Walter\textsuperscript{1} Palmer of the Great Migration: Probable Origins in Frampton, Dorset

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In 1995 and 2015, Robert Charles Anderson stated that the origins of Great Migration immigrant Walter\textsuperscript{1} Palmer are unknown, without commenting on previously published claims.\footnote{Robert Charles Anderson, \textit{The Great Migration Begins: Immigrants to New England 1620–1633}, 3 vols. (Boston: NEHGS, 1995), 3:1379–1383 (sketch of Walter Palmer); Robert Charles Anderson, \textit{The Great Migration Directory: Immigrants to New England 1620–1640} (Boston: NEHGS, 2015), 251–252.} In this article, a new probability that Walter originated in Frampton, Dorset, is revealed and an old claim that he originated in Yetminster, Dorset, is re-examined.

**New Probability: Walter Palmer Originated in Frampton, Dorset**

In his profile of Walter Palmer, Anderson shared uncertainty about estimating the year of birth for some of the immigrant’s children:\footnote{Anderson, \textit{Great Migration Begins}, 1620–1633 [note 1], 3:1383, these approximate birth dates and the correction to Jonah’s name, as inserted.}

The two eldest children of Walter Palmer, Grace [born about 1614] and John [born about 1615], were certainly born in the middle years of the second decade of the seventeenth century. For the next three children, Elizabeth [born say 1617], William [born say 1619] and John [sic, Jonah, born say 1621], the chronological evidence is not so helpful. All three of them could be ten years younger than the estimates given here without contradicting anything we know about them.

Given the uncertainty about Elizabeth, William, and Jonah, the following baptismal records from Frampton may identify two of the five children that came to New England with Walter Palmer in 1629:\footnote{Parish register of Frampton, included in \textit{Dorset, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538–1812}, online at Ancestry.com. Both entries are on the same page; damage to the original page makes the image difficult to read.}

- 1627, third entry: “Jonah Polmer [sic] y e son of Walter Palmer was Baptized [illegible]”
- 1628, fifth entry: “Elizabeth Palmer y e daughter of Walter Palmer was baptized [illegible]”

Unfortunately, baptisms, marriages, and burials are only available from Frampton parish registers starting in 1627; no further mention of Walter Palmer can be found after 1628; and no Bishop’s transcripts survive. With such limited evidence, we cannot conclude with certainty that Walter Palmer of Frampton was subsequently admitted as an inhabitant of Charlestown,
Massachusetts in 1629, but additional indirect evidence makes this possibility a probability.

Rev. John White (1574/5–1648), rector of the largest parish in Dorchester, Dorset, was instrumental in obtaining a charter for the Massachusetts Bay Company and he personally promoted migration to New England.[4] Most immigrants who arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony before 1630 — and especially those of Charlestown — were recruited by White.[5]

In 1630, when Walter Palmer was accused (and subsequently acquitted) of manslaughter in the death of Austen Bratcher, Ralph Sprague — probably a native of Upwey, Dorset, and an immigrant from Fordington, Dorset — stood bond for him. [6] Upwey (or Upway) is adjacent to Weymouth and less than nine miles from Frampton; Fordington is adjacent to Dorchester and less than six miles from Frampton.

No mentions of Walter, or any other Palmers, are found in lay subsidy rolls, manorial surveys, or other records related to Frampton, prior to 1648.[7]

**Old Claim: Walter Palmer Originated in Yetminster, Dorset**

In 1937, the posthumously published research of Charles Edward Banks (1854–1931) identified Walter Palmer as the only emigrant to New England from the parish of Yetminster, citing Banks' own manuscript, “Banks Mss.”[8]

Since Frampton lies at the midpoint of a line that runs south approximately 24 miles from the inland parish of Yetminster to the coastal port of Weymouth, someone could hypothesize that Walter Palmer was a native of Yetminster who only resided in Frampton on his way to New England. However, when the records behind Banks's statement are analyzed, it becomes evident that there are no records in Yetminster that can definitely be attributed to Walter Palmer of the Great Migration.

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[5] Robert Charles Anderson, FASG, email correspondence with Henry B. Hoff, CG, FASG, Editor of the Register, dated 14 March 2019. The author is grateful to Mr. Anderson for reviewing an initial draft of this article and commenting that Walter Palmer of Frampton was a “strong candidate for the immigrant,” based on the Frampton parish register entries “of great value.”


[7] Jessamy Wilsdon, Research Assistant, Dorset History Centre, letter to the author, 3 April 2019, citing 1545 and 1594 subsidy rolls for Frampton (T. L. Stoate, *Dorset Tudor Subsidies 1523–1593* [1982], 66) and a “Transcription of a survey started by Sir John Strode in 1628 relating to his estates, with additions,” (Survey of Godmanstone Manor 1600–1650 [D/BUL/M/4]). The “Survey of Frampton Manor taken 7th July 1648” (Kitson and Trotman Archive [D/KAT/7604]) includes brothers William and John Palmer (p. 3, called brothers) and Humphry Palmer (p. 8).

The original records cited in “Banks Mss” were not published until 2002 by the Walter Palmer Society. [9] “Yetminster Prima or Upbury” was one of three manors in the large parish of Yetminster; the parish included the chapelries of Chetnole and Leigh. [10] A transcription of “Rawbusson MSS. No. 17904” was entitled “Gough MS. Dorset 15—Upbury Manor Roll” [11]; this manorial roll includes the following: [12]

- Between 1567 and 1627, a Walter Palmer was identified numerous times from 1588 until 1612; these entries might pertain to more than one man, but no distinctions such as Jr./Sr. or elder/younger were ever noted.
- On 14 October 1594, John Warren of Chetnole granted a “manorial except” to his freehold tenant, Walter Palmer.
- In December 1612, “Walter Palmer yielded up both of his Excepts . . . he came into Court and gave up all his right, title and Interest.”

Perhaps Banks’s assumption that Walter Palmer emigrated from Yetminster to New England was based on the December 1612 event. In 1607 the vicar of Chetnole complained that some parishioners — including Walter Palmer — were withholding their contributions to his annual stipend. [13] If Banks was also aware of this fact, his assertion may have also been based on Walter Palmer possibly demonstrating nonconformity. Walter Palmer of the Great Migration was born by about 1589, [14] and so the December 1612 record could have referred to him — or to an older Walter Palmer.

**Walter and Elizabeth (Carter) Palmer of Chetnole, Yetminster**

On 4 November 1585, “Walterum Palme” [Walter Palmer in Latin] of Chetnole was married in Buckland-Newton, Dorset, to “Elizabetham [Elizabeth] Carter,” daughter of Richard Carter of Brockhampton. [15] As noted above, Chetnole was a Chapelry of Yetminster; Brockhampton was a settlement within Buckland-

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9 Elmer Hall Palmer, comp., *Genealogical Record of the Descendants of Walter Palmer of Charlestown, Massachusetts Bay Colony (1629–1642); “Seacuncke” Plantation, Plymouth Colony (1643–1653); and Stonington, Connecticut Colony (1653–1662): Volume 1, 8 Generations* (n.p.: The Walter Palmer Society, 2002). The exclusive focus on descendants in the title is somewhat unfortunate because the 691 pages of this volume also contain transcriptions from original sources throughout England intended to determine the possible ancestors of Walter Palmer. Walter’s descendants should be grateful to the volume’s compiler and editor, Elmer Hall Palmer, and to the author of the “Dorsetshire” chapter, Doris Lillian (Palmer) Buys. Doris was also the author of *Walter Palmer of Charlestown and Rehoboth, Massachusetts and Stonington, Connecticut: a 400-Year Family History* (Orem, Utah: Historical Publications, 1986).


11 Palmer, *Descendants of Walter Palmer* [note 9], ix. As of 3 March 2019, “MS Gough/Dorset 15” was still held by Special Collections, Bodleian Library, Oxford University; it is not available at The National Archives (NationalArchives.gov.uk).

12 Palmer, *Descendants of Walter Palmer* [note 9], x.

13 Ibid., xii: Bishop’s transcripts of Yetminster.


15 Parish register of Buckland-Newton, included in *Dorset, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538–1812*, online at Ancestry.com. Richard Carter of Brockhampton was buried in Buckland-Newton on 5 October 1598 but apparently died intestate.
Newton; Buckland-Newton, which is about 7 miles southeast of Chetnole. The following events were recorded in the parish registers of Buckland-Newton:

- 12 January 1593, buried an unnamed “son of Walter Palmer son in law of Richard Carter of Brockhampton”

Recall that John Warren of Chetnole granted an except to a Walter Palmer on 14 October 1594 in Upbury Manor of Yetminster. Given the continuity in dates, it seems likely that the following baptisms recorded in Yetminster should be attributed to the same Walter Palmer of Chetnole, Yetminster, who had married Elizabeth Carter:

- 1594/5: Baptized daughter of “Walter Paulm’ [sic, Paulmer]”
- 16 February 1598/9: Baptized “Susanna, daughter of Walter Palmer of Chetnole”
- 18 July 1603: Baptized “Francisca, dau. of Walter Palmer”

On 23 July 1604, an unnamed wife of Walter Palmer was buried in Yetminster; she was likely Elizabeth (Carter) Palmer. These baptisms were extracted from the Bishop’s transcripts for Yetminster which begin in 1579 but “the records for many years are missing” and “most of them are in poor condition with bits missing or completely illegible.”

Walter Palmer and Elizabeth Carter were married in 1585, but the first known record for any child of theirs was in 1593. This gap supports the possibility that Walter and Elizabeth may have had children born about 1586, 1588, 1590, and 1592. Years later, on 3 August 1619, George Carter — a probable brother of Elizabeth (Carter) Palmer — included the following in a codicil to his will: “I reserve unto myself... Talbotts bond for satisfying Walter Palmers childrens porcions [sic, portions].” Thus, Walter and Elizabeth likely had other children born between 1585 and 1593 who were probably baptized in Yetminster and some of them were probably among the children living in 1619.

Walter and Elizabeth (Carter) Palmer apparently had children baptized in Buckland-Newton, her native parish, and Yetminster, his native parish. As evidence that they resided in Yetminster, on 7 July 1592, the Churchwardens of the parish reported: “We doe present that Walter Palmer hathe committed adultereye with Agnes Torranc’ [sic, probably Torrance] — servant unto Johne

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16 Palmer, *Descendants of Walter Palmer* [note 9], xxxi: parish register of Buckland-Newton.
17 Ibid. [note 9], xii: Bishop’s transcripts of Yetminster. The Archivist of the Salisbury Diocese extracted the entries published herein. Digital images for FHL 1,239,263 are not yet available online, but alternate transcriptions are available online at FamilySearch.org and AmericanAncestors.org.
18 Palmer, *Descendants of Walter Palmer* [note 9], xii: Bishop’s transcripts of Yetminster.
19 Ibid., xii.
21 Palmer, *Descendants of Walter Palmer* [note 9], xxxi-xxxii.
Warryn.”[22] “Johne Warryn” was likely the John Warren of Chetnole who subsequently granted an except to Walter Palmer on 14 October 1594.

Shifting the Focus of Future Research to Frampton

Ultimately, Banks’s statement that Walter Palmer was from Yetminster was nothing more than an assumption based only on his name. The Walter Palmer Society followed that assumption and concluded — albeit tentatively — that Walter was an undocumented son of Walter and Elizabeth (Carter) Palmer of Chetnole, Yetminster.[23] Unfortunately, no evidence directly refutes that hypothesis so it will be difficult to convince some of Walter’s descendants that it is now far more probable that he was born in Frampton before the surviving parish registers begin. Numerous entries in the Frampton parish registers for other Palmers suggest that Walter may have been born into a family that was well established there for generations.[24]

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22 Ibid., xii: Bishop’s transcripts of Yetminster.
23 Ibid., xvi.
24 Documenting other Palmer families of Frampton is beyond the scope of this article, but one connection is worth noting here. Lawrence Palmer was rector of Gedling, Nottinghamshire, from 1640 until his death in 1682. On 10 April 1649, he recorded the marriage of Christopher Carrington, of nearby Lambley, to Elizabeth Palmer, “the daughter of my brother, William Palmer, of Frampton, in the co. of Dorset,” (“Marriages at Gedling, 1558 to 1812,” in W.P.W. Phillimore and Thomas Matthews Blagg, Nottingham Parish Registers, Marriages, vol. 10 [London: Phillimore & Co., 1907], 48, online at HathiTrust.org). In Frampton, the 1628 baptism of “Elizabeth Palmer y’ daughter of William Palmer” was recorded between those of Jonah and Elizabeth, children of Walter Palmer [see note 3].