

MYLES STANDISH- MAN OF MYSTERY

In 2020 Chorley, Duxbury and Standish will celebrate Myles Standish and the voyage of the Mayflower in 1620. Myles was the military adviser and leader attached to the Pilgrim Fathers, religious refugees and migrants, who undertook to cross the Atlantic and found their own godly settlement in North America.



The portrait of Myles could well be authentic and was probably painted in 1625 when he briefly returned to England in order to seek more investment in the Pilgrims' settlement of New Plymouth.

There are several meaty historical questions about Myles:

- How useful and important was he in America?
- Was his character too warlike- especially towards native Americans?
- Where was he born? (Many claim a Chorley origin for him.)

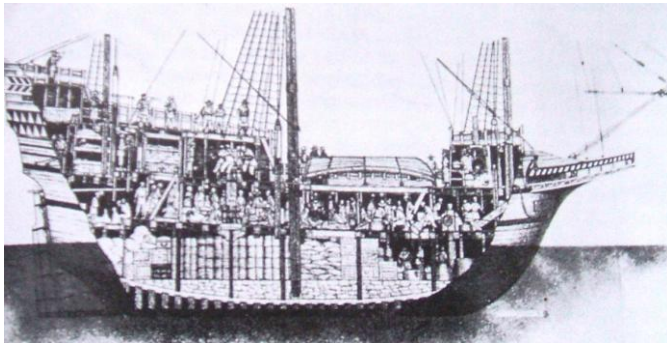
Myles Standish. What Do We Know About Him?

1584	Possible birth date, likely in Lancashire
By 1601	Drummer/soldier in the Netherlands
1601	Possible wounded Nys Sickem/ Myls Stansen in Leiden hospital
1601 -	Gains commission as lieutenant
1609-19	Becomes friendly with John Robinson and Leiden Separatists
	Marries first wife Rose
	Selected as "captain" by Pilgrim Fathers about to sail to America
15/11/1620	Commands first exploratory survey in America
29/1/1621	Wife Rose dies
1621	Helps nurse settlers through sickness
1620-3	Involved in exploratory/punitive missions amidst native Americans
July 1623	Marries second wife, Barbara
By 1625	Elder children -Charles(1), Alexander, Josiah
June 1625	Returns to London briefly
1627 +	Further children born- Lora, Josiah, Charles (2)
1627-41	Undertaker- helps organize trade and debt repayment
By 1632	Founds farm and settlement at Duxbury, township 1637
1644	Treasurer of Colony
1653	Placed in command in event of Dutch War; retires
1656	Dies

The Historical Background to The Pilgrim Fathers and Myles Standish

In England, during the seventeenth century, a group of English Protestants known as Puritans were unhappy within the Church of England. A small faction of them considered the Church of England beyond reform. They were known as Separatists and their failure to conform led to fines and often jail. Their solution was to seek sanctuary in Leiden, Holland which had a reputation for religious tolerance. However they found life there hard. In addition, the truce between the Dutch Republic and Spain was coming to an end and they feared that Catholic Spain would once again curtail their religious freedom.

They decided to cross the Atlantic to the New World where they could live an unhindered life. They underwent a series of misadventures coping with a leaky craft. Eventually, on 6 September 1620, 102 passengers, including some 50 Separatists, set sail for the New World. The voyage in the Mayflower was horrendous and they did not see land until 9 November.



Artist's Impression of The Mayflower
(from J.King, The Mayflower Miracle

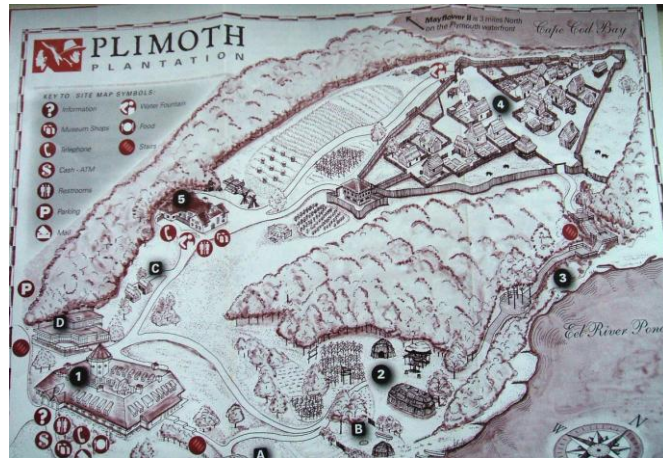
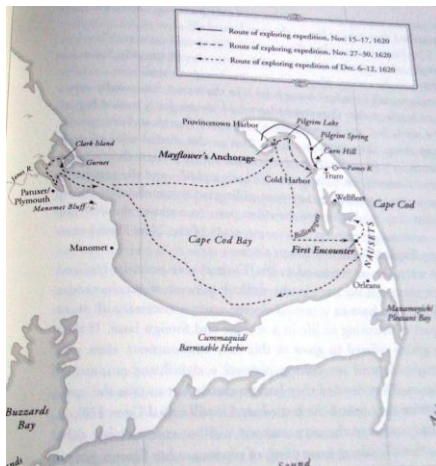


Oil Painting by H.W.Stone

What would be the worst of the experiences they faced?

<i>Crowded conditions?</i>	<i>Old and leaky ship?</i>	<i>Split in main beam?</i>	
<i>Disrespectful crew of 25?</i>	<i>Sailor threatened to throw Pilgrims overboard!</i>		
<i>Fierce storms from 25 September?</i>	<i>Soggy food- water splash put galley fire out?</i>		
<i>Scurvy set in</i>	<i>Seasickness?</i>	<i>Man overboard?</i>	<i>Filth?</i>

The main beam was held together by a Pilgrim printing press. The sailor threatening violence died of sickness and was buried at sea. Just one servant lad, William Button, died. John Howland fell overboard, was dragged back by a rope and founded an American family existing today. After a horrendously stormy voyage, they landed in Cape Cod Bay in November and after three exploratory expeditions chose the site which became New Plymouth.



Pilgrims' Explorations late 1620

Plan of a modern reconstruction of New Plymouth

(from N.Philbrick, The Mayflower)

(from a Plimoth Plantation Leaflet)

The Pilgrims were too late to plant crops, they had difficulty fishing. Their first common building was burnt down due to a stray spark. They worried about native Americans they saw but needed - and received- help. It was bitterly cold and wet and a mysterious sickness took hold, killing half their number and making it almost impossible to work. It is here that Myles Standish comes to the fore. He was elected military captain, organised a militia, constructed a stockade and nursed his sick comrades. Myles survived and played a leading role until his death in 1656.



1621, The March of Myles- JE Baker, 1874

Modern Reconstruction

Built for Defence?

Issue One: Myles Standish in America. How Useful and Important was he?

Myles Standish reputation is much greater in America today than it is in England. A great memorial is erected to him on Captain's Hill, New England.



A later Dutch Version of Myles Monument on Captain's Hill Depiction of Pilgrims Landing

Admirers of Myles would say:

"Myles led the first expedition to find a safe site"
"Myles helped nurse people through the disease"
"He organised building the settlement"
"He set up defences and trained a militia"
"He later served as assistant governor and treasurer"
"He tried to raise money in England in 1625"
He was one who took on New Plymouth's debt

Critics of Myles might say:

"If Myles had gone north he would have found a better site- modern Boston!"
He relied on skilled others: "New Plymouth defences copied from Dutch"; "Mayflower's master fixed guns on site"
"He stole food from native American caches"
"He gained part of a monopoly of the fur trade in return for guaranteeing town's debt."
Went off to Duxbury in 1632, leaving Plymouth

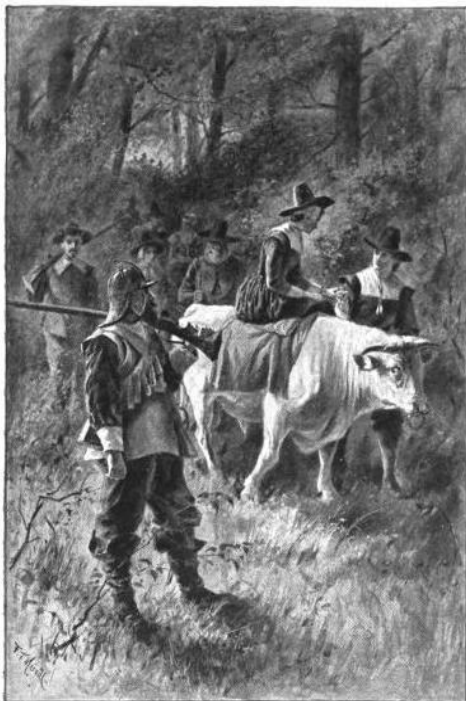
History is about interpretation and judgement. Readers will have to make their own mind up about Myles' record. There is a collection of books about Myles in Chorley Library and good modern works like Nathaniel Philbrick's "Mayflower" (2006). One reason he continued to be famous and popular was the success of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's heroic poem "The Courtship of Myles Standish" (1858).

Longfellow's "The Courtship of Myles Standish"

For Americans the Pilgrims became not as they had been but the heroes Victorians wished them to have been. The poem is set in the year 1621 against the backdrop of a fierce Indian war and features a love triangle between three of the Mayflower passengers, Myles Standish, his close friend John Alden with whom he shared a house, and Priscilla Mullins.

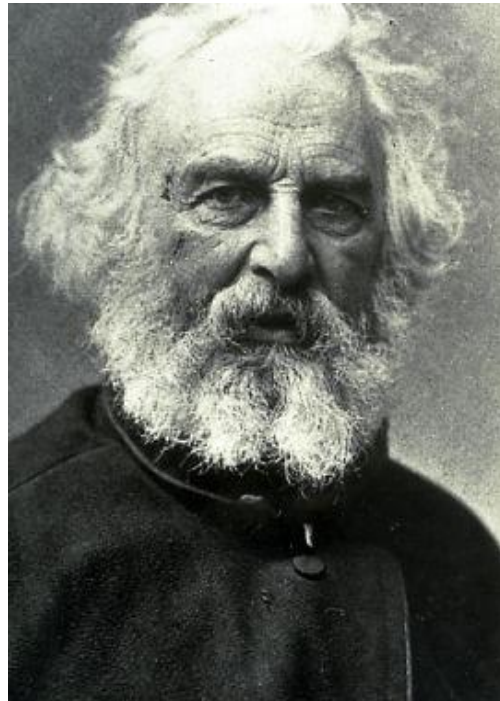
Following the death of his wife Rose, the first of the Mayflower passengers to die in the New World, Myles fell in love with Priscilla. He persuades John to speak to her on his behalf. Whilst not wanting to be disloyal to his friend John also falls in love with Priscilla. As an independent minded woman Priscilla charges John to speak for himself and it is they who eventually marry.

L.J.Potts' painting in the Harris Museum, Preston, is one famous representation of the marriage of Alden and Priscilla.



THE BRIDAL PROCESSION

An illustration about the poem

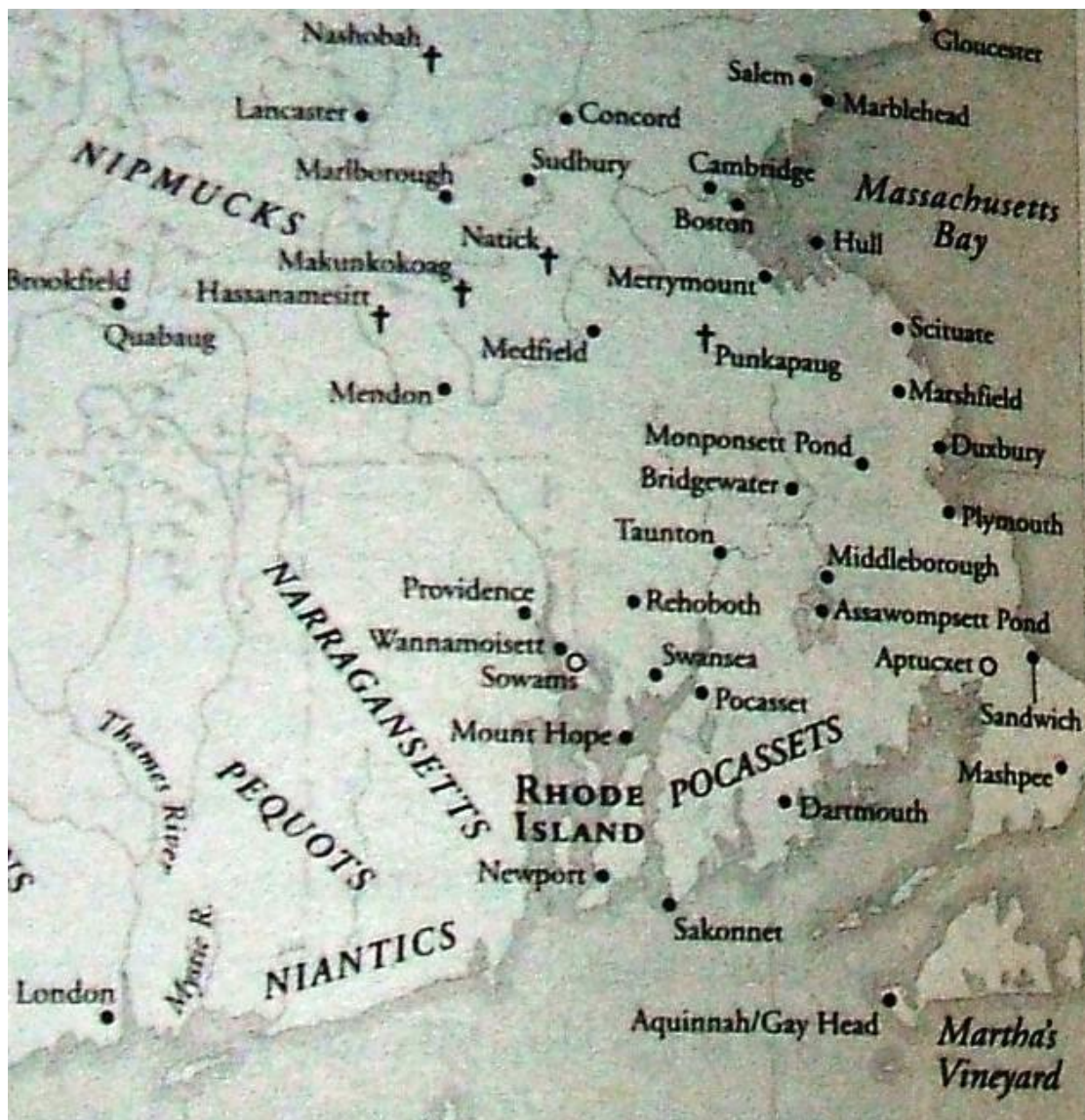


H.W Longfellow

Issue Two: Was Myles Too Warlike- especially towards native Americans?

The Pilgrims in the settlement of New Plymouth came to a largely deserted inlet but wanted to live at peace with those native Americans they encountered. Two conclusions are clear.

Firstly the arrival of more settlers in New England (at least 21,000 by 1640) caused serious conflict with native Americans by 1675. In that year, the first slave ship was sent to the West Indies.

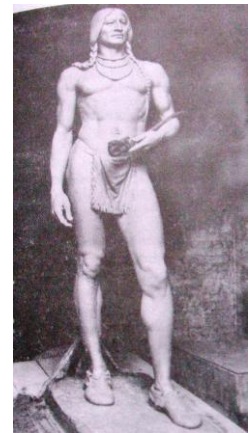


New England settlements and native American groups by 1675

Pastor Robinson: *'He (Standish) lacked the tenderness of the life of a man, made after God's image, which is meet'*

Because Myles Standish was the military captain of New Plymouth he could be blamed for the start of hostilities. It would be fair to say:

- He had a hot temper, - "a little chimney soon fired" (W.Hubbard, 1676)
- He led several punitive expeditions against native Americans 1620-23
- In August 1621 he attacked and wounded occupants of wigwam at Nemasket,, when looking to capture alleged hostile Corbitant
- In 1623 invited hostile Wituwamat and Pecksuot of Massachusetts group to a meal. He killed both, then two more and sent word causing death of two others. Took Wituwamat's severed head back to New Plymouth as trophy and warning.



On the other hand, a historian could find that:

- Myles Standish always acted on the orders of governors Carver and Bradford
- The closest native neighbours, the Pokanoket led by Massasoit (depicted in 1920 sculpture, right) , became allies early in 1621 and were protected against their enemies, the Narragansetts
- Later depredations against the native Americans were far worse than anything Standish did. In 1637 Massachusetts settlers attacked the Pequots, killing 400. Major war broke out 1675-76 leading to a halving of New England's native American populations.
- Myles Standish aggression was also against lawless English settlers. He forcefully arrested Thomas Morton of Merrymount settlement in 1625, who had mocked the Pilgrims and sold guns to the native Americans. Morton became a keen critic of Myles.

- Issue Three: Looking for the Birthplace of Myles Standish

Myles left a will which would seem to describe his family origins. The key clause runs:

*I give unto my son & heire aparent Allexander Standish
all my lands as heire apparent by lawfull Decent in
Ormistick Borsconge Wrightington Maudsley Newburrow
Crawston and the Ile of man and given to me as right
heire by lawful Decent but Surruptuously Detained from
mee my great G(ran)dfather being a 2cond or younger
brother from the house of Standish of Standish March the
7th 1655 by mee Myles Standish*

Morden's map (1695) of the area around Chorley, with places associated with Myles



In his will Myles claimed to be a **Standish of Standish**. This family's records contain no Myles. It is possible that he is an unrecorded great grandson of Alice Standish or Katherine Standish, both daughters of Alexander Standish of Standish (d. 1507). There was also one Roger Standish who was born in 1584 and who disappeared later.



St Wilfrid's Standish c. 1585



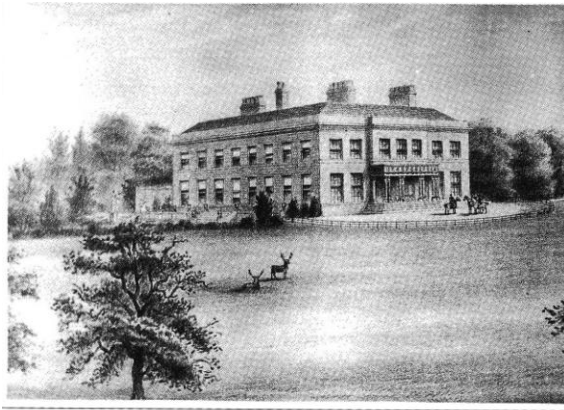
Standish Hall of the Standishes of Standish

In his will Myles referred to lands in the "Isle of Man". This could well be a farm in Croston, close to the other lands claimed. But.....

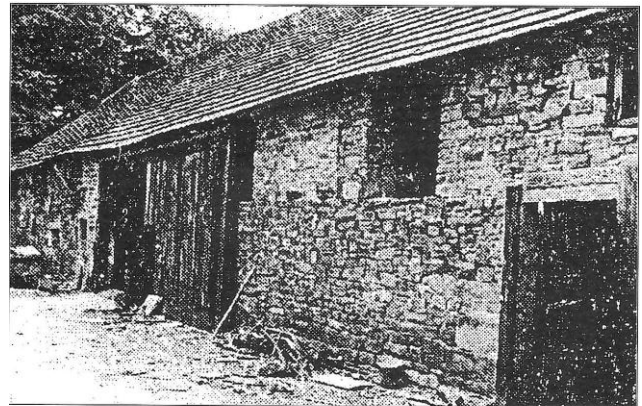
Could Myles be a **Standish of Ormskirk and the Isle of Man?**(i.e in the island of Man in the Irish Sea) Lands listed in the will were identified by T.C.Porteus as Standish of Ormskirk lands shown in deeds of 1529 and 1540. They were sold off in 1574 by Hugh of Ormskirk. Meanwhile Huan Standish of Ormskirk, a third among siblings, had settled in the Isle of Man at Ellanbane. His grandson, John Standish of Ellanbane had a second son who was not named and here is just possibly a Myles sized gap. However there is no written record of a Myles and the probability is that the "unnamed" son was called John, just like his father and the elder son who had already died.

In 1632 Myles himself named his own farm, and emerging township "**Duxbury**". The **Standish of Duxbury** estate, some six thousand acres around Chorley, was large enough to be worth claiming in the will. Interestingly, both Alice and Katherine Standish of Standish mentioned above, married Standish of Duxbury husbands, thus allowing a descendant such as Myles to claim both Standish and Duxbury heritage (but not in the male line as Standishes of Duxbury were originally of the Haydock family). The Standishes of Duxbury worshipped at and were buried at the nearby parish church of St. Laurence. Myles' nineteenth century descendants always claimed the Duxbury estate was indeed Myles' birthright.

The Standishes of Duxbury originally came from the Pele just north west of the old Yarrow Bridge. Their earliest building on the Duxbury land they acquired was probably the barn which still stands today. A hall followed 1623 onwards, and the picture shows an 1828 rebuild.



Duxbury Hall, circa 1850 (Chorley Library).



*Duxbury Barn and yard.
(Photograph first published in the Lancashire Evening Post).*

A final local Standish family should be mentioned, namely the **Standishes of Lower Burgh** near Chorley. There is a chance that there is an admittedly unrecorded Myles, great grandson of Thurstan Standish of Lower Burgh who was appropriately second son of the already noted Alexander Standish of Standish who died in 1507. As Myles claimed he was a Standish of Standish, this would allow a descent in the direct male line. Therefore we now have no less than four local Standish families who might have produced the mysterious Myles.



Lower Burgh Hall

There are grounds for allowing that Myles was likely born in or not far from Chorley, Duxbury or Standish. His will claims local Standish family connections. He named his settlement "Duxbury". Contemporaries said he was from Lancashire, of a landed gentleman's family. Descendants of Myles in America carry a y chromosome in their genetic make-up which is particular to males in Lancashire. A DNA test done in 2004 shows a 23/25 match between the American Standishes and Fr. Benjamin Standish of Wigan who is able to trace his Standish family tree to the later seventeenth century. Would a DNA test involving Myles' descendants and the Standish forebears lying at rest in Lancashire prove a definite descent?



Fr. Benjamin in the Standish Pew



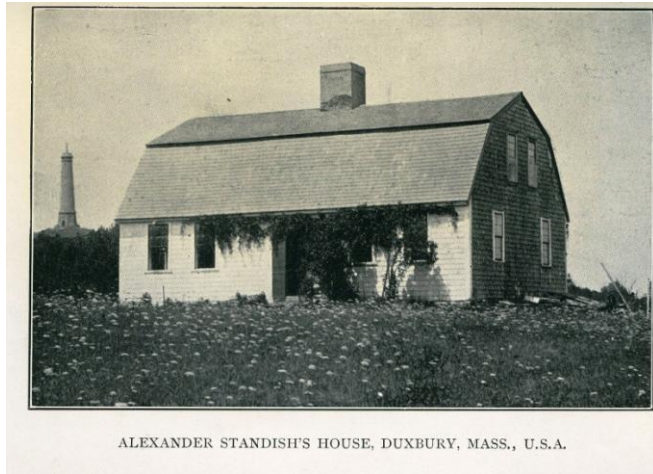
Myles' ancestors at St Laurence's



or St Wilfrid's?

The Legacy of Myles Standish

Myles has left his mark on New England.



His eldest son Alexander succeeded Myles and there are many descendants

The Standish Monument

There are many Standish associations in the Chorley area too.



A Standish Descendant at the Standish Pew,



Local street name



Recent drama based on Longfellow's Poem

This exhibition supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

