

The Search for Joseph Middlebrook (born circa 1610)

1. Introduction

A little while ago, as a part-time professional genealogist (and a Middlebrook) in England, I was approached by the Middlebrooks Family Association (MFA) to assist in researching the origins of Joseph Middlebrook.

Joseph Middlebrook was an early settler in New England, and is believed to be the direct forefather to many (if not most) of the Middlebrooks currently living in the USA. Much study has been conducted into his life once in America, and I do not intend to repeat that work here. Suffice to say that the key information for me is that he was born around 1610 and is assumed to have left England around 1635.

This report details the progress made so far in identifying Joseph's possible origins and will hopefully provide some food for thought and inspiration for further studies.

2. Other Middlebrooks in New England

Amongst the initial information provided to me by MFA was mention of the "Middlebrook Sisters", Mary and Esther, who were also amongst early settlers in New England. I was provided with a copy of a well researched article¹ which showed that these sisters originated from Batley parish in the West Riding of Yorkshire, England.

Although there was no reason to assume a direct link between Joseph and these two sisters, on scanning through the genealogical information in the article I noticed the name of Dr Joseph Wheeler of Concord. As I knew that Joseph Middlebrook had married into the Wheeler family of Concord, I investigated this line and tentatively confirmed (through a couple of reasonably sourced websites^{2,3}) that they were indeed linked (see Figure 1 for details).

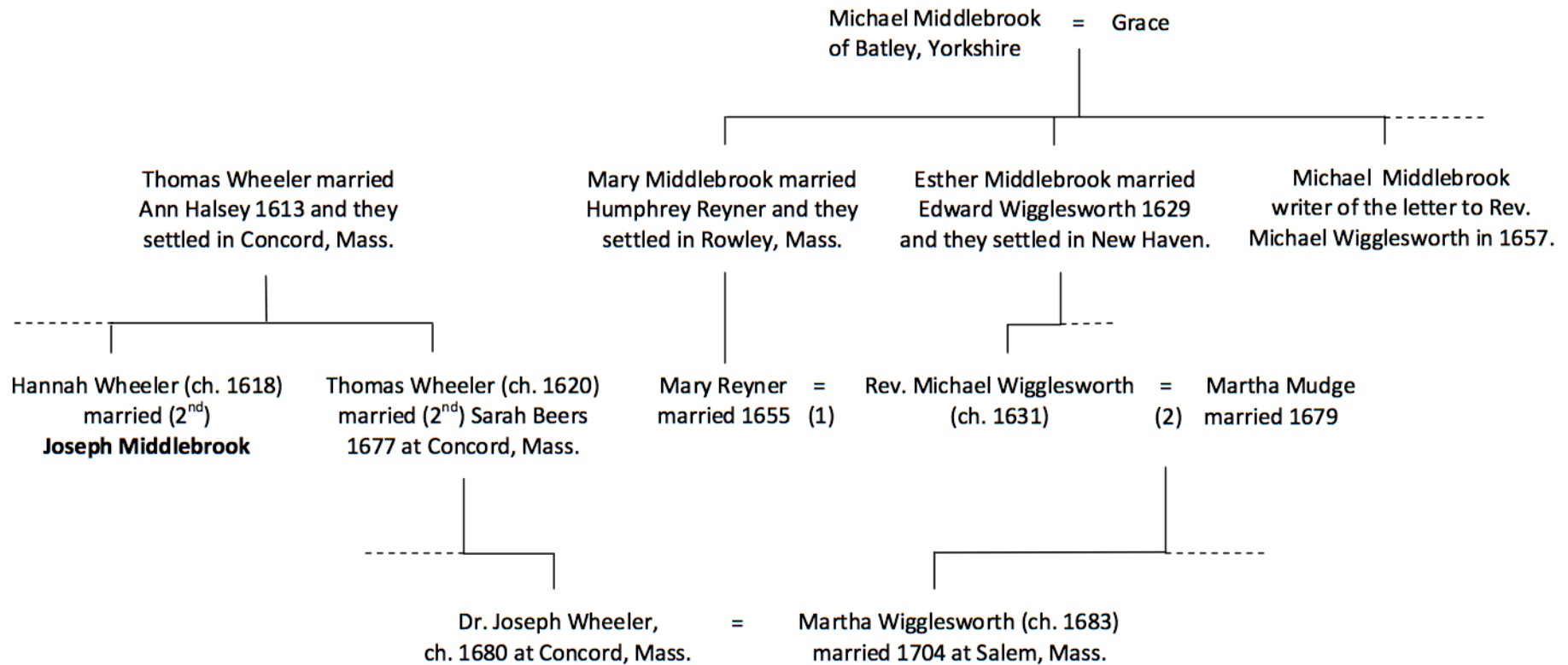
Internet genealogies are not always very reliable and often contradictory, so should be treated with some skepticism until original sources can be checked. Also this family link is only made after the migration of both Joseph and the sisters, so does not necessarily imply that the families were closely related beforehand in England. Nevertheless, it is an interesting possibility to keep in mind.

¹ Stansell, M. (2002) *The Middlebrook Sisters: Mother and Mother-in-Law of Michael Wigglesworth*. The New England Historical and Genealogical Register, Vol 156, pp309-321

² Thaler, D (2010) Descendants of Thomas "the elder" Wheeler
http://armidalesoftware.com/issue/full/Thaler_1072_main.html

³ Pane-Joyce, D. (2008) Pane-Joyce Genealogy <http://aleph0.clark.edu/~djoyce/gen/report/>

Figure 1 – Outline Family Tree connecting Joseph Middlebrook of Concord, Mass. to the Middlebrook Family of Batley, Yorkshire



3. Joseph Middlebrooks in England, UK

For an initial UK search, I naturally started with the International Genealogical Index (IGI)⁴, which includes genuine extracts from a large number of parish registers across England, in some cases stretching back to the earliest registers in 1538. The IGI also includes a lot of family data that has been submitted by individuals – some of which can be traced to original sources but much of which is unattributed.

The Myth

When searching the IGI for a Joseph Middlebrook, the first thing I noticed was dozens of entries suggesting that he had been born in Salford or Cranfield in Bedfordshire. This was a surprise to me, because that is not an area of England where I would expect to find the Middlebrook surname.

Unfortunately none of those IGI entries seem to be the result of a genuine extraction from any parish register – they all appear to be un-sourced individual submissions. This assumption of a Bedfordshire birth has also found its way onto a few internet genealogies, but again I was unable to identify any genuine source from these.

It seemed pertinent to clear this up, and members of the MFA kindly rented and searched microfilm copies of the registers for Salford and Cranfield parishes. They found no Middlebrook entries whatsoever, never mind any sign of Joseph.

It is most likely that this assumption has originated from Joseph's connection with the Wheeler family of Concord who, I believe, can be traced back to this area. But the real evidence does suggest that Joseph must have originated elsewhere.

The Reality

There are a couple of facts in our favour when searching for a Joseph Middlebrook in England in the early 1600s. Firstly, Middlebrook was quite an unusual and localized surname, largely restricted to areas of Lincolnshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire (see Figure 2), so by knowing where the name was found then the search can be narrowed down quite sharply. Secondly, Joseph was not a particularly common first name at that time⁵ so I would not expect to find very many to investigate.

From searching various indices, including the IGI, Boyds Marriage Index, the National Burial Index and Yorkshire probate records, and from additional searches of some key parish registers not covered by those indices, I was able to compile a provisional list of Joseph Middlebrooks found in England in before 1700. The results of this are shown in Table 1.

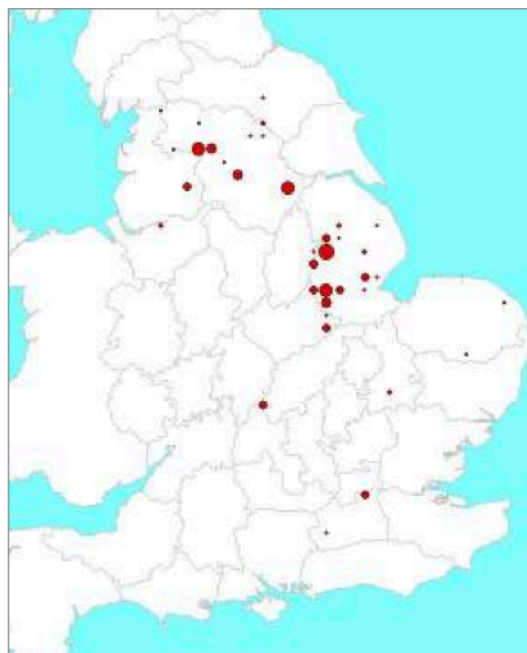
⁴ See <http://www.familysearch.org> for details of the IGI

⁵ Smith-Bannister, S. (1997) Names and Naming Patterns in England. Appendix C cited by <http://victoria.tc.ca/~tgodwin/duncanweb/documents/names.html>

Table 1 – List of Joseph Middlebrooks found in English parish registers before 1700

Parish	Year	Event	
Dewsbury, Yorkshire	1613	baptism	Joseph son of Edwarde Midlebroughe
Leeds, St Peter, Yorkshire	1656	baptism	Joseph son of Mr Michael Midlebrough
Carleton-in-Craven, Yorkshire	1686	baptism	Joseph son of William Midlebrooke
Leeds, St Peter, Yorkshire	1688	baptism	John son of Mr Joseph Midlebrook
Carleton-in-Craven, Yorkshire	1690	burial	Joseph son of William Midlebrooke
Leeds, St Peter, Yorkshire	1690	baptism	Susanna dau of Mr Joseph Midlebrough
Alne, Yorkshire	1693	baptism	Josephus Midlebrook

Figure 2 – Approximate distribution of Middlebrooks in England around 1600⁶



What I found was that Joseph Middlebrook was a very unusual name. There are only seven entries from four parishes (probably only relating to four separate individuals) for the whole of the 17th century. Note that all of these Josephs were in Yorkshire, despite the surname being possibly more frequent in Lincolnshire at that time.

Of course I would never claim that this list is complete. None of the indices are fully comprehensive, many parish registers from that time are lost or incomplete, and whilst I have tried to fill in some of the gaps for parishes in key areas, there could still be more entries hiding elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the majority of core areas for the Middlebrook surname have been covered, so we have a good indication of just how unusual the name was.

Clearly the first Joseph Middlebrook to appear in the records, at Dewsbury in 1613, is the only one born in the right time frame for the man who emigrated to New England in 1635 and therefore worthy of further research.

As an additional point of interest, the second Joseph Middlebrook to appear in the records, at Leeds in 1656, is actually the son of Michael Middlebrook who was brother to the “Middlebrook Sisters” – see Section 2 and Figure 1 for earlier discussion of this family.

⁶ This map is based on the location of all Middlebrook/Middlebrough baptisms that I have found between 1550 and 1649.

4. The Middlebrook Family of Dewsbury, Yorkshire

The parish registers of Dewsbury survive from as far back as 1538, when they were first required to be kept by the church (thanks to Henry VIII). Transcripts and indices of these registers, in addition to the IGI, have now been searched up to 1722^{7,8}. The Middlebrook surname (note also the common variant of Middlebrough) does not appear in these parish registers until the 1590s, when a man called Edward Middlebrough began to father a large family there.

By reconstructing his family as best possible from the register entries (see details in Section 5 below), we find that Edward was married three times and had 14 children. Of these 14 children, 6 were buried before they reached adulthood – meaning that Edward was survived by 8 children when he died in 1627.

Fortunately, Edward left a will⁹, which is transcribed below:

Edward Midlebrough of Ossit did make his will nuncupative in manner as followeth First he did comitt his soule to God and his body to be buried in the church yard of Dewsbury then he gave unto Edward Midlebrough his sonne and to his heires and assigns forever one acre of copihould land in the new close Item he surrendered unto Thomas Nayler his heires and assigns forever one close called ... ??? ... and he should sell it to the full worth and the money therefore received to be equally divided amongst his youngest children that is to say to **Joseph** John Joney Alice Elizabeth and Dorotheie Midlebrough It he willed if his wife was with child that that child should have forty shillings of the ... of his goods and the remainder of his goods he gave to be divided amongst his children witness hereof Thomas Nayler Thomas Spence ...

The list of children mentioned in Edward's will (including Joseph) matches precisely with the children thought to be alive at that time, based on my interpretation of the parish registers, with the exception of his son William. Given that William was his eldest son, and he was an adult by the time of Edward's death, the implication must be that William had already been set up with his own establishment prior to the writing (speaking) of the will, which is why he received no further bequest.

Thankfully, William [*Willime Midlebrough de Ossitt ...*] is mentioned in the probate for Edward – albeit amongst some legal latin at the end of the document that I am unable to interpret due to the quality of the photocopy. I think it is reasonable to assume that probate was granted to William as, by that time, Edward's widow had already re-married.

⁷ Yorkshire Archaeological Society transcript (1538-1653) – extracts supplied to me by Neal Middlebrook

⁸ Huddersfield and District Family History Society transcripts (1653-1722)

⁹ Probate of Edward Midlebrough of Ossit, proved at York on 5-Aug-1628. Borthwick Institute ref. Vol.41/f.46a

5. Family Chart for Edward MIDDLEBROUGHE of Ossett, Dewsbury, Yorkshire

Edward Middlebroughe of Ossett married, firstly, Alice (nee ?) in or before 1592 and they had 6 children:

1. John Middlebroughe, baptized on 21st December 1592 at Dewsbury, but buried there on 10th February 1617.
2. William Middlebroughe, baptized on 25th March 1593/4 at Dewsbury, but buried there on 25th February 1602.
3. Agnes Middlebroughe, baptized on 20th March 1596/7 at Deswbury, but buried there on 1st January 1598.
4. Jonye Middlebroughe, baptized on 10th November 1601 at Dewsbury. She married Nicholas Hargrayve in January 1626 at Dewsbury.
5. William Middlebroughe, baptized on 26th December 1603 at Dewsbury. He married Sara (Rawsom or Ransom) in February 1629 and they had at least 4 children:
 - i. An unbaptized child was buried on 23rd September 1630 at Dewsbury.
 - ii. William Middlebroughe, baptized on 13th October 1631 at Dewsbury.
 - iii. An unbaptized child was buried on 25th August 1633 at Dewsbury.
 - iv. Joshua Middlebroughe, baptized on 25th January 1634/5 at Dewsbury. He married Mary Harrison of West Ardsley on 4th February 1657 at Dewsbury and they had 6 children:
 - i. Joshua Middlebrook, baptized on 18th February 1661 at Dewsbury, but buried there on 12th July 1665.
 - ii. Ann Middlebrook, baptized on 22nd June 1663 at Dewsbury.
 - iii. William Middlebrook, baptized on 20th May 1665 at Dewsbury, but buried there on 6th February 1666.
 - iv. William Middlebrook, baptized on 22nd July 1667 at Dewsbury. He married and had 3 children at Dewsbury: Sarah (ch. 1699), Ann & William (ch. 1708). William was probably buried at Dewsbury in 1713.
 - v. Sarah Middlebrook, baptized on 17th October 1669 at Dewsbury. She married Timothy Megson on 15th June 1690.
 - vi. Joshua Middlebrooke, baptized on 1st January 1672, but buried there in November 1672.Joshua was then buried in November 1672 at Dewsbury and Administration¹⁰ was granted to his widow Mary in 1673.
6. Alice Middlebroughe, baptized on 10th October 1606 at Dewsbury. She married John Garnall on 25th April 1630.

¹⁰ Probate of Joshua Middlebrough of Ossett, granted on 4-Jun-1673. Borthwick Institute ref. Admon/f.107

Alice, the wife of Edward, was buried on 10th October 1606 at Dewsbury. Edward Middlebroughe then married, secondly, Alice Brouke on 30th January 1608 at Dewsbury and had a further 6 children:

7. Elizabeth Middlebroughe, baptized on 28th December 1609 at Dewsbury. She married William Milner on 30th April 1632 at Dewsbury.
8. Edward Middlebroughe, baptized on 28th July 1611 at Dewsbury.
- 9. Joseph Midlebroughe, baptized on 12th September 1613 at Dewsbury.**
10. Dorothe Midlebrouke, baptized on 24th August 1615 at Dewsbury. She married Matthew Speight of Gawthorpe on 1st July 1635 at Dewsbury.
11. Sara Middlebroughe, baptized on 25th September 1617 at Dewsbury, but buried there on 20th October 1617.
12. John Midlebrouke, baptized on 9th May 1619 at Dewsbury.

Alice, the second wife of Edward, was buried on 9th April 1621 at Dewsbury. Edward Middlebrouke then married, thirdly, Margaret Medlay on 23rd November 1624 at Dewsbury and had a further 2 children:

13. Andrew Midlebrouke, baptized on 4th December 1625 at Dewsbury, but buried there on 25th December 1625.
14. An unbaptized daughter was buried on 12th August 1627 at Dewsbury.

Edward Middlebrouke was buried on 1st December 1627 at Dewsbury, and his widow Margaret then married John Mitchell on 27th May 1628.

6. Further Records for Dewsbury, Yorkshire

Of Edward's surviving children, the four daughters all married within the parish between 1626 and 1635. However, out of the four sons, only the eldest, William, is definitely accounted for in the parish registers – remaining in the area until his death in 1644 and being survived by two sons.

This leaves three other sons – John, Edward and Joseph – who cannot definitely be accounted for in the registers of Dewsbury after the death of their father (although John possibly fathered a couple of children at Dewsbury in 1657 and 1660, but I cannot be certain this is the same man).

This means that a wider area and variety of records need to be consulted in order to trace their movements (if possible). Firstly, a number of registers from neighbouring parishes¹¹ have been searched for the relevant time period, but they have not produced any evidence of these men moving around in the local area, so other local records have been identified.

¹¹ Including Rothwell, Batley, Birstall, Mirfield, Leeds, Calverley, Thornhill, East Ardsley, Horbury, Hartshead, Wakefield, Whitkirk & Woodkirk parishes

Wakefield Court Rolls

In his will, Edward Middlebrough left an acre of copyhold land to his son, the younger Edward. Copyhold land was owned by a 'manor' and Ossett belonged to the manor of Wakefield. Any transfer of such land should be recorded in the court rolls of the manor, and fortunately those for Wakefield survive in an almost unbroken run from 1274 to the 20th century. It is possible that these rolls may tell us more about what happened to the Middlebrook family in this area, although they are not easy documents to read or interpret.

The Yorkshire Archaeological Society has a program of transcribing and indexing these Court Rolls, although they are only able to complete one year at a time (14 volumes since 1974). In addition to land transfer, the rolls report on a host of other matters, such as road and ditch maintenance and the swearing in of court officials.

The Table below shows the Middlebrooks that have been found in those years currently transcribed:

YAS volume	Years covered	Middlebrooks mentioned
Vol. 3	1331-33	None
Vol. 2	1348-50	None
Vol. 6	1350-52	None
Vol. 9	1537-40	None
Vol. 7	1550-52	None
Vol. 4	1583-85	None
Vol. 11	1608-09	None
Vol. 1	1639-40	Edward Midlebrooke (Ossett) William Midlebroughe (Ossett, lord's tenant) John Middlebrough (Midgley)
Vol. 8	1651-52	William Middlebrooke (Northowrome)
Vol. 5	1664-65	William Middlebrooke (lord's tenant)
Vol. 13	1687-88	William Middlebrooke (Wakefield, Northgate)
Vol. 10	1790-92	None

The most important of these volumes covers the year 1639-40, where there seems to be evidence for the younger Edward Middlebrook remaining in Ossett along with his elder brother William, and possibly evidence for a third son, John, at Midgley. However, these court rolls have not yet produced any evidence that Edward's son Joseph remained in the area.

Hearth Tax

The Hearth Tax is the closest thing we have to a national census in England in the second half of the 17th century. Every household in the country was required to pay tax based on the number of hearths within their building (unless they were so poor as to be exempt), so in theory the returns list nearly all householders in any area.

Dewsbury lay within the Administrative District of Agbrigg and Morley Wapentakes, and the 1672 returns for that district¹², which cover 18 parishes, list the following Middlebrooks:

Township	Parish	Householder	Hearths	Notes
Bramley	Leeds	Mr. Michael Midlebrough	5	<i>Brother of the "Middlebrook Sisters". Nobody had more hearths in Bramley.</i>
Gildersome	Batley	Math. Midlebrough	1	<i>Almost certainly a brother of Michael above¹.</i>
Northgate	Wakefield	Wm. Midlebrough	3	<i>Presumably the eldest grandson of Edward (bapt 1631).</i>
Ossitt	Dewsbury	Jos. Midlebrooke	1	<i>Presumably Joshua, the second grandson of Edward (bapt 1633).</i>

Michael, Matthew and Joshua Middlebrook are known, from the relevant parish registers, to have headed families at that time and to have died after 1672, so we can be fairly certain about their identities. William at Wakefield may not have had a family, but is mentioned regularly in the Wakefield Court Rolls.

So there is actually no sign of any Middlebrooks in this area other than those descended from Edward Middlebrook and those related to the Middlebrook sisters. And again, no sign that Edward's son Joseph had remained (or survived) in the area.

7. Middlebrooks Family DNA Project

Genetic genealogy is a very useful tool for supporting or disproving possible links between different families with the same surname, and the MFA has established a very successful DNA project looking at the Middlebrook surname. In return for my assistance with this research into Joseph, the MFA very kindly contributed towards a DNA test for myself.

The results of this were a great surprise, with my DNA showing a close affiliation with the main group in America known to descend from Joseph Middlebrook¹³.

Without going into technical details here, this result, combined with the sharing of an unusual surname, indicates that Joseph Middlebrook almost certainly shares a common direct male ancestor with myself. And given that the majority of surnames in Northern England did not become fully established as

¹² Heath Tax Returns 1672: Vol 1. Agbrigg and Morley Wapentakes. Ripon Historical Society. (index in Vol. 2)

¹³ My FTDNA kit number is 159527 and the results of the Middlebrook project can be seen here <http://www.worldfamilies.net/surnames/middlebrooks/results>

hereditary family names until the late 14th century (if not later), then our common ancestor is most likely to have lived within the two centuries (just a handful of generations) before Joseph's birth.

My own ancestry can be traced with certainty back to Colne in Lancashire, and the records also show that the Middlebrooks of Colne had moved there from the remote parish of Burnsall in the West Riding of Yorkshire. The Middlebrook surname has a long history in this area of Yorkshire, close to the Lancashire border.

Despite Joseph's own migration to New England, the reality is that most migrations in the preceding period were very local (ie. within a few parishes) and that long distance cross-country migration was quite unusual. So the affinity of Joseph's DNA with a Middlebrook family known to originate from a remote area of Yorkshire does suggest that his origins may not lie too far from that same area.

8. Summary of Evidence

1. Hard genetic (DNA) evidence demonstrating a strong link between descendants of Joseph Middlebrook in America and a current Middlebrook family in England. This is supported by the knowledge that the English family can be traced back to the West Riding of Yorkshire, and that a common ancestor is not likely to date much more than a handful of generations earlier than Joseph.
2. Circumstantial genealogical evidence that links Joseph Middlebrook, subsequent to his settling in New England, with members of another Middlebrook family who are known to originate from the parish of Batley in the West Riding of Yorkshire.
3. Hard genealogical evidence of the baptism and survival of a Joseph Middlebrook born around the right time (1613) in the parish of Dewsbury in the West Riding of Yorkshire (which lies adjacent to the parish of Batley).
4. Circumstantial evidence that the Joseph Middlebrook born in Dewsbury did not remain in that area as an adult, despite finding evidence for most of his siblings. (More strictly, an absence of evidence that he did remain in the area).
5. An absence of evidence for any other individual called Joseph Middlebrook in England in the first half of the 17th century, despite fairly extensive searches across the main areas where Middlebrook families are known to have lived at that time.

So did Joseph Middlebrook migrate from Dewsbury to Concord? Well there isn't enough clear evidence yet to say that for certain, but at the moment it is the only possibility backed up (or not contradicted) by all the evidence that is currently available.

Ian Middlebrook