

The Mayflower Trail



On September 16th 1620*, the Mayflower sailed from Plymouth UK with just 102 passengers and around 30 crew on board, with what William Bradford called “a prosperous wind.”

She arrived some 66 days later, on November 21st, in Cape Cod on the US East Coast and finally landed at the site that would become the colony of Plimoth, in Massachusetts, on December 21st 1620. The Pilgrim’s signed the Mayflower Compact which the founding of modern day America was based.

The Mayflower sailing is celebrated by many in the US as the beginning of a national legacy, and in the UK as the start of one of the most enduring alliances the world has ever known. No other date so embodies the centuries of shared cultural values and traditions that lie behind the “Special Relationship”.

*Gregorian calendar date

1 The Mayflower Steps and Mayflower Museum

Although structurally altered over the intervening years, the Steps themselves may be taken as the approximate location from which the Pilgrims embarked upon the Mayflower for the final time.

Discover more about the Pilgrims voyage and their journey aboard the Mayflower at the Mayflower Museum located above the Tourist Information Centre, opposite the Mayflower Steps.

If you make your way along Southside Street, towards the Barbican, you will find yourself outside Island House which is your next stop.



2 Island House

This house is said to date between 1572 and 1600 and was one of the houses in which the Pilgrims lodged prior to their departure for America. Today the house is home to the Pilgrim ice-cream parlour. You will find two plaques on the walls of the building, one listing the names of the Pilgrim Fathers.

At the rear end of Island House you will see the narrow end of New Street, which gives you an authentic feel for the character of Plymouth as it would have been in the 1600s. If you follow the cobbles you will come to your next stop, the Elizabethan House and Gardens.



3 The Prysten House and American 'Door of Unity'

Alongside the Merchant's House Museum is a pedestrian walkway taking you past the modern Magistrates' Court building to St. Andrew Street and a small paved area, where stands one of Plymouth's finest early buildings – "The Prysten House". Dating from the year 1500, this historic courtyard house has within it a number of American plaques. It is also partially occupied by a fine restaurant.

The Prysten's north garden door (facing St. Andrew's Church) is today known as the "Door of Unity" (so named on 30th May 1930). Alongside it is mounted a most interesting American tombstone, dating from the maritime warfare of 1812-14 between Great Britain and President Madison's USA.



4 Customs House and Old Customs House

It is believed that the crew of the Mayflower would have had to have visited Customs House.

The Mayflower and The Speedwell met in Southampton and were continuing their journey to America. After leaving Southampton the Speedwell began leaking and both ships stopped in Dartmouth to fix the problem.

Continuing on their journey, the Speedwell started leaking again when they had travelled just past Land's End.

They turned around and sailed into Plymouth, the nearest dock. It was here they decided to leave the Speedwell behind. The cargo and some of the passengers were transferred on to the Mayflower and for this reason it is believed they would have had to check in with customs.

Continuing down Southside Street, the main street in the Barbican, you will find the Gin Distillery.



5 Blackfriars Plymouth Gin Distillery

Originally adjoining a Dominican Priory and dating from the year 1431, in 1620 some of the Pilgrims may have dined here before their departure on the Mayflower.

In 1793, the building was acquired by the Coates family for conversion into a distillery producing "Plymouth Gin". It is now England's oldest gin distillery and remains in full production, exporting extensively to the USA. Its gin is "Appellation Controlee" (i.e. has to be distilled in Plymouth and nowhere else) and is specified by name as the prime mixer in some 27 different cocktails, including the American "Charlie Lindbergh". During opening hours, call in for a tour and visit the distillery shop just inside the door.

The building also features a lofty roof-timbered public cocktail lounge in the historic Refectory on the first floor and a popular adjoining restaurant. Once you have finished exploring the historic Barbican and Sutton Harbour take a left out of Southside Street, cross the road and take the small road to your right by the crossroads. Here on the left you will find the distinctive Merchant's House, the next stop on your trail.



6 St Andrew's Minster Church

Standing tall next to the Prysten House is St Andrew's Minster Church. Although gutted by fire during the 2nd World War and then refurbished in 1957, the 15th century fabric of St. Andrew's still retains some of its pre-War features.

The great bell tower ("Yogge's Tower") and many of its memorials survive intact, the bells having been cast in the 16th century to celebrate Sir Francis Drake's circumnavigation of the Globe (including his landing in California on 17th June 1579). The modern stained glass windows were designed by the distinguished post-War artist John Piper, who also designed windows for the new Cathedral at Coventry.

The Tower and Central East Windows both commemorate Lady Astor. A few of the fragmented 17th century inscriptions upon the floor stones surviving in the south-east transept name merchants and others who would have been present in Plymouth at the time of the sailing of the Mayflower in 1620.

