

William Mullins (*Mayflower* passenger)

William Mullins (c. 1572 – 1621) and his family traveled as passengers on the historic 1620 voyage to America on the Pilgrim ship *Mayflower*. He was a signatory to the *Mayflower Compact*. Mullins perished in the pilgrims' first winter in the *New World*, with his wife and son dying soon after.^{[1][2][3]}



Mayflower in Plymouth Harbor by William Halsall (1882)

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Early life in England

William Mullins was born about 1572 in *Dorking*, County Surrey, England, probably the son of John Mullins and Joan/Joane (Bridger) of *Dorking* parish, located about 21 miles south of *London*. John Mullins died in February 1583/84 and William's mother Joane married secondly Vincent Benham on November 1, 1585. The *Dorking Register* shows baptisms, marriages and burials of persons with the name of "Mullyns" between 1571 and 1585 and then a gap in those names of about twenty-five years until more names of this family appear.^{[2][4]}

The first mention of William Mullins in *Dorking* records was on October 4, 1595, when he was fined, at about age 23, two pence by the manorial court for non-attendance at that year's session. That record states that he was then residing in the *Chippingborough* district of *Dorking*. Records note a William Mullins named on a 1596 muster list for *Stoke*, near *Guildford*, co. Surrey, where it is believed he was living at that time, and returning to *Dorking* about 1604.^[2]

While in *Guildford* it is believed that Mullins married for a first time, name of wife unknown. During that time, it is also believed that his first wife gave birth to at least one daughter, name Elizabeth, with baptism recorded at *Holy Trinity Church*, *Guildford* on December 11, 1598. Elizabeth may have died young. Authors Caleb Johnson and Charles Edward Banks have indicated that this unnamed wife may have given birth to a son and daughter prior to the 1598 birth of Elizabeth.^{[2][5]}

Records for Dorking dated October 5, 1604, again name William Mullins, then residing in the Eastborough district there where he was the head of a "frankpledge" – a group of ten families bonded to the king for their good behavior. And if one member of the group was fined or punished, all members would be punished, which is what happened on September 19, 1605 when Mullins and his frankpledge were fined for an unknown transgression.^[2]

Dorking records exist for several dates in 1612 for William Mullins:

On March 30, 1612 – William Mullins witnessed the will of John Wood.

On December 20, 1612 – Mullins was named the overseer of the will of Jane Hammon. That document, for the first time, states Mullins occupation as shoemaker.

On December 28, 1612 – Mullins purchased a tenement on West Street in Dorking. This house still exists and is often a stopping place for tourists. Banks refers to this house as the "Manor of Dorking."^{[4][6]}

In August (Banks says April 29) 1616 William Mullins was called before the Lordships of the Privy Council and held for an unknown reason for a period of time. On May 1 he appeared before the Privy Council and was technically continued in their custody "untill by their Honours' order hee be dismissed." It has been speculated that this may have involved matters of a religious nature which may have forced Mullins to consider emigrating.^{[4][6]}

In May 1619 Mullins sold his Dorking Manor holdings to Ephraim Bothell/Bothall for 280 pounds, which may have been a precursor of his preparations for the *Mayflower* voyage. It appears he made a good living as a shoemaker as his was one of the larger investments in the Merchant Adventurers group, of which he was a member, which was investing in the Pilgrim venture. His will shows he had nine shares of stock in the Merchant Adventurers and that his estate consisted primarily of boots and shoes.^{[6][7]}

The London businessmen known as the Merchant Adventurers, under the direction of Thomas Weston, invested in the *Mayflower* voyage from the very beginning. The documents drawn up, and approved by members of the Leiden church, imposed certain restrictions on the Pilgrims work week, to which they agreed. But as the time to depart England drew near, the Adventurers wanted the restrictions tightened which would have caused the Pilgrims to work almost 7 days a week, in an effect to increase profits, without such as due time for religious activities. The Pilgrims balked at this and refused to agree to the new terms. William Mullins played a part in these deliberations, probably because he had a large investment and needed to ensure a satisfactory return on it, as an Adventurers member. And although Robert Cushman, who had been the Leiden agent for *Mayflower* voyage preparations, came to Plymouth in November 1621 to try to settle the rift between the Pilgrims and the Adventurers, it was never resolved. Eventually the Pilgrims bought out the Adventurers and formed their own investment company.^{[6][8]}

On the Mayflower

When the Mullins family boarded the *Mayflower*, they consisted of William, then about age fifty, his wife Alice, daughter Priscilla and son Joseph, as well as a servant. They boarded the ship with the London contingent, and not as part of the Leiden religionists. Mullins was a shoemaker and businessman, and carried with him a large stock of boots and shoes. The family had left behind in Dorking the two eldest children, Sarah, about age 22 and probably married, and William, possibly in his

late 20s and married. These two older children may have been borne by a first wife of Mullins. His daughter Sarah, married to a man named Blunden, was his estate administrator, as requested in Mullins will.^{[1][5][6][9]}

Recording those on board the *Mayflower*, William Bradford wrote of Mullins as "Mr. William Mullins", possibly as he was somewhat more prosperous than many of the original settlers: "Mr. William Mullines, and his wife, and *2* children, Joseph and Priscila; and a servant, Robart Carter."^[10]

The *Mayflower* departed Plymouth, England on September 6/16, 1620. The small, 100-foot ship had 102 passengers and a crew of about 30-40 in extremely cramped conditions. By the second month out, the ship was being buffeted by strong westerly gales, causing the ship's timbers to be badly shaken with caulking failing to keep out sea water, and with passengers, even in their berths, lying wet and ill. This, combined with a lack of proper rations and unsanitary conditions for several months, attributed to what would be fatal for many, especially the majority of women and children. On the way there were two deaths, a crew member and a passenger, but the worst was yet to come after arriving at their destination when, in the space of several months, almost half the passengers perished in cold, harsh, unfamiliar New England winter.^[11]

On November 9/19, 1620, after about three months at sea, including a month of delays in England, they spotted land, which was the Cape Cod Hook, now called Provincetown Harbor. After several days of trying to get south to their planned destination of the Colony of Virginia, strong winter seas forced them to return to the harbor at Cape Cod hook, where they anchored on November 11/21. William Mullins signed The Mayflower Compact 11/21 1620.^{[6][11][12][13]}



Signing the Mayflower Compact
1620, a painting by Jean Leon
Gerome Ferris 1899

In the New World

William Mullins, his wife Alice and son Joseph all died within months of arriving in the New World, along with their servant Robert Carter. Only their daughter Priscilla survived. William may have been the first of the family to die, probably on February 21, 1621. In his will, written on his deathbed, he mentioned "my man Robert" indicating Carter was still alive then. Per Stratton, Alice, her son Joseph and servant Robert Carter were all alive on April 5, 1621 when the *Mayflower* set sail on its return voyage to England, but all had died before the arrival of the ship *Fortune* in mid-November of that year.^{[3][14][15]}

Family

The Family section has been revised based on an article about the William Mullins family by noted *Mayflower* researcher and biographer Caleb Johnson which appeared in the March 2012 *Mayflower Quarterly*. Mr. Johnson reviewed hundreds of pages of material on this family in England, in particular about the two wives of William Mullins. What he has created is what he refers to as a speculative hypothesis with genealogical information that he believes is entirely reasonable and plausible.^[16]

William Mullins probably married firstly Elizabeth Wood in Stoke, near Guildford, co. Surrey, England sometime prior to December 1598 – possibly in the early 1590s. She was the daughter of John and Joan (Taylor) Wood. She died sometime prior to 1604.^[16]

Children believed of that first marriage:

- William Mullins Jr., possibly born about 1593 and died in 1674 in New England, coming there sometime after his father's death. Records for the 1643 Able to Bear Arms List for "Duxborrow" (Duxbury) note a "Wm Mullens."

He married:

1. _____ by 1618 and had one daughter.
 2. Ann (____) Bell in Boston on May 7, 1656 as her second husband.
- Sarah Mullins, born possibly late 1590s. She married _____ Blunden by 1621 and remained in England. She was named the estate administrator in her father's will and was awarded administration in July 1621. No further information.
 - Elizabeth Mullins, baptized December 11, 1598 at Holy Trinity Church, Guildford, co. Surrey. She may have died young.^{[1][2][7]}
 - Priscilla Mullins was born about 1603 and died between 1651 and September 12, 1687, the date of her husband's death. She had been a passenger on the *Mayflower* with her parents and her brother Joseph, and only she survived after their deaths in 1621. She married *Mayflower* cooper John Alden before 1623 and had eleven children. The only proven descendants of William Mullins living today are descended from Priscilla.^[6]

Second wife of William Mullins and child of that marriage:

William Mullins married secondly Alice _____ possibly ca 1605. Her ancestry is unrecorded. She may have been the widow of two possible men with the surname Browne. She died in Plymouth in the winter of 1620/1.^[16]

Child believed of his second marriage:

- Joseph Mullins, born about 1606. He was a passenger on the *Mayflower* with his parents and sister Priscilla. He died after the first winter in Plymouth – sometime in 1621 between April 5 and mid-November, date unknown. His corrected birth year per Johnson.^{[1][7][17]}

Will of William Mullins

The will of William Mullins was the first one written in New England. It was written for him on his deathbed by Governor John Carver and witnessed by Dr. Giles Heale, surgeon of the *Mayflower* and its captain, Christopher Jones. His is the only known will of a *Mayflower* passenger who died that winter, with it being taken back to England on the *Mayflower*'s return trip. His will states that he was owed monies by "Goodman Wood" in the amount of 40 pounds of which he made distribution to family members in his will. Except for 10 pounds he gave to his daughter Sarah, he bequeathed all his stocks and bonds to his son William. He also made distribution of all goods and supplies brought with him on the *Mayflower* to family members as well as twenty-one dozen pairs of shoes and thirteen pairs of boots which he requested be sold to the New Plymouth Company. He also divided his shares in the joint-stock company among family members as well as stipulating that if his son William should ever come to Plymouth – which he eventually did – he would inherit his property there. The probate record of his will has the Latin annotation "nuper de Dorking defunctus in partibus transmarinis" indicating he formerly resided in Dorking, co. Surrey. The original will still survives today.^{[7][14]}

Death and burial of William Mullins, his wife Alice and son Joseph

William Mullins died on February 21, 1621, coincidentally the same date as another *Mayflower* passenger, William White, whose wife Susannah did survive.^[1]

William Mullins' wife Alice and son Joseph are believed to have died sometime after the departure of the *Mayflower* for England on April 5, 1621 and before the arrival of the ship Fortune in mid-November 1621. William was buried in Coles Hill Burial Ground, Plymouth, probably in an unmarked grave as was common in those early days. His wife Alice and son Joseph died sometime later in 1621 and were also buried in Coles Hill Burial Ground. The family is memorialized on the Pilgrim Memorial Tomb, Coles Hill, as "William Mullins, Alice his wife and Joseph their son." ^{[1][18]}

Apprentice in the company of the William Mullins family on the *Mayflower*

Robert Carter was an apprentice or manservant of William Mullins. He did not sign the Mayflower Compact in November 1620 and is believed to have been under age twenty-one at the time, probably in his late teens. Since he was traveling in the company of the Mullins family of Dorking, Surrey, it can be speculated that Carter came from this area as well, although his ancestry is uncertain.

When William Mullins died in February 1621, his will instructed his overseers "to have a special eye to my man Robert which hath not so much proved himself as I would he should have done." But Robert Carter died soon after his master's death.^{[19][20][21]}

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