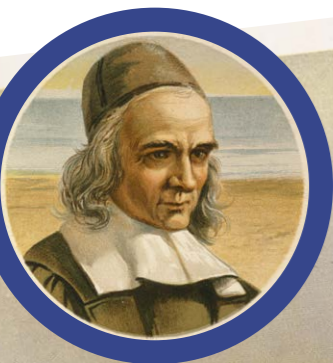


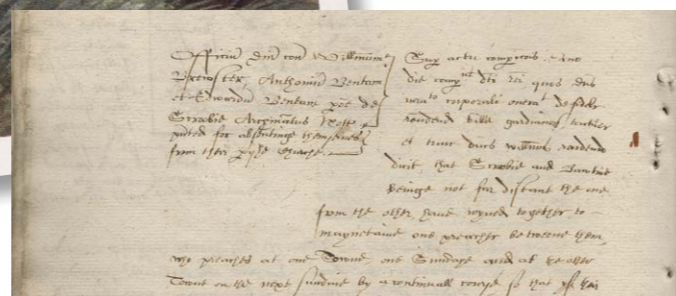
The area around north Nottinghamshire was a centre of religious nonconformity, which attracted the attention of the Church.



◀ 'Elder Brewster', 1896. Colour portrait said to be of William Brewster. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-7083

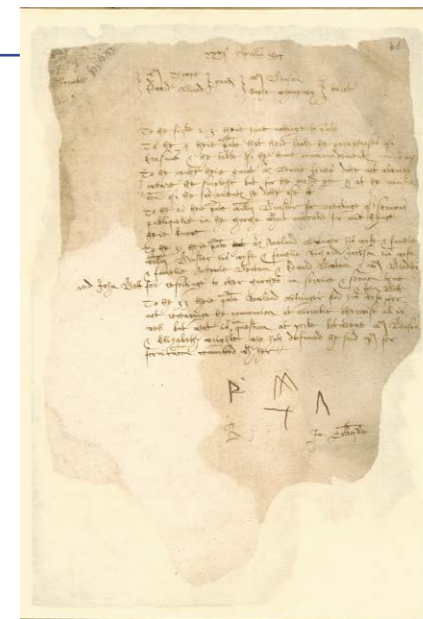
◀ General view of Scrooby, from Alexander Mackennal, *Homes and haunts of the Pilgrim fathers; with four coloured frontispiece and ninety-three other illustrations from original drawings and photographs by Charles Whymper* (London, 1899). East Midlands Special Collection Oversize, Lin1.D14 MAC.

Act Book recording court held on 17 June 1598. Archive of the Archdeaconry of Nottingham, AN/A 11/2



This was evident as early as April 1598 in the Presentment Bills for the parish of Scrooby. A number of families were charged with not attending church and for illegal preaching:

“William Brewster is presented for repeating sermons publicly in the church without authority; Mr Rowland Stringer and his wife and family, William Brewster and his wife and family, Richard Jackson and his wife and family, Anthonie Bentam, Edward Bentam, William Bradley and John Bett for resorting to other churches in service and sermon time.”



▲ Churchwarden presentment bill, Scrooby, 27 April 1598. Archive of the Archdeaconry of Nottingham, AN/PB 292/7/46

When they were brought to court, they argued that the churches of Scrooby and Bawtry had joined together to maintain one preacher between them, and so if they were not at Scrooby, they would have been at Bawtry hearing the sermon there.

Groups like the Separatists perceived such charges to be a test of their faith. They persisted at great peril, but the connections formed within the region were particularly strong. The Brewsters in Scrooby were part of a congregation formed around the ministry of the Nottinghamshire preachers Richard Clyfton (c.1553-1616) and John Robinson (1576-1625) at All Saints' Church in Babworth. They would have heard the preaching of John Smyth (1570-1612) in nearby Lincolnshire. It was in the Brewsters' home that the Separatists met with William Bradford (1590-1657), who later recorded the lives of those from the area who sailed on the Mayflower in his 1651 book, *Of Plymouth Plantation*.

In 1607, this 'Scrooby Congregation' faced increasing pressure from the Church of England to conform. Smyth broke away from the structures of the Church of England and fled to Amsterdam, where he and Thomas Helwys began the English Baptist Church. Other Nottinghamshire Separatists including Brewster and his wife also moved to Amsterdam and later decided to join the 'pilgrims' who sailed on the Mayflower to the 'new world'.