was 'worthy of imitation' in the 'noble-minded men' shown in the 'beautiful painting'.[45] In the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as reproduction became cheaper, emotive paintings such as these became standard illustrations in the growing number of accessible histories.

Richard Monckton Milnes's frequently anthologised poem 'Columbus and the Mayflower' (*c.*1850s) also highlighted the moralising element, but more explicitly contrasted the motives of English colonists with those of the Spanish: to the former 'God gave free earth and air, and gave no more', and only 'at the last, almost unsought, came gold'.[46] This approach was a justification for the contemporary British imperial regime, comparing its 'arts of peace' with the 'black legend' of Spanish imperial cruelty and avarice in the 'Age of Discovery'.[47] For Monckton Milnes, Protestant imperialism was blessed by God: 'He, who rules both stormy and calm days' continued to protect Britain on the 'perilous heights of power and wealth' just as he protected the Pilgrims in the fragile midst of 'Stern Nature'. Through toil and loss, the Pilgrims' settlement achieved growth, piety and resilience—a positive morality tale for a Protestant anglophone readership. In most of these short inspirational retellings there was little or no mention of indigenous peoples. New England appeared as an unpopulated, untamed wilderness to be overcome by English spirit and labour rather than a place with an existing government and culture.[48] In longer and more

44. *Morning Post*, 28 June 1847, p. 5. A fresco by Charles West Cope depicting a similar scene to Lucy's was chosen for the Peers' Corridor in the House of Lords. Both artists had probably read Bradford's description of the departure from Holland in recently republished extracts of his history. For the links between these paintings and other contemporary works in the US, see S. Bush, 'America's Origin Myth: Remembering Plymouth Rock', *American Literary History*, xii (2000), pp. 749–51, 754–5.

45. 'The Pilgrim Fathers', *Bradford Observer*, 2 Mar. 1854, p. 6. Lucy's painting operated as a form of 'civic uplift' of the type assessed by A.B. Rodrick, *Self-Help and Civic Culture: Citizenship in Victorian Birmingham* (Farnham, 2004).

46. Richard Monckton Milnes, 'Columbus and the Mayflower', in Joseph Hunter, *Collections concerning the Church or Congregation of Protestant Separatists formed at Scrooby in North Nottinghamshire in the Time of King James I* (London, 1854).

47. D.S. Shields, *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690–1750* (Chicago, IL, 1994), p. 175; A. Richardson, 'Epic Ambivalence: Imperial Politics and Romantic Deflection in Williams's Peru and Landor's Gebir', in A. Richardson and S. Hofkosh, eds, *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture* (Indianapolis, IN, 1996), pp. 265–82.

48. This 'myth of pristine wilderness' was also important to American settler colonialism narratives: R. Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Boston, MA, 2014), pp. 45–7.

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explicitly historical rather than artistic works, however, it was impossible to tell the story without Squanto and the Massasoit Ousamequin, whose help was essential to the immediate survival of the colony. Thus in Annie Webb's novel *The Pilgrims of New England*, indigenous people first provide dramatic tension, their barbarity depicted from 'war crys' to eyes that 'glare terribly'. Later, they are simply an obstruction to progress to be overcome by the 'comparatively civilized life' of Plymouth. There was, however, an element of the Rousseauian 'noble savage', visible in the amazed attitude of the Europeans towards 'nature's children' as they utilised woodland resources.[49]

The most popular evocations of the *Mayflower* story, predictably, avoided any consideration of the 'rightfulness' of settler colonialism. One of the most speculative was the American Henry Longfellow's epic poem *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, which found enthusiastic audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. To an audience weaned on Sir Walter Scott and his imitators, this poem would have come as a welcome counterpart to moralising tales. It was first published in London in 1858, and sold for one shilling in wrapper and five shillings in cloth; over 10,000 copies were apparently sold on the first day.[50] Longfellow's poem also had the benefit of being, like Scott's work, both romantic and touched with humour. Longfellow told the tale of Captain Miles Standish and his amorous intentions towards the young Patricia Mullins before she eventually married John Alden, and claimed that this story derived from Alden family folk histories. Victorian audiences were only the start: Longfellow's fictionalised romance became a staple part of dramatic retellings of the story in twentieth-century Britain, especially during the 1920s. Thus there were elements of the story that, with the touch of a sentimental pen, could easily be cast as entertainment. This was typical of historical culture in the nineteenth century, the first 'mass media' age. Worthy and moralising viewpoints existed alongside dramatic, entertaining fictionalisations of historical stories. One did not cancel out the other; there was almost certainly a subversive pleasure in indulging the romantic and the humorous while others were immolated in narratives of self-sacrifice. Moreover, while overtly moralistic works tended to burn brightly among certain audiences for a limited period, the popularity of Longfellow's work suggests the enduring elements of historical stories are those with universal appeal: unrequited love, moral ambiguity, humour and the triumph of youth and beauty.

49. Annie Webb, *The Pilgrims of New England: A Tale of the Early American Settlers* (London, 1853), p. 168. For context, see K. Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776–1930* (Princeton, NJ, 2009), and F. Palmeri, *'State of Nature, Stages of Society': Enlightenment Conjectural History and Modern Social Discourse* (Oxford, 2016), esp. ch. 1.

50. E.L. Tucker, 'Longfellow's "The Courtship of Miles Standish": Some Notes and Two Early Versions', *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1985), pp. 285–321.

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III

By the mid-Victorian period, then, a multiplicity of meanings could already be derived from the *Mayflower*, with authors working across genres and finding something useful or inspirational in the story. Crucially, it was at this stage of romantic interest that historians, using new archival discoveries, began to flesh out the details of the English side of the story. Several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England chroniclers had already used large portions of an unpublished manuscript by the colony's governor William Bradford; *New England's Memorial* (1669), by Bradford's nephew Nathanial Morton, was the most prominent (republished for a fifth time in 1826).[51] Alexander Young's *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers* (Boston, MA, 1841 and 1844), however, was a new departure. He had found Morton's original (and now unrecognised) verbatim notes from Bradford's manuscript, the latter having gone missing during the American Revolutionary Wars (probably stolen by British troops from the Old South Church during their occupation of Boston). Young published and annotated these notes alongside reprinted and never-before-published manuscripts by Bradford and another leading Pilgrim, Edward Winslow. Many of the details of the Pilgrims' travails in England were already technically a matter of public record, but Young's book produced a new interest in, among other things, the Pilgrims' 'rise in the north of England, [and] their persecutions there'.[52] According to Joseph Hunter, a British antiquarian and assistant keeper of the public records, Bradford's 'exceedingly valuable' writings were 'little known' till Young's book.[53] Hunter, soon after Young, had made some of the most significant *Mayflower* discoveries of the century. Using both manuscript archives and empirical deduction, he named, for the first time, Scrooby Manor, Nottinghamshire, as the early meeting place of the Pilgrims before their escape to Holland, and also confirmed Austerfield, Yorkshire, as William Bradford's birthplace. Hunter, importantly, had been spurred on by the interest of a growing cohort of genealogists on the other side of the Atlantic.[54]

Even more exciting finds were to come. In 1855, back in the United States, John Wingate Thornton tipped off the Reverend John S. Barry,

51. Bangs, *New Light on the Old Colony*, p. 26, n. 13.

52. *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers of the Colony of Plymouth, from 1602 to 1625*, ed. Alexander Young (Boston, MA, 1841), p. vii.

53. Joseph Hunter, *Collections concerning the Early History of the Founders of New Plymouth, the First Colonists of New England* (London, 1849), p. 16.

54. In 1842, James Savage, a Bostonian antiquarian, was in Britain undertaking genealogical research; Hunter told him that Bradford was from Austerfield rather than 'Ansterfield', as incorrectly named by Cotton Mather: 'Gleanings for New England History', *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, iii, no. 8 (1843), pp. 56–8. In 1845, the New England Historic Genealogical Society was formed in Boston, and began producing the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* soon afterwards in response to 'an awakened' and 'growing interest' in the 'knowledge' that could be 'obtained' by genealogical investigations, including into the Pilgrims: *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, i (1847), p. iv.

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who was undertaking research for a history of Massachusetts, about *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America* (1844) by Samuel Wilberforce (bishop of Oxford). Deep in this book was a citation to 'MS. History of the Plantation of Plymouth … in the Fulham Library'. Barry told Charles Deane, a Boston-based merchant and antiquarian, who contacted Hunter in Britain. After investigation, Hunter authenticated the rediscovered manuscript held in the Bishop of London's Fulham Palace, and made a transcript that was published in 1856.[55] For a new generation of artists, authors and historians, William Bradford's rediscovered telling of the story—arguably written to serve as an educational memorial—became an authoritative source for the early part of the colony's history.[56] Over the next fifty years, more details about the *Homes and Haunts of the Pilgrim Fathers*—as the British Congregational minister Alexander Mackenall's beautifully illustrated guide in 1899 put it—were uncovered by genealogists. As transatlantic and interior forms of transport developed, both Britons and Americans could also now visit these historical sites more easily. When Hunter had first published his own research in 1849, he expressed his 'satisfaction' at 'finding' how an 'intense curiosity' had 'sprung up' among Americans 'respecting their English ancestry'—a development that would 'tend to strengthen the sentiment of fraternity, and to bind one free nation to another practically as free as itself'.[57] By the end of the nineteenth century it was this 'fraternal' connection that the *Mayflower* came to symbolise in Britain.

If the historical relationship between the US and Britain would come to be seen as a mostly positive one, the malleability of the *Mayflower* also lent itself to radical uses in the Victorian period. Arguably the most influential work in this spirit was the abolitionist poem 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point' (1848), by the British author Elizabeth Barrett Browning. In an ironic inversion of the standard American narrative of liberty, the speaker of the poem, a fugitive slave woman, stands at Pilgrim's Point and addresses the Pilgrims directly: on the shore touched by 'the first white pilgrim's bended knee / Where exile turned to ancestor / And God was thanked for liberty', she says 'O pilgrims, I have gasped and run / All night long from the whips of one / Who in your names works sin and woe'. Following stanzas depict the speaker's brutal experience of rape and torture by her master, and a distraught mother killing her infant child. Towards the end of the poem the runaway

55. William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. C. Deane (Boston, MA, 1856), p. v; Goldstein, 'Diplomacy in the Service of History'.

56. 'Of Plimoth Plantation' was a powerful example of how 'historical reprints necessitated a revision of the historical narrative': L. DiCuirci, *Colonial Revivals: The Nineteenth-Century Lives of Early American Books* (Philadelphia, PA, 2019), p. 3.

57. Hunter, *Collections Concerning the Early History of the Founders of New Plymouth*, p. 6. Public interest was high, so he published an expanded version: Hunter, *Collections Concerning the Church or Congregation of Protestant Separatists formed at Scrooby* (London, 1854).

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slave again calls out to the 'pilgrim-ghosts', only to find 'in their stead, their hunter sons!' Published first in the US in *The Liberty Bell*, 'The Runaway Slave' became one of Browning's best-known poems. It censured rather than praised the Pilgrims' descendants and considered the ends of a journey rather than the beginning of an origin myth, and spoke to a history of injustice rather than freedom.[58]

In the shadow of the 'Condition of England' debate in 1842, Ebenezer Elliott, a popular poet among readers sympathetic to Chartism, penned another politically radical interpretation, titled simply 'The Pilgrim Fathers'.[59] This short work followed the pattern of his other poems, being characterised by what Nigel Cross describes as 'emotional bombast', 'fervid language' and 'urgent appeals to God'.[60] Elliott, the so-called Corn Law rhymer, positioned the Pilgrims as freedom fighters and critics of contemporary Britain: 'Tho' slaves are ye, our sons are free'. He pleaded with his British brethren to recapture their ancestors' radical vitality: 'Land of the sires of Washington / Bring forth such men again!' 'The Pilgrim Fathers' was reprinted in other Chartist works in the 1840s and, in the 1850s, was even placed alongside the first English translation of the *Communist Manifesto* in the socialist newspaper *The Red Republican*, demonstrating how, for many, the Pilgrims had progressive credentials.[61]

By claiming the Pilgrims as English, Elliott's poem demonstrated an increasingly important broader trend in the story's retelling in Britain: the need to harness the power of the narrative beyond a parochial American origin story. Commentators in Britain were never backward about claiming the Pilgrims as distinctly 'English' to bolster, for example, their own sense of imperial grandeur. The animosity that had followed the War of Independence was receding in the public consciousness, to be replaced by a variety of narratives that articulated a continuity of amicability between Britain and its erstwhile colony, not least because this allowed the former to claim the US as its prosperous offspring. Nevertheless, some also sought to convey a *longue durée* narrative of historic continuity between the intrepid Saxons of old and the Victorian Englishman hunting for new commercial and colonial opportunities. As the politician William Molesworth told an assembly of New Zealanders in the old Plymouth in 1840, the English had every reason to be proud of the Americans, who shared the 'colonising spirit

58. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point', *The Liberty Bell* (Boston, MA, 1848); B. Taylor, 'EBB Among the Nightingales: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Felicia Hemans, and Generative Rivalry in the Poetess Tradition', *Woman's Writing*, xvi (2019), pp. 149–67. Both White and Black abolitionists could articulate their beliefs as the rightful form of Puritan inheritance: K. Gradert, 'The *Mayflower* and the Slave Ship: Pilgrim-Puritan Origins in the Antebellum Black Imagination', *Melus*, xliv (2019), pp. 63–90.

59. 'The Pilgrim Fathers', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, Sept. 1836, p. 573.

60. N. Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 149.

61. *The Red Republican*, 9 Nov. 1850, p. 1.

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of our race'. This vigour could be seen anew in the colonies of Australia and Van Diemen's Land, and Molesworth went on to cajole his audience to:

> [b]ecome the founders of a mighty empire in a new world of your own creation. Thus accomplish the destiny of your race. It is true, you are few in number, but not more numerous were those who first landed in this kingdom with Hengist and Horsa, and still fewer were the pilgrim fathers of the thirteen millions of America.[62]

Such words lend credence to the old view of Reginald Horsman, who argued that racial Anglo-Saxonism became a 'rationale for the domination of peoples throughout the world'.[63] As Peter Mandler has countered, however, explicitly racialised notions of 'Anglo-Saxonism' or 'Teutonism' were by no means as powerful or present in the mid-nineteenth century as some twentieth-century historians argued, nor were such notions uniform in character.[64] More recently, Rosemary Sweet has demonstrated how the complexities of the antiquarian 'production of historical knowledge' allowed for the development of 'a more varied, nuanced and fuller history of the Anglo-Saxon period' by the mid-nineteenth century. Such a history did not necessarily depend on biological categories of 'race', but instead attempted to trace a lineage from 'contemporary morals' to 'values in the past'.[65] This fits with Molesworth's deployment of the Anglo-Saxons. His speech demonstrated a deep anxiety about the country's more recent past, and the loss of its American territories. The Anglo-Saxons were a convenient shared ancestor, allowing a claim to the Pilgrims as part of a much longer cosmopolitan-imperial historical narrative with common origins. Rather than surrender the Pilgrims to a parochial American history, Molesworth made them part of the British colonial destiny. Thus, during the earlier part of the nineteenth century, British, and specifically English, commentators, found it useful to employ an ancient tribal grouping as the common ancestor of two political entities that had, until relatively recently, been periodically at war. This was a means of finding neutral ground on which to build a common narrative: the Anglo-Saxon 'tribe' preceded national distinctions and was therefore pregnant with possibility in the newly connected modern world, and a renewed bond based on a long-defunct Anglo-Saxon identity could translate into an imperialism that would straddle the Atlantic.

62. 'Final settlement of the New Zealand controversy', *Evening Chronicle*, 4 Nov. 1840, p. 1.

63. R. Horsman, 'Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism in Great Britain before 1850', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, xxxvii (1976), p. 387.

64. P. Mandler, '"Race" and "Nation" in Mid-Victorian Thought', in S. Collini, R. Whatmore and B. Young, eds, *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 224–44.

65. R. Sweet, 'The Recovery of the Anglo-Saxon Past, *c*.1770–1850', *English Historical Review*, cxxxvi (2021), pp. 304–31.

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There was, however, another aspect to the negotiation of a shared British and American past beyond the contentious and often exclusive language of Anglo-Saxonism: nonconformity. By the 1840s, the romantic turn in historical writing gave latitude for writers of the stature of William Wordsworth to sentimentalise the Pilgrims within a narrative of transatlantic Protestant brotherhood. Much as Cotton Mather had, Wordsworth attempted to link the Pilgrims' settlement with the imagined purity of an apostolic inheritance, symbolised by the Anglican episcopacy in England and the Episcopalian bishops in America. At first glance, this seems counterintuitive, but it is testament to both the malleability of the Pilgrim legend and the ingenuity of historical interpreters when faced with the raw material of the past. Wordsworth wrote the first of three sonnets on the subject of the English and American churches as an elegiac tribute to the 'Pilgrim Fathers'. Like other romantic authors, he turned to heroic imagery of self-sacrifice and hardship, casting the Pilgrims as men 'well worthy to be magnified' for their bravery and self-sacrifice in leaving behind 'the hallowed ground in which their fathers lay'. The poem concluded with natural and religious imagery, imagining 'their spirits' rising from the woodland of New England into a 'galaxy that knows no end' and being granted a place in eternity as they are literally 'sanctified' by 'His glory who for sinners died'.[66] The other sonnets took the story of the Pilgrims further to episcopal reunion, ending with the consecration of American bishops at Lambeth in London. Wordsworth's fantasy was not of a conversion from Puritanism to Anglican conformity, but rather of a modern Church of England that would welcome its American brethren in a spirit free from the corruptions of its seventeenth-century predecessor.[67]

Tracing continuity between the Pilgrims and the modern episcopacy stretches credulity, but it points to the utility of religious feeling in shoring up the ambiguous Anglo-American relationship. It also nuances the Anglo-Saxon narrative that emerged in civic and secular circles. J.R. Green, in *A Short History of the English People* (1874), emphasised the sheer number of Puritans who joined the exodus from England, but only after the little band of Pilgrims showed the way, 'poor men and artisans' though they were: 'From the moment of their establishment the eyes of the English Puritans were fixed on the little Puritan settlement in North America'. Green, one of the great popular historians of his day, was no less adept at working the sentiments of his audience than the most accomplished poet, and the reader would have been left in little doubt as to the heroism of this suffering band of worshippers.

66. William Wordsworth, *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years: Including the Borderers, a Tragedy* (London, 1842), p. 218.

67. William Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, VII: *The Later Years, Part IV: 1840–1853*, ed. E.D. Selincourt and A.G. Hill (Oxford, 1967), p. 297.

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But, Green admitted, 'with the strength and manliness of Puritanism, its bigotry and narrowness had crossed the Atlantic too'. The colonies of New England were little more than theocracies by the middle of the seventeenth century, but even so, 'twenty thousand Englishmen had found a refuge in the West'. Yet, despite this, for Green Puritanism was not merely a community: it was a spirit, and that spirit could be found uncorrupted in Britain, too. Green thus attributed the religious revival in Britain of the early eighteenth century, and the growth and spread of Methodism, to the 'old Puritan spirit' that, at least in the middle classes, had 'lived on unchanged'. This Puritanism was synonymous with the spirit of liberty itself. Green cast religious and social equality, integrity in matters of law and privilege, and freedom of conscience as attributes that set Britain apart from the despotism of European nations, while simultaneously pointing to a transatlantic connection.[68] The humble origins of the Pilgrims, their Puritan religion and the ability to endure spoke well of England, and of the nation that grew from the same root. In essence, the distinctive feature of both the US and, for some at least, Britain, could be traced to its nonconformist history.[69]

By the mid-nineteenth century, this spiritual link was celebrated and cemented in stone, especially by the growing band of British Congregationalists who, following their American brethren, made a strong genealogical claim to the Pilgrims' legacy.[70] In 1846, the minister John Waddington, an expert on the pastor to the Pilgrims, John Robinson, took over the Congregationalist church in Southwark. He redubbed the existing structure 'the Church of the Pilgrim Fathers', suggestively tracing a genealogy back to Henry Jacob, who had formed a congregation in line with Robinson's views in the area in 1616. Soon after, Waddington led the campaign to replace the inadequate building with 'the Memorial Church of the Pilgrim Fathers', finally completed in 1864, with much goodwill and money flowing back from American Congregationalists.[71] In the 1890s, there was another wave of enthusiasm for the Pilgrims after the first International Congregational Council was held in London, with Americans touring the nonconformist sites of 'the Old World'. In the same way that Waddington had tapped into international networks of religious finance, the Reverend

68. J.R. Green, *A Short History of England* (1874; repr. London, 1889), quotations at pp. 508, 514, 736 and 797.

69. Mandler, '"Race" and "Nation"', pp. 241–2.

70. Congregationalists began building a common identity around their New England ancestors in the early nineteenth century, in the process taking ownership away from other denominations such as Presbyterianism: M. Bendroth, *The Last Puritans: Mainline Protestants and the Power of the Past* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2015), ch. 2.

71. John Waddington, 'The Church in Southwark', in *The Works of John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers*, ed. R. Ashton (3 vols, London, 1851), iii, pp. 437–54; Benjamin Scott, *Lays of the Pilgrim Fathers Compiled in Aid of the Fund for Completing the Memorial Church of the Pilgrim Fathers, in Southwark* (London, 1861); 'Memorial Church of the Pilgrim Fathers', *Clerkenwell News*, 30 May 1864, p. 3.

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H.S. Griffiths in Gainsborough—aided by Alexander Mackenall, one of the Congregational Union's most effective fundraisers—led a campaign to build a John Robinson Memorial Church in the town where Robinson had preached and—incorrectly, it turned out—was believed to have been born. The final squat red-brick structure (fig. 2) respected the simplicity of Pilgrim beliefs, with 'ornamentation' being 'almost wholly absent' and 'the exterior … very plain'.[72] In 1896, no less a figure than T.F. Bayard—the first US ambassador to the United Kingdom, and a champion of the Anglo-American blood relationship—ceremonially laid the foundation stone.[73]

IV

It was this Anglo-American rapprochement that now became the defining feature of the Pilgrim story in Britain. The return of Bradford's manuscript in the 1890s from London to Massachusetts, after much

Figure 2. Jonathan Thacker, 'John Robinson Memorial Church, built 1896' (2021), available via *Geograph* (Geograph Project Limited, 2005–), at https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/6733518. [Reproduced under CC BY-SA 2.0.]

72. 'The Pilgrim Fathers', *Lincolnshire Echo*, 10 June 1897, p. 2.

73. 'Pilgrims at Gainsborough', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 29 June 1896, p. 6; 'The Pilgrim Fathers', *Lincolnshire Echo*, 10 June 1897, p. 2. See also E. Goldstein, 'Building the Anglo-American Relationship—The John Robinson Memorial Church, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire', *Congregational History*, ix, no. 2 (2019), pp. 67–80.

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diplomatic wrangling, led to an outpouring of Anglo-American sentiment in elite circles on both sides of the Atlantic, articulated as the renewing of a historic blood link between the two world powers.[74] Wider diplomatic agreements in matters of war and territory, beginning with the resolution of the Alabama Claims after the Civil War and reaching a peak with British support for the American war with Spain in 1898, helped memories of past conflicts fade. Bitterness about separation was gradually overcome, to some degree, by shared values: constitutional government, liberty and freedom (however loosely defined), and the primacy of 'English-Speaking Peoples'. Underpinning this shift was what Melanie Hall and Erik Goldstein call a 'diplomatisation of culture': the ways that a 'transatlantic network of influential people' demonstrated and celebrated Anglo-American connections in language, literature, religion and a shared past.[75] It was, as Duncan Bell has argued, a time of great utopian belief in Anglo-American destiny. Numerous intellectuals encouraged closer relations between the two countries, ranging from total political (re-)unification to a looser (and unfixed) sense of kinship, now drawing more heavily on the racialised Social Darwinist understanding of Anglo-Saxonism that had grown in power on both sides of the Atlantic.[76]

The Pilgrims now symbolised many of the supposed traits that marked this burgeoning Anglo-American alliance: a deterministic imperial spirit, ideals of freedom and self-government, Protestantism and Whiteness. Most simply, their story evoked the literal movement of those traits from one land to another. They were thus easily incorporated into the 'English-Speaking Peoples' destiny: a vision of the future set in motion by the past. Such was the pervasiveness of this idea that it could be found in the history reading books widely used to teach literacy to elementary schoolchildren. Stories that demonstrated how Britain had always produced seafarers and settlers could create 'enlightened patriotism' by encouraging children to 'to identify with the values of past actors, to respect, revere and even emulate them'.[77] H.O. Arnold-Forster's *A History of England* was one such accessible history reader; first published in 1897, it was in press until the 1930s, and already by 1912 had sold over 100,000 copies. In a chapter on the 'Pilgrim Fathers', Arnold-Foster stressed that 'though they could not any longer live in England, they longed to be in a land where English law was known and where the English tongue was spoken'. American descendants were

74. Goldstein, 'Diplomacy in the Service of History'.

75. M. Hall and E. Goldstein, 'Writers, the Clergy, and the "Diplomatisation of Culture": Sub-Structures of Anglo-American Diplomacy, 1820–1914', in J. Fisher and A. Best, eds, *On the Fringes of Diplomacy: Influences on British Foreign Policy, 1800–1945* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 127–54.

76. D. Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race: Utopia, Empire and the Destiny of Anglo-America* (Princeton, NJ, 2020).

77. P. Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire: The Politics of History Teaching in England, 1870–1939* (Manchester, 2013), quotations at pp. 2, 65.

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'proud of their forefathers', Arnold-Forster suggested, and had 'reason to be', given how 'to this day' they formed 'the best and strongest part of the population' of New England.[78]

The discourse of transatlantic cultural ancestry reached its apogee during the First World War, when the US entry in 1917 cemented an 'imagined community' of Anglo-America.[79] The *Mayflower* now became a figurative vehicle that linked the American and British war efforts.[80] Writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, Rudyard Kipling declared that the arrival of the Americans in the conflict was 'The Second Sailing of the Mayflower' and the beginning of a new era.[81] In 1918, the British National War Aims Committee published *The Return of 'The Mayflower': Why America is Fighting*, the first in the 'Allies Series' of pamphlets focusing on strengthening the links between the Allied nations, and specifically their Anglo-American wing.[82] Serendipitously, the tercentenary of the voyage was also drawing near. Interest was already evident in the US, where the 'perceived religious and political instability of the immediate post-war period made the Pilgrims, their history, and their symbolic meaning easily malleable by numerous secular and religious interests'.[83] In Britain, local and religious communities also began to plan.

Even before this auspicious anniversary, many localities had sporadically tied themselves to the memory of the Pilgrims. Southampton and Plymouth, however, had taken the lead in incorporating the *Mayflower* into a specifically civic history. In historical terms, their relationship to the voyage was minor and circumstantial; the former was the original point of departure, and the latter the second point after the vessel had been forced back (via Dartmouth) due to the leaking hull of the companion ship *Speedwell*. In neither case could each port honestly claim to have shaped the Pilgrims' lives or beliefs, and, apart from documents created by the Pilgrims afterwards, there were no contemporary records verifying each's role. Serious interest in memorialising the *Mayflower* in these towns

78. H.O. Arnold-Forster, *A History of England from the Landing of Julius Cæsar to the Present Day* (1897; London, 1912), pp. 440–41.

79. J. Bennett and M. Hampton, 'World War I and the Anglo-American Imagined Community: Civilization vs. Barbarism in British Propaganda and American Newspapers', in J.H. Wiener and M. Hampton, eds, *Anglo-American Media Interactions, 1850–2000* (Basingstoke, 2007).

80. Abraham Lincoln was also claimed as an Anglo-Saxon: S. Edwards, '"From Here Lincoln Came": Anglo-Saxonism, the Special Relationship, and the Anglicisation of Abraham Lincoln, *c.*1860–1970', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, xi (2013), pp. 22–46.

81. Rudyard Kipling, 'The Second Sailing of the "Mayflower"', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 Aug. 1918. Kipling had probably read the similar allusions made by the American ambassador, Walter Hines Page, speaking in Plymouth less than two weeks previously: *The Union of two Great Peoples: A speech by W.H. Page ... delivered at Plymouth, August 4 1917* (London, 1917).

82. H. Neil, *The Return of 'The Mayflower': Why America is Fighting* (London, 1918).

83. S.K. Nytroe, 'Religion and Memory in American Culture, 1890–1920' (Boston College Ph.D. thesis, 2009), p. 294; C. Arnold-Lourie, 'Baby Pilgrims, Sturdy Forefathers, and One Hundred Percent Americanism: The Mayflower Tercentenary of 1920', *Massachusetts Historical Review*, xvii (2015), pp. 35–66.

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began in the late Victorian period, a point when narratives of municipal progress and civic leadership drew profitably on the appreciation and celebration of a town's historical stature. Town histories and almanacs told these stories alongside contemporary successes in municipal management, creating a seamless Whiggish narrative of progress.[84] When it became clear that growing interest in the *Mayflower* could contribute to not just civic prestige but transatlantic business too, local leaders began emphasising their historical and contemporary Anglo-American connections.

It is important to note that this civic development marked a shift in the cultural valence of the *Mayflower* story, as well as a turning point in historical culture. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the story had largely been retold through histories, poetry and novels. But the turn of the twentieth century was a high point for localised articulations of identity and belonging, which coalesced with an enthusiasm for expressions of historic character.[85] For villages, towns and cities across Britain, but especially on the English south coast and in the Midlands, celebrating a link to the *Mayflower* supported a claim for contemporary importance in a national—and indeed international—frame of reference. Plaques and monuments began to appear in the 1890s; ritualistic civic functions were held for visiting American dignitaries; and an increasingly cost-effective and modernised transatlantic print culture, alongside rapidly increasing literacy, meant that the local story of the Pilgrims could be brought to a wider audience than ever before, for example through illustrated guidebooks, the postcard boom and the apotheosis of the popular press.[86]

Southampton's Pilgrim Fathers' Memorial (1913) encapsulated these shifts (fig. 3). F.J.C. Hearnshaw, a professor of history at Southampton's Hartley University College, led the campaign for this monument. Like his mentor, J.R. Seeley, Hearnshaw saw history as active civic education that demonstrated how local events contributed to national and global progress.[87] Hearnshaw traced the British Empire back to Anglo-Saxon

84. For town histories, see P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, c.1848–1914* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 180–82. More broadly, see S. Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class* (Manchester, 2000). For a more specific investigation of the role of the *Mayflower* in urban culture, see T. Hulme, 'The Mayflower and "Mother Plymouth": Anglo-America, Civic Culture and the Urban Past', *Cultural and Social History*, xviii (2021), pp. 517–37; and M. Vandrei, '"Why Should Not Citadels Become Academies?" Transatlantic Tercentenaries, Higher Education, and Local Pasts in Britain after the First World War', *History*, cvii (2022), pp. 526–48.

85. Readman, 'Place of the Past in English Culture'.

86. See M.B. Huish, *The American Pilgrim's Way in England to Homes and Memorials of the Founders of Virginia, the New England States and Pennsylvania* (London, 1907), which included reproductions of watercolours by Elizabeth Mary Chettle. For the context of this print revolution, see A. Ardis and P. Collier, 'Introduction', in A. Ardis and P. Collier, eds, *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms* (Basingstoke, 2008).

87. R. Soffer, *History, Historians, and Conservatism in Britain and America: From the Great War to Thatcher and Reagan* (Oxford, 2010), p. 52. For example, see 'Southampton and Empire Making', *Hampshire Advertiser*, 14 Mar. 1903, p. 8.

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settlements—in this case, Hampton—and 'the other great Anglo-Saxon Federation, the United States' back to 'the Pilgrim Fathers who left Southampton'.[88] The memorial takes the form of a rough stone pillar leading to columns, derived from an Ionic order, that support carved corbels of allegorical women (representing Pilgrim ideals of Faith, Hope and Charity) and the prow of a ship, facing the sea. Atop

Figure 3. Tom Hulme, 'Southampton Pilgrim Fathers' Memorial, built 1913' (2018). Photograph by author.

88. F.J.C. Hearnshaw, 'Some Great Events in the History of Southampton', in F.J.C. Hearnshaw, ed., *Relics of Old Southampton: Memorial Volume of the Local Exhibition of Local Antiquities* (Southampton, 1904), p. 157.

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the memorial is a gold and white mosaic cupola, containing a beacon lantern and crowned by a copper *Mayflower* weather vane. The composite of classical influences and stone simplicity symbolised 'the high civilisation of the Old World superimposed on the rough unhewn rock of primeval America'.[89] Walter Hines Page, the US ambassador and another champion of Anglo-Saxonism, was given the unveiling honours, after which he told the gathered crowds that 'great qualities of soul' had made the Pilgrims 'such dauntless adventurers', and also the only colonists 'that went in search of God and not of gold'. Above all, he argued, the Pilgrims 'still wished to be English subjects' despite having not 'been kindly enough treated' in their home country.[90]

Commemorations, while often linked to moments of national pride, depended heavily on local patriotism.[91] As the Anglo-American world ruminated on Allied victory and its historical roots, the tercentenary of the voyage in 1920 'offered a vehicle' for towns to identify with a 'major achievement'—and an opportunity to use 'new secular ceremonies' for old civic purposes.[92] Southampton and Plymouth dominated the commemorative landscape in 1920—with pageants, parades and speeches by important diplomatic speakers witnessed by tens of thousands—because of their size and contribution to the Anglo-American war effort rather than any historical primacy.[93] Religious communities, however, continued to find real purchase in the *Mayflower*, loosely tracing their nonconformist beliefs back to the Separatists in a way that demonstrates the continued significance and adaptability of religious institutions in this period.[94] Particularly important for the 1920 moment was the Free Church Association and its former president James Rendel Harris. A Quaker from Plymouth, he forcefully called for the commemoration in 1918: 'the great reunion of English speaking people', as he put it, 'which the future must surely have somewhere in reserve'. Harris granted politicians their allotted role in the celebration but insisted: 'The privilege of organising and carrying out the welcome of the returning Mayflower belongs to the Free Churches, who inherit the same religious traditions. They are ours because they are ourselves'.[95] Many places across Britain, and especially those in England that were

89. J. Roethe, 'Richard Macdonald Lucas, the Architect of Southampton's Mayflower Memorial', *Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society Newsletter*, lxxv (2021), pp. 10–11.

90. 'Memorial to Pilgrim Fathers', *The Times*, 16 Aug. 1913, p. 8.

91. R. Quinault, 'The Cult of the Centenary, *c.*1784–1914', *Historical Research*, lxxi (1998), p. 322.

92. C. Macleod and J. Tann, 'From Engineer to Scientist: Reinventing Invention in the Watt and Faraday Centenaries, 1919–31', *British Journal for the History of Science*, xl (2007), p. 389.

93. H. Whitfield, *'Mother Plymouth': A Souvenir of the Mayflower Tercentenary together with the Story of the Pilgrim Fathers, 1620–1920* (Plymouth, 1920).

94. D. Nash, *Christian Ideals in British Society: Stories of Belief in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 1–3.

95. 'Pilgrim Fathers', *Western Morning News*, 15 Mar. 1918.

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now known—thanks to the tireless work of genealogists—to have been birthplaces of or home to Pilgrims, held conferences, services, excursions and pageants.[96] The specifics of the Pilgrims' religious principles by this point were often not overly important; above all, they were exemplars of maintaining faith in adverse times: *all* Christian denominations could thus recognise the importance of the Pilgrims. During the 1920 tercentenary, for example, there was 'an International Conference' on 'The Call of the Present Situation to International Protestantism' in Plymouth, with speakers representing the US, Britain, France, Holland and Switzerland.[97] Less seriously, a visiting minister from Springfield, IL, captured this spirit when preaching at the Chelmsford service in the local Congregational Church. Expressing his 'pleasure' at seeing the Bishop of Chelmsford present, he said, to laughter, 'Their Puritan fathers thought they might dispense with Bishops but it was quite impossible to do that', and sometimes he thought 'their Anglican brothers had been so zealous in the celebrations of the *Mayflower* that they had almost regarded it as their own'.[98]

If religion played an important role in the celebrations, the utopian sense of racial destiny also continued to matter. An article in *The Observer*, titled 'The Meaning of the "Mayflower"', cast the voyage as 'the grandest achievement of the English race', whose commemoration was not simply 'antiquarian or sentimental' but a reflection of the desire to 'recall facts in our past not for their own sake, but for their bearing on the present'. 'If, as British and Americans are persuaded, there is truth and power in the beliefs they share', *The Observer* argued, 'they cannot hold back from joint action to make them effective in the councils of the world'.[99] This supposed cultural power of Anglo-American traditions was projected forwards by Lord Birkenhead during a commemorative speech at Southampton. During the war, he argued, 'strange doctrines' and 'heresies' abounded, with people being told that 'democracy had met its final refutation' and that they 'must look to Soviets'. On the contrary, said Birkenhead, 'the civilisation of the world had no surer anchor than the historical traditions of the British people'—and only close association between Britain and the US could help 'conquer the post-war perils which menaced them'.[100]

The tercentenary marked a high point in the cultural afterlife of the *Mayflower* in Britain, a moment when religious communities, local governments and international diplomats alike could find ways of interpreting, nuancing, employing and retelling the story. The commemorations were productive of a great deal of ephemera, but

96. 'Tercentenary of the Pilgrim Fathers', *The Times*, 3 July 1920, p. 49.
97. 'Gulf of 300 Years Bridged', *Western Morning News*, 7 Sept. 1920, p. 5.
98. 'Mayflower Celebrations', *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 1 Oct. 1920, p. 7.
99. 'The Meaning of the "Mayflower"', *The Observer*, 25 July 1920, p. 10.
100. 'Civilisation and its Sheet Anchor', *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 26 July 1920, p. 1.

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there were lasting memorials as well. Although Rendel's claim to have located the remaining timbers of the *Mayflower* in the fabric of a barn near the Quaker Meeting House at Jordans, Buckinghamshire was fanciful, it nonetheless became a new site on the Pilgrim trail.[101] But, in the decades that followed this major commemoration, the power of the Pilgrims to connect to international Anglo-American diplomacy—or, at least, provide a primary inspiration—began to wane. Interest and enthusiasm, however, did remain in those communities that had begun to connect themselves to the story in the late nineteenth century, and, as place-making and heritage agendas came to the fore during the later twentieth century, the *Mayflower* story retained cultural purchase at a local level.

V

After the final parades had passed and the *Mayflower* tercentenary itself became history, the Pilgrims remained a popular and recognisable facet of a wider enthusiasm in Britain for the celebration and preservation of the local past.[102] The Reverend Hugh Parry's 'Mayflower Pageant', which had been commissioned by the Mayflower Council for Plymouth's tercentenary celebrations, continued to be performed around the country until at least the 1930s. Mixing comical farce with more earnest calls for religious freedom, the storyline went all the way from imagining a meeting of Robinson, Bradford, William Brewster and Richard Clyfton at Scrooby in 1608 to peace-making attempts and Thanksgiving with the Wampanoag people in 1621. Reflecting the influence of Longfellow's *Courtship* poem, a romantic subplot focused on John Alden and Priscilla Mullins; the epilogue depicted them staring into a crystal ball ('a gift from the Ancient Medicine Men of the Indians') and witnessing the *Mayflower* returning eastward—signifying the US coming to the aid of Britain during the Great War.[103] This pageant thus contributed to the larger narrative of Anglo-American rapprochement that suffused the tercentenary. But it represented a new development too: the ability of the *Mayflower* story to be both fun and participatory on a mass scale. Historical pageants had blossomed in the opening decades of the twentieth century, but it was in the inter-war years that they were democratised; it was not just the civic elite who took the plum roles but now the everyday urbanites too, and a focus on the 'common people' and not just 'great men' was also evident in storylines.[104] Both developments were apparent in the many *Mayflower*

101. J.R. Harris, *The Finding of the Mayflower* (Manchester, 1920).

102. A. Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London, 2010).

103. H. Parry, *The Historical Pageant of the 'Mayflower'* (London, 1920).

104. T. Hulme, '"A Nation of Town Criers": Civic Publicity and Historical Pageantry in Inter-War Britain', *Urban History*, xliv (2016), pp. 270–92.

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pageants of the 1920s and 1930s; in effect, the casts of hundreds—not to mention set builders, costume creators and orchestra players—were now active producers too.

Growing enthusiasm in the inter-war period for American culture also meant that access to the *Mayflower* story was becoming more dispersed in Britain.[105] In *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1923), the actor and producer Charles Ray tried to capitalise on both the enduring popularity of the Longfellow poem and the renewed interest aroused by the tercentenary to bring the Pilgrims to the American silver screen. Though audiences were apparently unimpressed and the film was a box office bomb, the 'glorious, brave lunacy' of creating a full-size reconstruction of the ship at a cost of $65,000 (over a million dollars today) hinted at the story's potential for visual spectacle.[106] Even before this film, however, the massed crowds and pageants of the tercentenary had been ideal material for the newsreels that were shown before the main picture in British cinemas.[107] Increasingly sophisticated advertising also began to play a part in how the Pilgrim image was transmitted. One poster, for example, produced for the London & North Eastern Railway in 1929 by Austin Cooper in the post-impressionistic style, depicted two Pilgrim 'Passengers of the Past' on a voyage by train in the present, captioned with a ditty: 'As they joined the Harwich boat train / They were overheard to say / we'll hook it first to Holland / then found the USA'.[108] One of a series of travel advertisements inspired by the popular past, it was emblematic of three facets of inter-war Britain: the instant recognisability of the Pilgrims; the desire of even small towns to promote tourism; and the fact that 'history' and 'modernity', both in topic and technique, were certainly not irreconcilable.[109]

Throughout the 1920s to 1940s, transatlantic visitors flocked to 'American shrines on English soil', not least the Mayflower Barn at Jordans.[110] Bits of wood were chipped off this newly historic structure to be ceremonially gifted as symbols of the Anglo-American relationship: in

105. R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918–1951* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 523–7.

106. K. Brownlow, *Hollywood, the Pioneers* (New York, 1979), p. 246.

107. Some of which survive; for example, 'Mayflower Tercentenary Celebration at Plymouth', *Gaumont Graphic Newsreel*, 9 Aug. 1920, available via the British Pathé website, film id: VLVA6YHNS6SREZIY88IZKF4BR6YEP, at https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/168112/ (accessed 13 May 2020).

108. We cannot reproduce this image due to copyright law relating to open access publishing. It can, however, be viewed online at 'Passengers of the Past—the Pilgrim Fathers' (object no. 1978-9426), Science Museum Group, https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co231499/passengers-of-the-past-the-pilgrim-fathers-poster (accessed 5 May 2023).

109. Michael Saler has shown how 'interwar medieval modernists' sought to integrate the romantic past with contemporary life, infusing 'mass commodities with soul': M.T. Saler, *The Avant-Garden in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford, 1999). Austin Cooper, though not discussed in Saler's book, was a prolific designer of Underground posters and brought this aesthetic to his 'Passengers of the Past' poster.

110. J.F. Muirhead, *American Shrines on English Soil* (London, 1925)—the Mayflower Barn features at p. 106.

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1921, for example, the Quakers presented a part of one of the timbers to Samuel Hills (an American Friend), who placed it in a chest inside the Pacific Highway Association Peace Portal on the boundary between the US and Canada to commemorate the 'common ancestry' and a century of Anglo-American peace; and, during the Second World War, wood from the rafters was used to create a 'Mayflower medal' for Winston Churchill to give to Franklin D. Roosevelt.[111] Two new memorials were also erected: in 1925, an austere obelisk (incorporating granite from a deconstructed canopy covering the legendary Plymouth Rock in Plymouth, MA) by the Anglo-American Society of Hull at Immingham Creek, the site supposed at the time to be where the Pilgrims left for Holland in 1608; and, in Plymouth in 1934, a small Grecian arch, mimicking the neo-Classical style of the larger memorial that had replaced the granite canopy in the 'daughter' Plymouth. In both cases, the memorials connected local places to a larger Anglo-American story.[112]

In reality, high-level diplomatic relations between the two nations were often cold during the inter-war years.[113] But during and after the Second World War the newly dubbed 'Special Relationship' undoubtedly came back to the fore. It was, however, now shorn of the racialised Anglo-Saxonism of the early twentieth century; the end results of Nazism, and the increasing power and visibility of immigrant communities in the US, meant that such a discourse was unsuitable on both sides of the Atlantic. After the formal creation of the Commonwealth in 1931, and more explicit imperial decline from the late 1940s, the Pilgrims were in any case no longer of any use in justifying a genetic right of the British to rule the world. Nonetheless, the 'shared values of liberty and democracy characteristic of the "English-Speaking" peoples' remained available for cultural diplomacy—in a manner reminiscent, if not named as such, of the less racialised early Victorian Anglo-Saxonism.[114] Churchill was famously one of the key architects of this 'Special Relationship'. In *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* (1956), he gave the *Mayflower* its own chapter and emphasised how 'the British stream' of migrants had 'followed first and remained foremost' in contributing to the 'manifold character of the future United States'.[115] Many of the monuments and plaques to the Pilgrims in Britain date

111. London Metropolitan Archives, Pilgrim Trust Collection, LMA/4450/C/04/227, Peter B Smallwood (Clerk to Trustees of Old Jordans Hostel) to Lord Kilmaine (Secretary of the Pilgrim Trust), 23 June 1964, The 'Mayflower Barn', Jordans, Beaconsfield, Bucks.

112. 'Memorial after 314 years', *Western Morning News*, 6 Sept. 1934, p. 5.

113. J.E. Moser, *Twisting the Lion's Tail: American Anglophobia between the World Wars* (New York, 1999).

114. Edwards, 'From Here Lincoln Came', pp. 36–7.

115. W.S. Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, II*: The New World* (London, 1956), p. 154. See A.P. Dobson and S. Marsh, eds, *Churchill and the Anglo-American Special Relationship* (London, 2017).

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from this period. The newly rebuilt Corinthian-style oak reredos at St Bride's, the famous Wren church on Fleet Street that had almost been totally destroyed in a Luftwaffe bombing raid, were dedicated in 1957 'To the Glory of God and the memory of Edward Winslow and all who sailed across the sea in the Mayflower', with Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip attending the service.[116] On a smaller scale, in 1955 a small bronze plaque was affixed to the harbour wall in the small town of Dartmouth. The *Mayflower* and *Speedwell* had put into that port for a short period of time to repair leaks to the latter. This tenuous connection is amplified on the plaque, which states: 'Thus Dartmouth took part in establishing civil and religious liberty'. Other plaques went up across the country at the same time: in churches (such as St Wilfred's, Scrooby, where the Pilgrim William Brewster was baptised); on monuments (as in Southampton and Plymouth); and on civic buildings (such as the Boston [Lincolnshire] Guild Hall, where the Pilgrims had possibly been imprisoned in 1607).

To a large degree these 1950s commemorations were a last gasp of the Pilgrim usefulness to Anglo-American ideals—and a relatively weak gasp at that. The memorials lacked the physical grandeur of those churches built in the late nineteenth century or the monuments erected between the 1910s and 1930s, and received little fanfare, with just brief local press notices and crowds that numbered in the tens rather than thousands. In comparison to the commemorations thirty years earlier, the level of interest shown by Britons was telling. In 1955, each small bronze plaque was donated by the General Society of Mayflower Descendants, an American and unavoidably single-interest organisation.[117] Funding for Pilgrim memorials had always flowed 'home' from the US, but previous schemes had at least originated with local individuals, associations and town councils, and had drawn on broader societal enthusiasm. On the one hand, the power and priorities of municipal councils after the Second World War, combined with the shift towards the centralisation of government and culture, discouraged grand celebrations of local history.[118] But, on the other hand, there was distinctly less enthusiasm from American diplomats, too; if officials came at all to the unveilings, they were usually just representatives of the ambassador, giving short and generic speeches. The utopian dream of a federation across the Atlantic was, by the late 1950s, a distant memory, as the balance of supremacy between the two nations started to shift sharply. American war memorials in Britain, as Sam Edwards has argued, now emphasised 'American power rather than

116. 'During the Rededication Service', *Illustrated London News*, 28 Dec. 1957, p. 9.

117. E. Frances Reyer, 'The Mayflower Descendants' Return to the Pilgrim Country of England and Holland, 1955', typescript booklet, n.d., n.p., p. 32. This booklet can be viewed online via the HathiTrust Digital Library at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89064055296&seq=6 (accessed 28 Aug. 2023)

118. T. Hulme, *After the Shock City: Urban Culture and the Making of Modern Citizenship* (Woodbridge, 2019), pp. 203–8.

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European heritage; the American future rather than the European past; [and] the ideology of the New World rather than the institutions of the Old World'.[119] Easily recalled symbols such as the *Mayflower* did retain some cultural purchase in the new articulation of Anglo-American diplomacy, but only as a passing curiosity rather than any central understanding of the relationship between the two countries.[120]

A decline in the political power of the story, however, did not spell the end of its utility altogether. The announcement in 1955 that a replica ship would recreate the voyage brought widespread public curiosity on both sides of the Atlantic. This '*Mayflower II*' project was indicative of the changing direction of interest in the later twentieth century, and the increasing power of Americanised media to shape the narrative. It was the brainchild of Warwick Charlton, an eccentric and ambitious British journalist and public-relations man who saw an opportunity to loosely celebrate the Anglo-American relationships of the Second World War, while also boosting his own public profile.[121] Charlton claimed to have had his *Mayflower II* idea after stumbling across a copy of Bradford's original history, but it seems likely that he had also been influenced by another Hollywood spectacular: *Plymouth Adventure* (1953). Starring Spencer Tracy, this film was adapted from the 1950 bestseller of the Irish-Czech novelist Ernest Gébler, which was itself based on research on the original Pilgrims.[122] The film kept some of the colonial politics of the book but amplified the fictitious love-triangle subplots; the *New York Times* thus concluded, fairly, that it might have seemed 'a trifle flowery and presumptuous' to 'serious historians', but was still unlikely to 'shake the concepts learned at school'.[123] Critics were lukewarm and the picture made a loss, but a scale replica *Mayflower* and the undeniably spectacular sea storm scene—'one of the most convincing … ever ... seen on the screen', according to *The Times*—helped it win an Academy Award for visual effects.[124] Charlton's own *Mayflower II* also tended towards spectacle and consumerism (as noted disapprovingly by the Foreign Office, reflecting highbrow fears about the Americanisation of popular culture).[125] For two years, tabloids and newsreels eagerly

119. S. Edwards, *Allies in Memory: World War II and the Politics of Transatlantic Commemoration, c.1941–2001* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 71.

120. Other historical English symbols were still adopted into diplomacy, such as Magna Carta, which saw Runnymede, Surrey, transformed into a shrine to Anglo-America's constitutional heritage: S.H.J. Franklin, 'Magna Carta: Public Commemoration, Celebration, and Meaning, 1915–2015' (Royal Holloway University of London Ph.D. thesis, 2020), pp. 97–133.

121. W. Charlton, *The Voyage of Mayflower II* (London, 1957).

122. E. Gébler, *The Plymouth Adventure: A Chronicle Novel of the Voyage of the Mayflower* (New York, 1950).

123. B. Crowther, '"Plymouth Adventure", a Vivid Portrayal of a Pilgrim Voyage', *New York Times*, 14 Nov. 1952, p. 20.

124. 'Plymouth Adventure', *The Times*, 5 Feb. 1953, p. 3.

125. See T.R. Bromund, '"This Somewhat Embarrassing Ship": The British Foreign Office and the Mayflower II, 1954–1957', *New England Quarterly*, lxxii (1999), pp. 42–60.

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tracked the building of the ship at a shipyard in Brixham in Devon and the eventual voyage in the spring and early summer of 1957.[126] Like historical pageants earlier in the century, the growing sophistication of film, combined with the ambition of building scale and even actual-sized replicas, better captured the magnitude of the ship's voyage than it did the morality of its passengers.

By the time of Britain's comparatively small 'Mayflower350' celebration in 1970, the commercial motive was more apparent than ever before. Plymouth again took the lead, recognising that, as a port that had 'seen a steady decline', a 'sales pitch … transatlantic oriented' could revitalise the local economy. Pilgrims' trails and passports, an ancestor-searching service and entertainments—from parades and fireworks to 'living history' costumed re-enactors—hoped to draw in visitors.[127] Across Britain, there was a trade in *Mayflower* trinkets, such as 2,000 'one-off' silver jugs (miniaturised copies of those that may have been used at the time the Pilgrims were establishing their colony) or mass-produced decorative crockery (with both historical and modernist designs); these required little emotional investment in the Pilgrims, but nonetheless attest to how easily the story was embedded in commemorative material culture.[128] In 1920 there had certainly also been a touristic motive in the *Mayflower* commemorations, but it was balanced with high-level cultural diplomacy and sincere religious celebration. By 1970, these latter aspects were distinctly overshadowed by the former: Anglo-American relations had weakened, 'soured' especially by tensions over the Vietnam War; and religious observance, after a remarkable resurgence in the 1950s, was now struggling against the 1960s revolution in culture and society.[129] In such a context, the nonconformist Pilgrims had only a limited political purchase.

Yet in the combination of a democratisation of 'local history' and the growth of interest in 'heritage', both particularly marked since the 1970s, there has been a resurgence of curiosity about the Pilgrims—if, in comparison to the early twentieth century, of a much more parochial flavour.[130] Already in 1970, in spite of the mass

126. The Brixham Heritage Museum holds the collection of material relating to the voyage, including the project's 'boosterish' magazine, the *Mayflower Mail* (1956–7). See also R. Charlton, *The Wicked Pilgrim: The Story of the Englishman who Gave Mayflower II to America* (2019).

127. 'How They Will Mark Historic Voyage', *The Times*, 8 May 1970, p. 15; *Mayflower 70: Plymouth Plans for Celebrating the 350th Anniversary of the Voyage of the Pilgrim Fathers to America* (Plymouth, 1970).

128. '350th Mayflower Anniversary', *Illustrated London News*, 1 Aug. 1970, p. 33.

129. S.A. Ellis, 'Lyndon Johnson, Harold Wilson and the Vietnam War: A *Not* So Special Relationship?', in J. Hollowell, *Twentieth-Century Anglo-American Relations* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 181; J. Morris, 'Secularization and Religious Experience: Arguments in the Historiography of Modern British Religion', *Historical Journal*, lv (2012), pp. 195–219; C.G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000* (London, 2001).

130. See J. de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (London, 2009).

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entertainment programme in places like Plymouth, the anniversary gave local history enthusiasts a renewed focus on the historical 'whys' and 'wheres' of the Pilgrims in Britain. Mary Boast, for example, a south London-based librarian, was commissioned by Southwark borough council to write *The Mayflower and Pilgrim Story: Chapters from Rotherhithe and Southwark* in 1970. She recognised that the associations of the Pilgrims with that area were 'probably less widely known' than Plymouth, Southampton or Scrooby, but stressed the likelihood that the *Mayflower* had set sail from the Thames at Rotherhithe.[131] Other accessible local publications—in Billericay, Harwich and Southampton—were written by those who simply wanted to acknowledge that important things had happened in their towns.[132]

Mayflower interest has mostly been maintained through the enthusiasm of these authors, along with family historians and local heritage groups. Religious communities especially, even if dwindling in size, have kept the flame alight. The campaigns for grand civic *Mayflower* monuments that looked across the Atlantic have been replaced by smaller personal memorials more in tune with communities: in 1989, a stained glass window was installed to commemorate the baptism of Bradford in St Helen's Church, Austerfield; in 1995, the 375th anniversary of the voyage, Christopher Jones, the captain of the ship, was the subject of an abstract statue in the grounds of the church where he worshipped (St Mary's, Rotherhithe); and, in 1996, a plaque to the sad story of the four More children (sent off on the *Mayflower* by their father, only one of them survived the first year of the colony) was placed in St James Church, Shipton, Shropshire. 'Pilgrims & Prophets', a 'social enterprise managed by Christians from local churches in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire' that aims to 'share' their 'region's rich Christian heritage and celebrate its present-day church community and fellowship', has been giving tours of Pilgrim (and other religious history) sites since 2016.[133] The ability and the desire to tell an international and culturally important story through the morals of the *Mayflower* may have waned in the second half of the twentieth century, but the memory of the Pilgrims was preserved, and arguably in those very places that could lay the best claim of a connection to the original historic event.

131. M. Boast, *The Mayflower and Pilgrim Story: Chapters from Rotherhithe and Southwark* (London, 1970). Graham Taylor has also stressed London's importance: G. Taylor, *The Mayflower in Britain: How an Icon was Made in London* (Stroud, 2020).

132. For example, see W. Cooper, *Harwich, the Mayflower and Christopher Jones* (London, 1970) and Basildon Branch Libraries, *Billericay and the New World: A Summary of Facts and Legends Concerning the Association of Billericay with the 'Mayflower' Venture* [Basildon, 1970].

133. See Pilgrims and Prophets: Christian Heritage Tours, at https://www.pilgrimsandprophets.co.uk/about-us/ (accessed 5 Nov. 2019); and A. Gray, *Restless Souls, Pilgrim Roots: The Turbulent History of Christianity in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire* (Retford, 2020).

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VI

A wealth of familiar rhetoric about what the Pilgrims and the *Mayflower* voyage symbolise in Britain—values of adventure and stoical spirit, religious hope and tolerance, and the founding of American democracy from English ideals—has developed from the interplay of historical ideas within both academic and popular culture over the last several hundred years. For the 2020 anniversary (though in the event the celebration was severely disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic), a body named Mayflower400—supported generously by Arts Council funding, the Plymouth City Council and private industry—drew on this rhetoric to: 'highlight the strength' of the Anglo-American 'relationship' (and with some room for Dutch commemoration too); 'demonstrate that the UK is open for visitors and business'; 'drive an economic boost through creative, cultural and tourism sectors'; and 'bring communities together through culture and heritage'.[134] And, as in previous years, such a positive interpretation is by no means definitive; a pamphlet written by the 'Mayflower Mavericks' and published by the Socialist History Society asked provocatively in its title 'Thanksgiving or Land Grabbing, Massacres and Slavery?'. The 'inglorious tradition of sanitising the Mayflower story', they argue, conceals the 'genocidal effects of the colonization of the Indigenous population, and New England's role in slavery and the slave trade'.[135] Certainly, the cultural afterlife of the *Mayflower* story in British culture has frequently been predicated on an idealised myth of brave and pious refugees finding freedom in the American 'wilderness'. But, having caught up with postcolonial critiques and the challenging of the Pilgrims in American public culture, activist pushback in Britain encouraged a more nuanced commemoration: one that tried to balance English adventuring with the realities of imperial expansion.[136] A more concerted effort to include Wampanoag representatives—through new exhibitions and the touring of a Wampum belt, for example—was thus notable in comparison to

134. 'About Mayflower 400', *Mayflower 400, 1620–2020*, at https://www.mayflower400uk.org/about/about-mayflower-400/ (accessed 5 Nov. 2019). Steve Marsh has drawn attention to how this commemoration had an underlying political value of celebrating the relationship between Britain and the US, but also 'acquired additional salience' because of the turbulence caused by Britain's exit from the European Union and the nationalistic isolationism of Trump: S. Marsh, 'Pageantry, Legitimation, and Special Anglo-American Relations', in Hendershot and Marsh, eds, *Culture Matters*, p. 144. For the effect of the pandemic on dampening enthusiasm, see S. Morris, 'Covid curbs 400th Mayflower anniversary as Americans stay away', *The Guardian,* 16 Sept. 2020, available online at https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/sep/16/covid-curbs-400th-mayflower-anniversary-as-americans-stay-away (accessed 24 Aug. 2023).

135. D. Reilly and S. Cushion, *Telling the Mayflower Story: Thanksgiving or Land Grabbing, Massacres and Slavery?* (Socialist History Society Occasional Publication, no. 43; 2019).

136. See the 'Suppressed Speech of Wamsutta James, 1970', in J.E. Seelye and S.A. Littleton, eds, *Voices of the American Indian Experience*, II: *1878–Present* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2013), pp. 587–9; P.C. Smith and R.A. Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York, 1996).

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the 1970 commemoration, even if the attempt to 'create a 400th anniversary that is historically accurate and culturally inclusive' could only founder under the sheer weight of that contradiction.[137]

Our purpose here, however, is not to reveal the 'truth' of the *Mayflower*, nor to judge the legacies of the Pilgrims and their promoters. Instead, we have demonstrated how the story provided opportunities for the creative reshaping of the past. Moments of *Mayflower* interest often coalesced around certain cultural or political purposes, from imperialism to Chartism, but even after those uses were no longer relevant the ideals or understandings they created have continued to inflect the telling and retelling of the story. But the afterlife of the *Mayflower* also highlights the importance of continuity—or, more significantly, *perceived* continuity—in the creation of identities. In this case, the voyage began as a story of one community removing to an outpost of that community: the Pilgrims were granted a charter by the very king they were defying, even if, in the eventuality, they settled elsewhere under their own 'Mayflower Compact'. At any rate, the early years of the colony are more accurately viewed as separation than secession. But, as tensions grew between Britain and its colony, that narrative became one of rebellion, in which the Pilgrims figured as predecessors of the American revolutionaries. The nineteenth century, punctuated by moments of high tension and even war, was a period during which Britain was forced to reassess its relationship with the US, and the story of the Pilgrims and the *Mayflower* allowed them to do this through a cultural and even ancestral lens, as well as a religious one. These supranational narrative strategies were ways that British commentators could maintain a hold on a narrative in danger of slipping away westward.

The malleability of the *Mayflower* story also highlights a more pressing point. To comprehend the Pilgrims in the present requires not just an unpacking of contemporary discourses—whether postcolonial, diplomatic or heritage-making—but also an appreciation of just how powerful the story has been for previous generations. It is worth knowing that our own interpretations are part of a longer sequence: a discursive process of historical culture. We have seen that no single group or community has ever been able to monopolise the *Mayflower* story or to settle the narrative irrevocably. To point out that historical stories can shift in their significance for later generations is by no means to argue that the Pilgrims had no historical reality within a documented historical narrative. But understanding history as a field of cultural production presents an opportunity for historians—broadly defined—to explore and critique the multiplicity of narratives that make up the story of our past(s).

We can see this interpretative struggle at work in the changing ways that British society commemorated the *Mayflower* voyage in 2020.

137. 'About Mayflower 400'.

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There was clearly an emphasis on boosting the international 'brands' of towns and cities across Britain that rarely get a moment in the limelight; certainly, the organisers of commemorations did not reach for the language of Anglo-Saxonism, and nor were religious narratives of international communities of belief evident beyond the margins. Nevertheless, audiences had to grapple with a variant of the same question that confronted people in 1920: what can this story do for us in the present? Mayflower400 consequently had a distinctly twenty-first-century flavour: what could a group of White men—religious extremists, whose wives often go unnamed, and whose descendants on far shores committed everything from bigotry and violence to cultural genocide—possibly teach the audiences of today? It is a moral conundrum that presently abounds in our fierce 'culture wars': how charitable can or should we be towards our ancestors? It is not an easy question to answer and we have not tried to do so here. But we think it is worth insisting that historical commemorations need not be moments merely of celebration, sadness or quiet reflection. In a mature and confidently diverse society, historical anniversaries can be opportunities for serious discussion, articulate protest and debate. No historical narrative is ever settled unless we allow it to ossify through neglect or, far more dangerously, by consensus. The 2020 commemorations, then, were an opportunity for us all to add our own voices to the multi-generational conversation that is historical culture; how that conversation will develop in the future, only time will tell.

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