

In the Footsteps of Ralph Wheelock, 1630-37, County of Norfolk, England

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As we know, Rev. Ralph Wheelock (Wheelocke) with his wife Rebecca, and three children emigrated from England to the New England colonies during the Great Migration in 1637 and became progenitor of nearly all of the Wheelocks in the United States today. (See **Descendants of Rev. Ralph Wheelock of Medfield, Massachusetts** compiled by Roderick B. Sullivan, Jr., 2024).

I took advantage of a recent vacation trip to England to discover more about what we could learn about Ralph's years prior to 1637 as a student at Clair College, Cambridge University, and his years as a priest in the Church of England from 1630 to 1637.

I was able to visit the churches in Banham and Eccles, County of Norfolk, where he was a minister, and to find records of his marriage and children's baptisms in the County of Norfolk archives. And two of the Eccles records include Ralph's signature as Curate of the church.

Clare College, Cambridge -- I corresponded with the Archives at Clare College to ask if it had any records of Ralph's matriculation and graduation from Clare College. Unfortunately, the archive records only begin around 1631 so there were no archival records on Ralph Wheelock. Previous genealogical studies accept that Ralph matriculated in 1622 and graduated with a Bachelors in 1626 and Masters in 1631.

Ralph became one of the Cambridge-educated priests advocating for English Protestants of the late 16th and 17th centuries who regarded the Reformation of the Church under Elizabeth I as incomplete and sought to simplify worship. Most of these Puritan reformers were from Emmanuel College in Cambridge; Ralph was the only one from Clare. About 30 of the Emmanuel-educated priests emigrated together to the New England colony in 1637. Ralph and his family emigrated the same year, but there is no record of the ship or date of arrival.

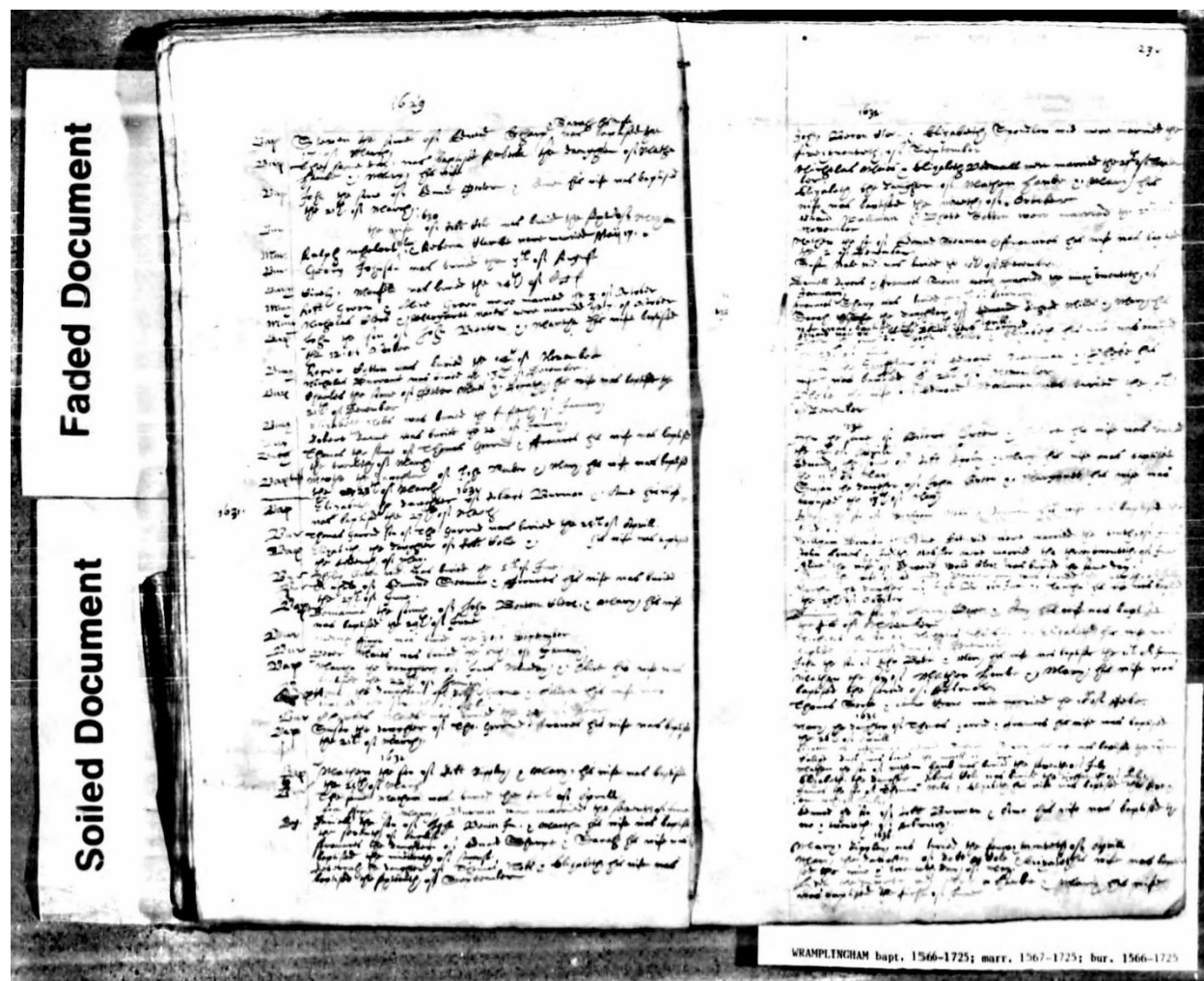


View of Clare College today. These buildings replaced the wood structures of earlier centuries.



View of Cambridge town

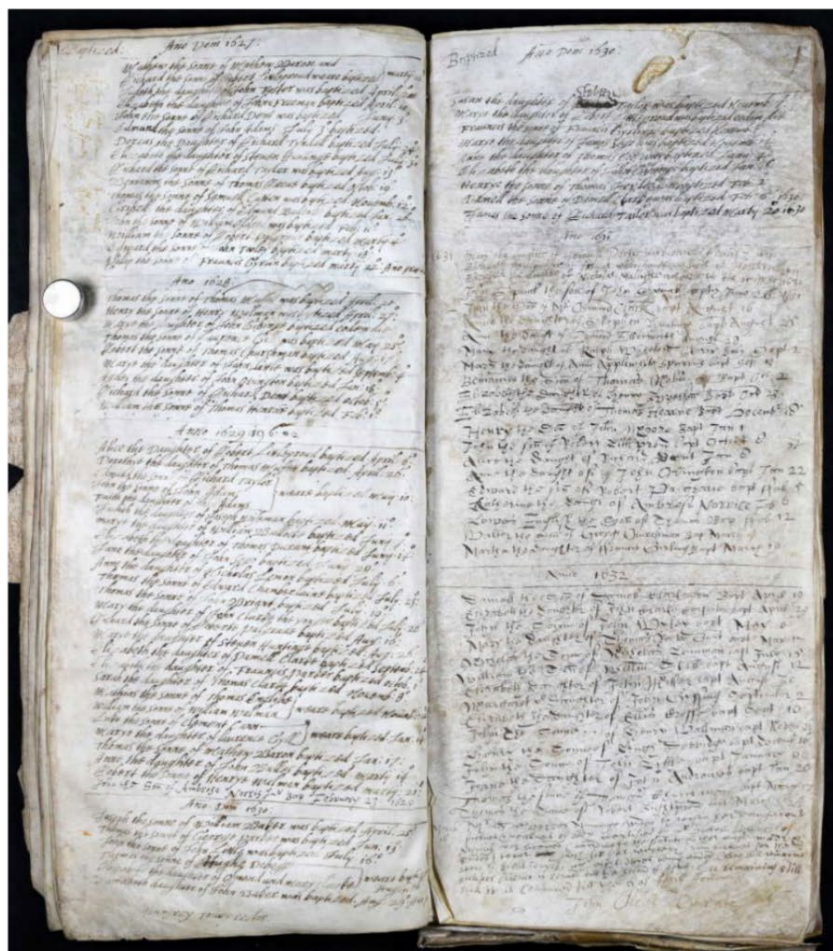
Church of England – There are two ordinations recorded for Ralph. The database “Clergy of the Church of England” citing the Ordination Register indicate that he was ordained a deacon – the first level in the church - on Sep 2, 1629 at Peterborough cathedral by Bishop Thomas Dove. **“Descendants of Rev. Ralph Wheelock”** states that Ralph was then ordained a priest by the Bishop of Norfolk Diocese, Francis White, on May 6, 1630. He married Rebecca Clarke on May 17, 1630, in Wramplingham, County of Norfolk, England. I found the marriage record (below) in the on-line Norfolk Records Office.



Record of Marriage between Ralph Wheelock & Rebecca Clarke May 17, 1630
Wramplingham, County of Norfolk (fifth entry on first page)

(I enlarged this picture and the other three records as much as possible. You may be able to copy and paste the photo onto a separate page in landscape profile and see it better.)

St. Mary the Virgin Church, Banham, Norfolk – Ralph was probably first assigned to St. Mary the Virgin Church in Banham, County of Norfolk given the fact that their first child, Mary Wheelock, was baptized there Sep 2, 1631. The parish's baptism record is shown below. Rebecca's entry is the 8th one under 1631 on the second page.



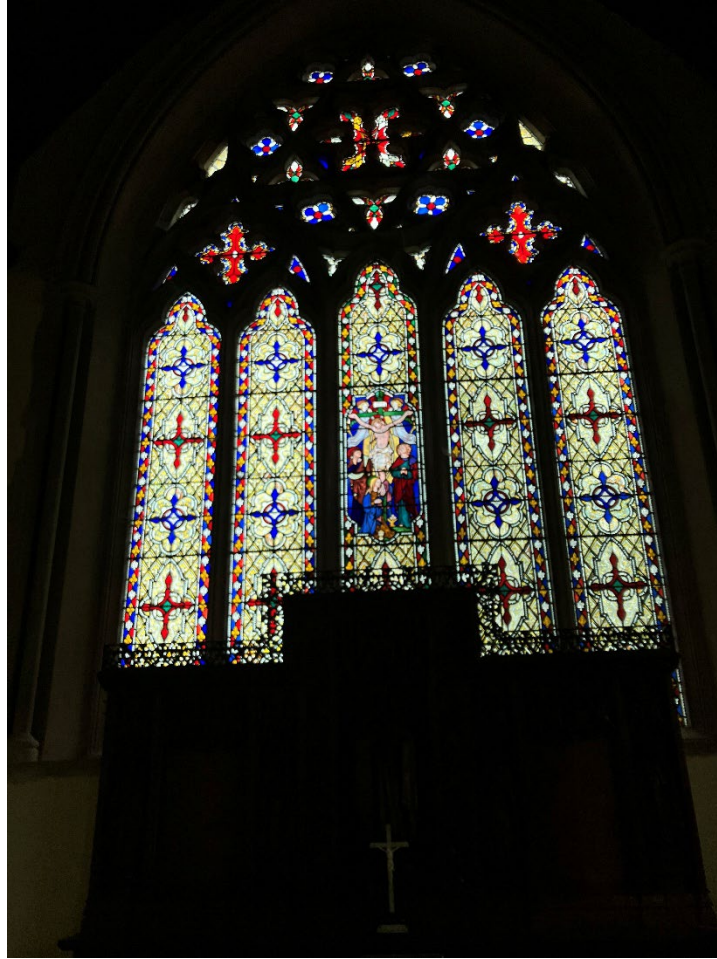
Baptismal record of Mary Wheelock, Sep 2 1631



St. Mary the Virgin Church in Banham:

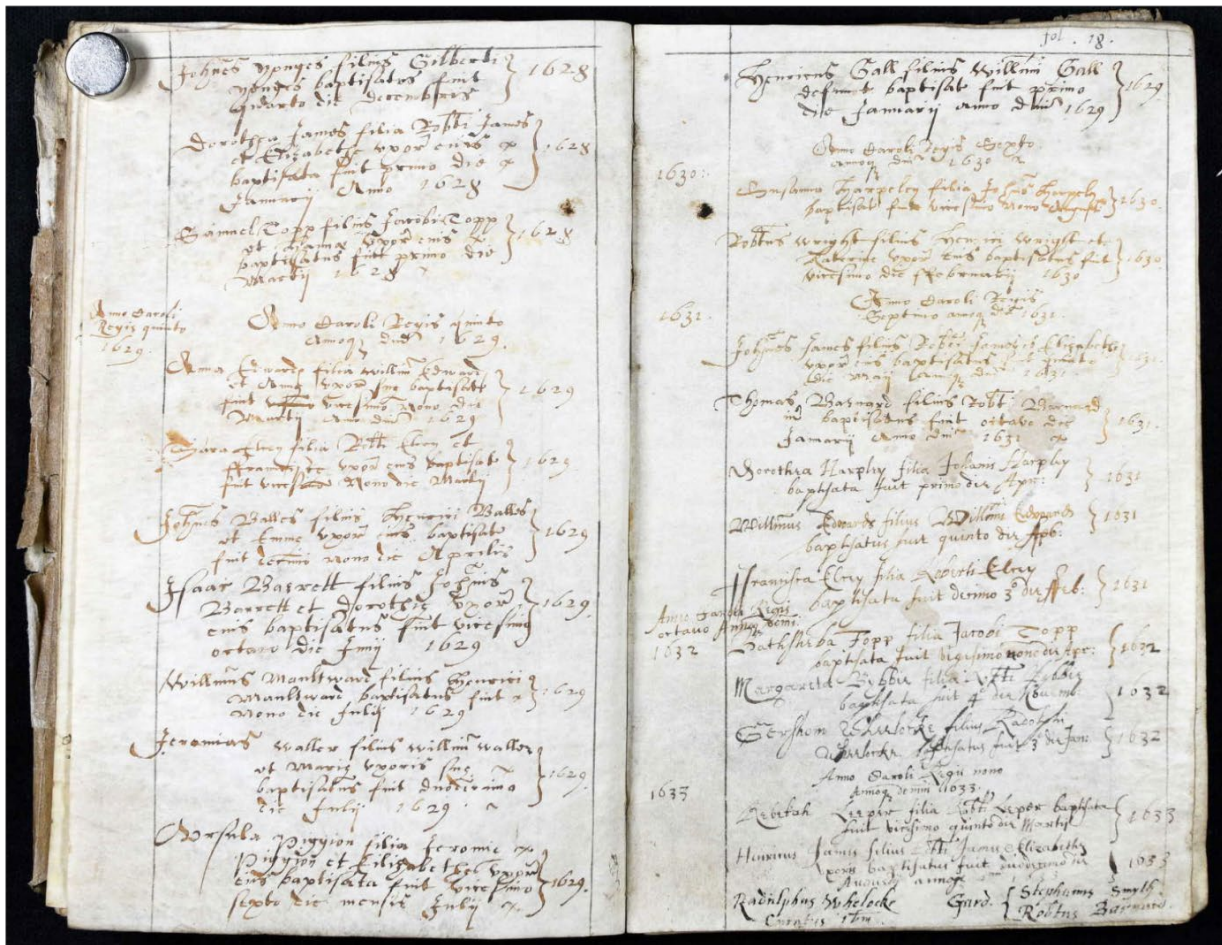


View towards Congregation from the Sanctuary, St. Mary the Virgin Church, Banham:



Stain glass window – St Mary the Virgin Church, Banham

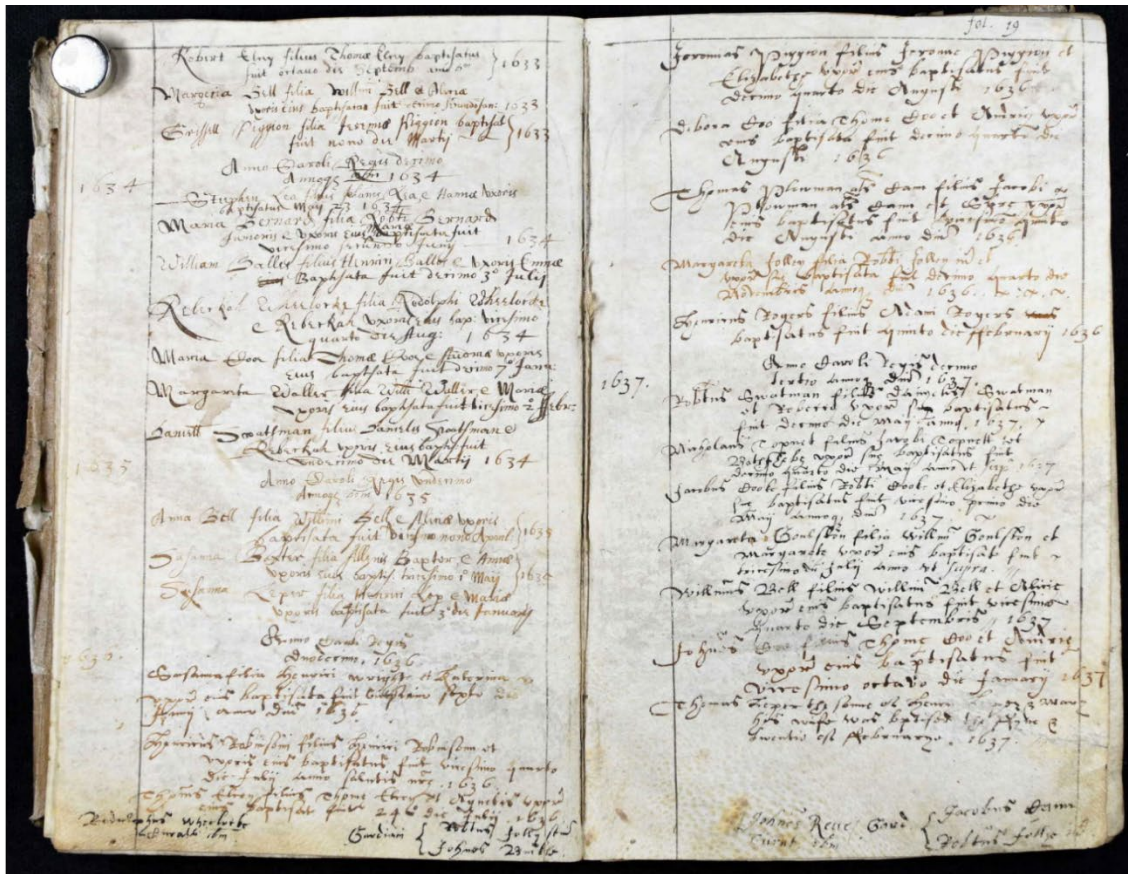
St. Mary the Virgin Church, Eccles, County of Norfolk – Ralph next served at the Anglican Church in Eccles, County of Norfolk, about 4 miles from Banham. Here, evidence of his presence and clerical duties is clear. The first son, Gershom Wheelock, was baptized at St. Mary the Virgin Church in Eccles, County of Norfolk, on 3 Jan 1632 (see the baptismal record below).



Baptism Record for Gershom Wheelock Jan 3, 1632

Baptism record of Gershom Wheelock is the last entry for 1632 on second page. But an entry for January 3, 1632 should have been further up the page (?). You can see Ralph's signature at the bottom of the second page.

Their second daughter, Rebecca Wheelock, was baptized on 24 Aug 1634 (see the baptismal record below). Ralph signed as Curate at the bottom of these pages of the parish records indicating that he performed clerical duties at the parish in Eccles, where Gershom and Rebecca were baptized. (If you scroll in on these baptism records, you can clearly see his signature at the bottom of the page.)



Baptism Record for Rebecca Wheelock Aug 24, 1634

Baptism record of Rebecca Wheelock is 6th entry for 1634 on first page. You can see Ralph's signature at the bottom of the first page for baptisms up to mid-1636. But he is not on the next page indicating that he had left to emigrate.

Here are photos of St Mary the Virgin Church in Eccles. During this period, over 100 churches in Norfolk were built with a tower structure, an unusual architecture.



St. Mary the Virgin Church, Eccles





View toward Altar





Transept between Sanctuary and Congregation



View from Altar towards Congregation

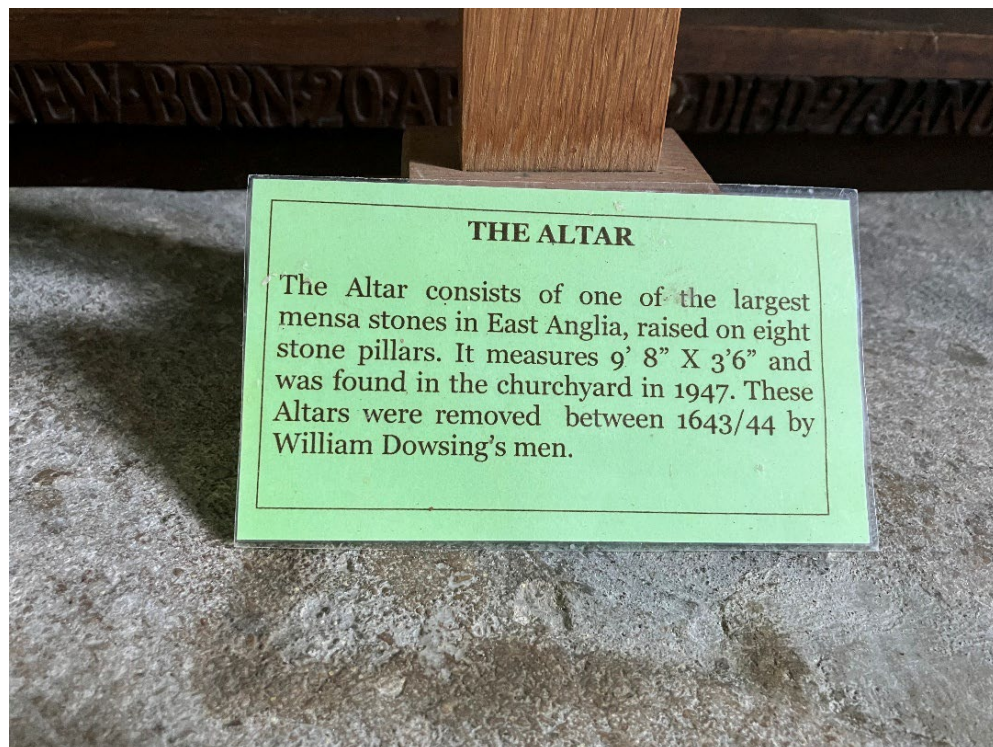


Jacobean Altar from early 1600s – reflecting the Puritan view of a simpler service





Present Day Altar



In short, by being there in the two churches, viewing the altar and pulpit in Eccles where Ralph would have served, and seeing his signature on the records, I now have a much greater sense of who Ralph and Rebecca were and where we came from. I hope that this review of Ralph and Rebecca Wheelock also gives you a better understanding about our family history.