

Reports of Glemsford Meetings - February 2017

The Extraordinary Life of John Winthrop

At our February meeting we welcomed a return visit from **Nick Sign** speaking about *the extraordinary life of John Winthrop*, the first Governor of Boston, Massachusetts.

Born in 1588 (the year of the Armada) and dying in 1649 (the year of King Charles I's execution), Winthrop's life spanned a turbulent period of political, religious and economical change. The grandson of wealthy landowner Adam Winthrop, who bought Groton Manor from the church after Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, young John accepted the 'polish' which Oxford University gave him, although as the son of a squire he had no need to graduate before pursuing a law career in the London courts.

As a committed Christian, Winthrop had long been disillusioned by the continuing Catholic doctrine still prevalent within the church and in 1629 when King Charles dissolved Parliament there was growing dissent and discontent. Believing they were living in 'evil and declining times', Winthrop and his followers decided to emigrate to the New World following the 1620 example of the Pilgrim Fathers. After recruiting those who could offer a variety of practical skills and leaving behind a large family, in April 1630 Winthrop sailed in a fleet of 1100 fellow pioneers aiming to obtain cheap land, develop a new colony and establish a purer church. The long and arduous voyage took two months through heavy weather and stormy seas, most passengers suffering from scurvy. On arrival, although they made good relationships with the native population, it soon became evident that some malaria ridden areas were unsuitable for settlement, sporting also a selection of snakes and wolves. Eventually a settlement, which was to become Boston, was carved out near the Mystic River; successful trading, exporting fish and furs, was established and the new strictly run Puritan community flourished. John Winthrop was elected Governor, becoming an important man and as a contemporary called him a 'councillor of peace'.