

The Uniqueness of the Ralph Bleasdale

by R. Carter Blaisdell

Ralph Bleasdale, born 11 March 1593 in Hawkshead, England, bears the dominant spelling of that surname in England, then and now, though there are 35 ways to spell the family name in England. Bleasdale means “bright spot on a hill” or possibly “to mark the trees,” like a blaze in the dell.

Ralph

Ralph is a unique given name for a Bleasdale. Only one Ralph was found in church and civil records of Lancashire County for period 1559-1633. Ralph was unique to the Bolton area. The Shuttleworth family of Bolton had in their accounts an entry of a “**Rauffe**” [Ralph] **Bleasdale** in 1582.

Bolton was a hotbed of Puritanism. Revs. **Richard Mather** and **William Thompson**, defrocked Anglican priests due to their Puritan views toward **King Charles I**'s Church of England, had preached in Bolton before sailing to America on the St. James, which accompanied Ralph's Angel Gabriel from June 4 to July 4, 1635. Puritans were at times fined, imprisoned and had their property confiscated by royal decree.

Rev. Mather's diary recorded that on the Angel Gabriel were “some good and godly Christians.” Ralph, Elizabeth and their son, Henry, were one of ten households and three of the Angel Gabriel's 30 passengers.

Hawkshead

Ralph, born in Hawkshead, west of Lake Windermere – England's largest natural lake – was about 80 miles from Bleasdale village. In 1593 it would have been unusual for a Bleasdale to be born “so far from home.” An Ordnance Survey map identifies Bleasdale village, Bleasdale Moors, Bleasdale Nash, Bleasdale Ridge, Bleasdale Moss and Bleasdale Grains, likely the area once known as Bleasdale Forest, now a part of Bowland Forest.

The Bleasdale area has a reputation among the English as being ancient. A booklet, *Historic Walks around Bleasdale*, has an older man telling a lad, “You're now in Lancashire, lad. We're nowt to do with them. Up here's Bleasdale. It's bin that way since afore the Roman times.”

The family blood lines could go back to the middle Bronze Age II period, 2100 – 1550 BC, estimated dates for the Bleasdale Circle, a small village with nine huts and a ceremonial circle, all enclosed by a circle of oak poles, discovered in 1898. Radiocarbon date of 1810+/-90 BC of timber

from the inner circle with Pennine urns in the cist make these collared urns among the oldest found in England.

The area around Bleasdale was laid waste by invading Scots in 1322 and was hit by the plague in 1422.

Today Bleasdale village has the Bleasdale School, St. Eadmer's Anglican Church with a parish hall and the Bleasdale Circle. Chipping with a post office is five miles east of Bleasdale. The roads around Bleasdale are narrow and winding. The homes are tucked behind tall, thick hedges that give a message, "We don't want to be found. Don't bother us."

19 Years Older than His Bride

Ralph at age 36 married **Elizabeth Parker**, age 17, in Chipping on 3 September 1629. Ralph's father, **Henry Bleasdale**, 1563-1601, at age 26 married **Ellen Hall**, who was 27. Only three of Ralph and Elizabeth's seven children had children of their own:

- a.) **Henry Blaisdell**, 1632 – 1703 or 1707
- b.) **Mary (Blaisdell) (Stowers) Sterling**, 1641/42 – 1681
- c.) **Martha (Blaisdell) (Bowden) (Cilley) Clough**, 1644/45 after 1707.

Their other children: **Henry**, b. 11 July 1630, buried 4 November 1631 in Hawkshead; **Elizabeth**, b. 23 May 1631; **Sarah**, b. 1637/1641, d. 17 January 1646/47; **Ralph, Jr.**, b. 1642/43, d. 1667.

Ralph & Elizabeth's descendants' given names after their arrival to America were predominantly Biblical, reflecting a Puritan persuasion. The five most popular male names were John, Daniel, Ebenezer, Jonathan and Samuel. The top female names: Mary, Elizabeth/Betty, Sarah/Sally, Hannah and Abigail. The majority of Bleasdales in England had been given predominantly Teutonic names prior to the Puritan movement.

Fled to America

Ralph, the first Bleasdale to sail to America, left to practice in freedom his Christian faith. Puritans sought to purify the church. By the 1600s the Reformation had gained in popularity throughout Europe. Puritans in England tended to be Presbyterian, Quakers, Baptists or Methodists. They were "Psalm singing roundheads," who with **Oliver Cromwell** defeated King Charles I's cavaliers in 1644 in the Battle of Marston.

By the 6th generation, Ralph had 208 male descendants. 129 of 248 in the 6th generation are his and Elizabeth's male descendants; 119 were female. There are eleven other Blaisdell patriarchs (by various spellings) who came to America from England in the 19th Century. All Blaisdell descendants (and their friends) are welcome to be members of the Blaisdell Family National Association, the fifth oldest in America.

Exceptional Ability

At age eight Ralph could have attended the famous Hawkshead School, established in 1585, whose graduates typically were admitted to St. John's College, Cambridge University. Topics taught six days a week: Latin, Greek, reading and writing, mathematics. In 1601 at age 8 he was under the guardianship of his uncle, **John Bleasdale**, 1565-1602, until his death. He then went to live with his mother, **Ellen (Hall) (Bleasdale) Hilton**.

As a trader in wool (tailor), he could easily have sailed from Liverpool to Ireland and Milford Haven, Wales. Salisbury, Massachusetts, records show Ralph had been a "Prudential Man," a constable, farmer, tailor, attorney, keeper of the ordinary (tavern), which doubled as the town hall.

He was one of eight of the 69 "Commoners" [founders] of the town of Salisbury, to be given the honorific title of Mister. He had come there from York, ME, in 1640. He died circa age 56, 1648-1650. BFNA records have three places of death reported: Lynn, MA; Hampton, NH; Salisbury, MA.

How we progeny wish we could visit his grave and honor his courage and leadership. On the whole we seek to emulate him by being able, creative, honorable and good Christian citizens.

[This information was shared in a seminar at BFNA's 16th Quinquennial.]

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