The Pilgrim Fathers

In 1620 one hundred Puritans boarded the ‘Mayflower’ bound for the New World. These people were the Pilgrim Fathers. The Pilgrim Fathers saw little chance of England becoming a country in which they wished to live. They viewed it as something un-Godly moving from a bad to an even worse state. The Pilgrim Fathers believed that a new start in the New World was their only chance.

A lot of the trials and tribulations about where they should sail to, the voyage across the Atlantic to the New World and the initial problems experienced by the Pilgrim Fathers, all these are contained in a diary written by William Bradford.

„The place they thought of was one of those vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for living.“

On November 9th, 1620, the ‘Mayflower’ sighted what is now Cape Cod. Despite seeing land, the crew of the ‘Mayflower’ searched for another month to find a suitable place where to land. Where they eventually landed was called New Plymouth. On December 25th, after finding a place where the ‘Mayflower’ could be safely anchored, the Pilgrim Fathers began to build the first house for common use. Bradford described in his diary how the “foulness” of winter affected them all and that many of them became sick. Bradford claimed that by February 1621 50% of the Pilgrim Fathers had died as a result of the cold weather and the inadequate housing that they had built for themselves.

A Native American called Squanto helped those Pilgrim Fathers who survived the harsh winter. He showed them how to sow maize and how to cultivate the crop. Bradford claimed that seeds brought from England were of little use in their new environment. By the summer of 1621, the Pilgrim Fathers had built houses for themselves and had gathered up a small harvest.

However, not all Native Americans were friendly. As a result, a wooden fence with watchtowers surrounded the homes that had been built and the gates in the fence were locked at night. By 1622 the Pilgrim Fathers had built a fort to protect themselves. It also served as a meeting place to discuss issues of government within the new colony. Over the next few years, as life for Puritans became more uncomfortable in England, more and more of them made the voyage across the Atlantic. By 1630, their numbers were such that the Puritans were able to establish the Massachusetts Bay Company and establish Boston, which was to grow into a major port. Despite the privations in 1620, the Puritans founded colonies that thrived and their success depended on fishing, shipbuilding, trade and farming.