

THE SEARCH FOR THE ENGLISH ORIGINS OF
MAYFLOWER PASSENGER GEORGE SOULE
 PART 3: TODDINGTON, TINGRITH, AND FLITWICK, BEDFORDSHIRE

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In part one and two of this article, it was shown that all the George Soules with ties to Eckington, co. Worcester, could be eliminated as candidates for the *Mayflower* passenger of the same name. It was also shown that all the other known George Soules elsewhere in Worcester, Gloucester, and Hereford could be eliminated, with the possible exception of George Soule of Redmarly d'Abitot. But that George was baptized on 24 March 1593/4, which is a few years earlier than what should be expected for someone still apprenticed in 1620. In this article, the Soule families of Bedfordshire will be investigated.

It has been widely speculated that the *Mayflower* passenger George Soule could be the George Soule baptized on 9 February 1594/5 at Tingrith, Bedfordshire. This was suggested on my own "Mayflower Web Pages" as early as 1997. Prior to that, the Tingrith Soules' possible *Mayflower* connection was mentioned in an article by Don Steel that appeared in *Soul Search* in March 1993, the journal of the Sole Society. In the article, the author notes of George Soule of Tingrith: "this is the very George whom in my *Kindred Souls* article I suggested might be the George Soule who was on the *Mayflower*."

Going even further back, to 1926, G.T. Ridlon mentions the Tingrith Soules, including this George, in his book, *History, Biography and Genealogy of the Families Named Soule, Sowle and Soulis*. Charles Banks, in an editorial note in Ridlon's book, reports:

A yeoman family of Sole was found in this county [Bedfordshire] living in the three adjoining parishes of Flitwick, Tingrith and Toddington as early as 1550, having a George born 1552, a nephew George (son of his brother William) born 1594, who had in turn a son George born 1615, but these later Georges are accounted for as living in Flitwick long after the emigrant sailed from Southampton. The first George was buried 1629, the second was churchwarden in 1620 and later, and the third George, besides being too young, was taxed in Tingrith when the Pilgrim was ending his days in Plymouth.

Based partly on the conclusions of Charles Banks' analysis, many researchers have not bothered to follow up, concluding that all the George Soules in Tingrith/Flitwick were accounted for. But as will be seen shortly, Charles Banks' analysis was wrong on one key point: George Soule son of William of Tingrith was *not* the same man as the George Soule of neighboring Flitwick.

The key family involved here is that of William Soule of Tingrith. He was living in Tingrith as early as 1587, when his eldest son William was baptized. Between 1587 and 1597, he had six children at Tingrith, two of whom died young. In October 1607, he is mentioned twice, simply in passing, as a landholder in the terrier of all possessions belonging to the rectory of Tingrith.¹ He was also enumerated as a churchwarden for the year 1608. He was not found in any of the many other Tingrith records that were examined, probably because, as a laborer, he was not in a position to be frequently mentioned in local records.² William Soule made out a will on 4 July 1611, calling himself "Wm Sowle of Tingrithe in the countye of Beds Laborer."³ Somewhat humorously, his will states that he was "deceased in body but of good and perfect mind"! He was still alive though, at least for a few months: he was buried 19 October 1611, and his will was administered 6 November 1611. In his will, he names his executors "William Sowle my eldest sonne and Joane Sowle my wyfe," and later makes bequeaths

¹Bedfordshire Records Office, "Terrier of all the possessions belonging to the rectory of Tingrith" (5 James I).

²William Soule and son George Soule are not found in any Tingrith tax records. They are not mentioned in any Tingrith wills from 1570-1650. They were not found in any chancery lawsuits. They were not found in Tingrith manorial records (searched: court rolls SC 2/153/1,21,26,47).

³Will of William Soule, Bedfordshire Records Office 1611/156.

to "Katherine my daughter," "Marye my daughter," "George my son," and "Constance my daughter."

William Soule's will is somewhat unique, in that he bequeaths to his four youngest children 20 shillings a year for five years, to be paid out to each child successively. Since he died in 1611, his daughter Katherine began receiving her 20 shillings per year in 1612, and her payments would have continued through 1616, when it then moved to daughter Mary, who would have received her 20 shillings per year between 1617-1621; then son George was up next—he should receive his money during the five year period beginning in 1621. Lastly, daughter Constance was to receive her share, from 1626 to 1630.

From William Soule's will, and from the parish registers of Tingrith, we can reconstruct his family as follows. William Soule and wife Joan had the following children; all but Katherine were baptized at Tingrith, Bedfordshire:

- i. Katherine (not found in parish registers, but mentioned in father's will).
- ii. William, bp. 2 December 1587.
- iii. Mary, bp. 19 April 1590.
- iv. Joan, bp. 20 February 1591/2; buried 8 August 1597.
- v. Alice, bp. 23 December 1593; buried 1 January 1593/4.
- vi. George, bp. 9 February 1594/5. This is the person we want to look at more closely as a possible candidate to have been the *Mayflower* passenger.
- vii. Constance, bp. 21 August 1597.

Following William Soule's death, widow Joan Soule remarried to Robert Springfield on 30 April 1612. No further trace of the Springfield family could be found; they may have moved out of the area.

It has, until now, been generally assumed that young George Soule of Tingrith ended up in neighboring Flitwick. The parish registers of Flitwick, Bedfordshire, reveal the assumed family:

George Soule of Flitwick, Bedfordshire, had the following children.

- i. George, bp. 28 February 1614/5.
- ii. Dinesse, 4 October 1618.
- iii. John, 11 February 1621.
- iv. [son], 14 December 1623.

Since this George Soule had his first child of record in 1614/5, when the George Soule of Tingrith was twenty one years old, it would seem reasonable to suspect they were the same man; and, if they were the same man, then he clearly was not the *Mayflower* passenger. This was the conclusion reached by Charles Banks in 1926.

But, in fact, George Soule of Tingrith and George Soule of Flitwick were not the same man. The proof of this comes from will of widow Agnes Soule of Flitwick, dated 17 May 1632, and proved 22 November 1639.⁴ Agnes was the widow of the George Soule who was buried in Flitwick in February 1629/1630. In her will, she mentions her son George, and her grandchildren from son George: namely Dionesse, John, George, and Edmond. Agnes is clearly the mother of George Soule of Flitwick, and grandmother of his children Dinesse, John, George, and Edmond. George Soule of Flitwick was the son of George and Agnes Soule, whereas George Soule of Tingrith was the son of William and Joan Soule: they are not the same man.

We can now see that there were at least *three* George Soules in Flitwick during the early 17th century. They were:

- (1) George Soule, born about 1552, buried 6 February 1629/30. According to a chancery lawsuit⁵ of 1624, he was brother of John Soule of Toddington, from which he bought land in 1597. He (or possibly his son) was the churchwarden at Flitwick from 1618-1620, and in 1624. He was taxed in

⁴ Bedfordshire Records Office, Wills and Administrations, 1639/112.

⁵ Public Records Office, Chancery Proceedings, C2/Jas I/S16/50 [17 November 1624].

1625 and 1628.⁶ He married a woman named Agnes probably about 1580; she made out her will in 1632 and died in 1639. They had at least four children: Robert, George (next), Frances (who married Robert Crawley), and Johan (who married Thomas Cripsey alias Barnett).

(2) George Soule, born say 1585, son of George and Agnes Soule. He had four children: George [1614/5, see next], Dinesse [1618], John [1621], and Edmond [1623]. He was churchwarden in 1636, executor of his mother's will in 1639, and was taxed in 1641.⁷

(3) George Soule baptized at Flitwick on 28 February 1614/5.

Clearly, none of these George Soules was the *Mayflower* passenger. They were all living in Flitwick after the *Mayflower* sailed in 1620, and none are in the correct age range either. With the Flitwick Soules out of the picture, let us return to Tingrith.

When William Soule of Tingrith died, he willed £5 to his son George, to be paid out in 20 shilling increments that would have begun in 1621 and lasted through 1626. His widow Joan remarried in April 1612 to Robert Springfield. What happened to George Soule of Tingrith, who was then about seventeen years of age? He either would have remained in the household of Robert Springfield, or he would have been apprenticed out. Where the Springfield family went has not been determined. They do not appear to have remained in Tingrith, as there is no record of them seen following the 1612 marriage. Springfield is a very uncommon surname in Bedfordshire—in fact, the IGI lists no other Springfields, in any time period, anywhere in Bedfordshire.

Recalling that John Soule of Toddington (brother of the eldest George Soule of Flitwick, and possibly the brother of William Soule of Tingrith) had some landholdings in co. Hertford, I searched this county as well for the Springfield surname. It is interesting to note that the only notable Springfields in Hertford were from the parish of Baldock—the same parish that was the origin of Elizabeth, the wife of *Mayflower* passenger Richard Warren, who himself was also likely from the area.

Another interesting item that may be worth noting: In Henlow, Bedfordshire, on 28 July 1605, a William Soule married Joan Allen. Could this possibly be George Soule's eldest brother William, who would then have been about eighteen? Eighteen is somewhat younger than would be expected for a marriage. However, just four months after their marriage, wife Joan gave birth to their first child: so it may well be that William Soule was constrained by Joan's unplanned pregnancy to get married earlier than may have been normal. If this indeed is George Soule's eldest brother, then the connection with Henlow is most intriguing: this is the home parish of the Samson, Tilley, and Cooper families of the *Mayflower*.

George Soule of Tingrith would seem to be a good candidate to have been the *Mayflower* passenger. First, George Soule of Tingrith was baptized 6 February 1594/5. This puts his birth generally within the 1595-1599 range that we established in Part I of this series of articles. *Mayflower* passenger George Soule came as an apprentice, a condition that most frequently happened to youngest sons, especially when a father had passed away before they had reached adulthood. George Soule of Tingrith's father William died in November 1611, so that condition is met as well. Apprenticeships typically ended when the individual turned twenty-five; George Soule of Tingrith would have turned twenty-five in February 1620: which seems to be evidence to the negative, since George was still indentured in November 1620, well after his 25th birthday had come and gone. However, it should be remembered that George Soule of Tingrith had a small inheritance from his father—an inheritance that was to be dispersed over five years, in 20 shilling increments, beginning in 1621. Perhaps this fact could have played a role in the decision to indenture George until that year.

Additionally, George Soule of Tingrith disappears from all Tingrith records following his father's will of 1611. It has been shown that he was not any of the George Soules recorded in neighboring Flitwick, as had been previously assumed. His mother Joan married Robert Springfield, who might possibly be from the vicinity of Baldock, Hertfordshire, a small parish with known *Mayflower* connections. There are also other Springfields to be found in Great Burstead, Essex, another parish with known *Mayflower* connections (Christopher Martin), as well as in London (where Edward Winslow, his future master, resided for a time). And his elder brother

⁶E179/72/270 [16 Dec 1628, taxed 4s], E179/72/271 [24 August 1628, taxed 8s], E179/72/291 [10 May 1625, taxed 4s].

⁷E179/72/283 [1 July 1641, taxed 8s].

William is possibly the man who appears in Henlow, marrying rather early in 1605: Henlow is another small parish from which a large group of *Mayflower* passengers hailed. If George Soule of Tingrith can be shown to have had a connection to another *Mayflower* family, or even to a parish with known *Mayflower* connections, this would be an important finding.

It should also be noted, on the contrary, that the George Soule of the *Mayflower* did not name any children William or Joan, nor did he use the names Alice or Constance either. If George Soule of the *Mayflower* were truly the man from Tingrith, one would have expected to see these names occur within his own children. The fact the names do not occur is not disproof, of course, but does cast some circumstantial doubt on the matter, as does the fact that George Soule of Tingrith would have been older than twenty-five (albeit just slightly) during his apprenticeship with Edward Winslow. While certainly a promising candidate, George Soule of Tingrith is in no way proven to be the *Mayflower* passenger. Further evidence must be gathered to tie him to some *Mayflower* family or community, and other George Soules will need to be investigated. The search continues ...