

OBEDIENCE ROBINS OF ACCOMACK: 17TH-CENTURY  
STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

A Thesis

by

MARY CATHERINE WILHEIT

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 1997

Major Subject: History

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## ABSTRACT

Obedience Robins of Accomack: 17th-Century

Strategies for Success. (December 1997)

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Obedience Robins emigrated to Virginia in the 1620s in search of the land and status his elder brother gained by inheritance. This thesis establishes motivations for immigration and methods by which one English émigré achieved success in Virginia. The 1582 will of Richard Robins established a pattern of primogeniture for successive generations of his Northamptonshire family. Muster lists, wills, parish registers and a 1591 manor survey record increasing prosperity and associated expectations. Robinses were among those "better sorts" who paid taxes, provided armour, held local office, educated their children, and protested against perceived government injustice.

In Virginia, Richard Robins's great grandson parlayed his assets into land, office and status. The extent of his education and financial resources was probably limited, but good health, timing, ability and hard work brought him respect, a seat on the governor's council, and his children's marriages within a coalescing Eastern Shore gentry.

Robins's career in America paralleled that of his brother in England. Both abandoned their father's yeoman designation to become gentlemen in their own and their peers' estimations. Obedience Robins combined public office with private enterprise and agriculture with trade for social and economic security. The commonwealth period did not disrupt Virginia's colonial hierarchy. Robins and his fellow justices, militia officers and burgesses retained their positions within a framework of transported English institutions.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION AND IDENTIFICATION

Seventeenth-century New Englanders' origins and their New World experiences, including continued communication with England through family, friends, and business interests, are well-documented, but no comparable comprehensive studies illuminate contemporary Virginia society.<sup>1</sup> The significance of emigrants' family and economic backgrounds, motivations, and continued trans-Atlantic familial and business connections has proved difficult to assess at all levels of society. This thesis reconstructs the circumstances that led to the emigration of one seventeenth-century Englishman, and the methods he employed to exploit colonial opportunities. Obedience Robins, a native of Northamptonshire, emigrated to Virginia in 1626 or 1627. He left no writings and court depositions render second-hand versions of only a few of his statements. Nevertheless, Robins appears frequently in historical studies, most often in conjunction with non-conformist activity, kinship networks, and land ownership. Students of colonial Virginia readily recognize his name, although confusion marks his parentage, birth place and year of emigration. Firm establishment of identity presents opportunities to assess family size, status, wealth, educational opportunities and assumption of civic responsibilities, all factors affecting a decision to emigrate and subsequent behavior. Robins and his extended family are not a rich source of personal commentary, but public records provide the framework on which to reconstruct one individual's English midlands background, and his active role in the formation of a colonial Virginia society. Establishment of Robins's identity is requisite to further discussion. This chapter presents cumulative and conclusive evidence that Obedience Robins of Accomack, Virginia was the second son of Richard Robins of Long Buckby, and permits exploration of a family background that includes four generations of Northamptonshire landowners.

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Citations in this thesis follow the format of *The William and Mary Quarterly*.

<sup>1</sup> David Cressy's *Coming Over: Migration and Communication Between England and New England in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), documents continuity of communication between settlers and their English connections. Brent Tarter asks for this type of information for Virginia, specifically who came and why, in "The New Virginia Bookshelf," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, hereafter *VMHB*, 104 (1996), 14.

Obedience Robins patented at least 4,450 acres<sup>2</sup> on Virginia's Eastern Shore, and served as vestryman, county court commissioner, commander, and Burgess. Historians identify his parents as either Thomas and Mary Bulkley (or Brackley) Robins of Brackley, Northamptonshire,<sup>3</sup> or Richard (II)<sup>4</sup> and Dorothy Rushall Robins, of Long Bucky, Northamptonshire,<sup>5</sup> and his date of birth as 1600 or 1601. Most often, Obedience Robins is described simply as a native of Northamptonshire, and credited with the influence to give the name of his English birthplace to the Virginia peninsula to which he and his brother Edward migrated. Richard (II) Robins's will<sup>6</sup> and the possibility that he owned a share in the Virginia Company, family naming patterns, a 1659 bill of sale,<sup>7</sup> and a communication from Richard (III) Robins in Virginia records,<sup>8</sup> verify that Robins was the son of Richard (II) Robins, of Long Bucky.<sup>9</sup>

Richard (II) Robins's will, written in 1633/4, mentions his wife and each of his surviving nine children (a daughter, Dorothy, christened in 1610, died in 1624.)<sup>10</sup> His son and heir, Richard (III), received all remaining "lands, goods, cattells & chattills" after varying sums were left to the poor, four daughters, "all my grandchildren," and his wife. John and Thomas, the third and fifth sons,<sup>11</sup> received legacies of land and cash. The remaining legacies, of one hundred pounds each, are to Obedience and Edward, the second and fourth sons.<sup>12</sup> It seems reasonable to infer that cash bequests, without mention

<sup>2</sup> George B. Curtis, "The Colonial County Court, Social Forum and Legislative Precedent: Accomac County, Virginia, 1633-1639," *VMHB*, 85 (1977), 274. 4,450 is the accepted total. Actual acreage is 4,850. See below, 67.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Lothrop Withington, "Minutes of the Council and General Court," *VMHB* 28 (1920), 326; Nora Miller Turman, *The Eastern Shore of Virginia, 1603-1964* (Onancock, Virginia, 1964), 19; and James Horn, *Adapting to a New World* (Chapel Hill, 1994), 56.

<sup>4</sup> Seventeenth-century records, the Northampton Public Record Office, hereafter NPRO, and genealogists use this method to distinguish among three Richard Robinses of Long Bucky, and it will be continued here.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas T. Upshur, "Eastern Shore History," *VMHB* 9 (1901), 94.

<sup>6</sup> NPRO, E. V. Northamptonshire Wills, First Series, 1634-1636, 91-95, Will of Richard (II) Robins

<sup>7</sup> NPRO, ZB563-22, photo of original conveyance; transcription in Thomas Robins, "The Facts of a Family: Robyn 1377 to Robins 1939." (typescript, Library of Congress, 1939), 53.

<sup>8</sup> James Handley Marshall, ed., *Abstracts of the Wills and Administrations of Northampton County, Virginia 1632-1802* (Camden, Me., 1994), 8.

<sup>9</sup> R. L. Greenall, ed., *The Parish Register of Long Bucky*, hereafter *PRLB* (Leicester, Eng., 1971), 22, records "Baptisms 1601, Apr 26 Obedience s Richard Robbens et ux." The NPRO holds the original, Bucky Parish Register, Folio 20 A, but all references will be to Greenall's transcription.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 29; Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints International Genealogical Index (hereafter LDSIGI), Northamptonshire, Eng. fiche pp. 5540, 5545; Will of Richard (II) Robins.

<sup>12</sup> LDSIGI, 5542, 5538.

of lands or leases, reflect Obedience's six-year absence in Virginia and Edward's residence in London. Larger legacies to the sons who remained in Northamptonshire might also reflect earlier expenditures on schooling or apprenticeships, Obedience's to an apothecary, and Edward's to a merchant.

Richard (III) Robins, son and heir of Richard (II) Robins, had seven children; one son, Richard (IV), and six daughters, including Grace, the fourth daughter and fifth child.<sup>13</sup> Three daughters, Dorothy, Mary and Elizabeth, are probable namesakes of aunts, a grandmother, and a great-grandmother. There are no readily apparent family antecedents for the names Ann, Grace and Jemimah, but it is possible that Grace Robins, for whom we have no birth date,<sup>14</sup> but who married John Moerton in 1662,<sup>15</sup> was named for Grace Neale Waters Robins, the wife of Obedience, in Virginia. Edward Waters, Grace Neale's first husband, died at Great Hornemead, Hertfordshire in 1630.<sup>16</sup> Four children of Obedience and Grace, Dorothy, John, Mary, and Obedience, continue immediate family names, while the name of the fifth child, Francis, appears among Robinses in the Long Buckby Parish register.<sup>17</sup>

The prospect of land ownership was a powerful incentive for New World migration. Two Robinses are listed among shareholders in the Virginia Company in 1618/19 and again in 1620.<sup>18</sup> George Robins, a merchant,<sup>19</sup> or vintner,<sup>20</sup> held shares in six adventuring companies, and is probably the same Robins who brought suit against Sambon,<sup>21</sup> and who bought, among other items, 67 pipes of

<sup>13</sup> NPRO, E. V. Northamptonshire Wills, Tenth Series, 1674-1676, 74-80, Will of Richard (III) Robins.

<sup>14</sup> Greenall, vii; between 1611 and 1620 there are no entries in the parish register.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 73. The entry reads "Mr John Moerton of Ringstead in this countie and M[istres]s Grace Robins of this parish," in October or November. Also, LDSIGI, 5540.

<sup>16</sup> Public Record Office, London, hereafter PRO, Probate Wills II, 81 Scroope: Will of Edward Waters.

<sup>17</sup> Greenall, 63, 71. Obedience and John, sons of "Francis Robins & Jane ux" are listed under births September 17, 1661. Cromwellian registers list births, not baptisms, beginning in 1653 and continuing into 1663 in this parish. W. P. W. Phillimore, ed. *Northampton Parish Registers: Marriages II* (London, 1909), and LDSIGI, 5539.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Myra Kingsbury, ed., *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1906-1935), 1:87, 2:332.

<sup>19</sup> Theodore K. Rabb, *Enterprise and Empire: Merchant and Gentry Investment in the Expansion of England, 1575-1630* (Cambridge, 1967), 8,36.

<sup>20</sup> Kingsbury 4:366; "The Second Charter to the Treasurer and Company, for Virginia, 1609," in William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia*, 13 vols. (New York and Philadelphia, 1819-1813), 1:86.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Rolle, *Les Reports de Henry Rolle, Sergeant del' Ley, de Divers Cases en le Court Del'Banke le Roy. En le temps de' Reign de Roy Jaques* (London, 1675), 278.

Alligant wine at a 1630 sale of prize goods.<sup>22</sup> Richard Robins's class is listed by Rabb as "unknown." There is no record of a purchase date, and no link with the Richard (II) Robins of Long Buckby, but investment in New World land might have seemed prudent to a prosperous yeoman farmer, father of five young sons.

A study of Elizabethan and Stuart joint stock companies found names of over 6000 investors, and broad support from landed classes, particularly after 1609.<sup>23</sup> The Virginia Company sought investment from lower classes and in 1615 advertised a lottery to raise funds, sending notice to Deputy Lieutenant Montagu of County Northampton requesting his influence and example to further "so good a worke and so behovefull to the whole Realme."<sup>24</sup> The lotteries proved successful and excited public imagination. In 1620, the Virginia Company allowed Humphrey Tompkins a Bill of Adventure, or one company share worth one hundred acres, won in the five shilling lottery.<sup>25</sup> The Virginia Company, despite its comparatively brief existence, succeeded in attracting the greatest numbers of members and half the total gentry investors in trade,<sup>26</sup> although individual investments were probably small.<sup>27</sup> Richard Robins's single share was valued at £12 10s, or one hundred acres of Virginia land.

Virginia land records provide another link between Obedience Robins of Accomack and Obedience Robins of Long Buckby. In 1659, Colonel Obedience Robins leased three hundred acres in Northampton County, Virginia, "part of the plantation called Buckby conteyning two thousand Acres of Land granted to me . . . the third of December . . . 1640," to John Danniell.<sup>28</sup> Long Buckby, west northwest of the city of Northampton, and three miles northeast of the River Nene, is approximately thirty miles from Brackley, which is southwest of Northampton, near the Buckinghamshire border, on

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<sup>22</sup> PROL SP16/165, 94.

<sup>23</sup> Rabb, 38.

<sup>24</sup> Edward Montagu, *The Montagu Musters Book*, Joan Wake, ed. (Peterborough, 1935), 236.

<sup>25</sup> Kingsbury, 2:295.

<sup>26</sup> Rabb, 81.

<sup>27</sup> Horn, 107.

<sup>28</sup> NPRO ZB563-22; Robins, 53.



the River Ouse.<sup>29</sup> That two Robins children were named Obedience within a year may be more than coincidence, and suggests family ties, despite the distance between the two parishes in which they were baptized. Obedience Robins named Virginia Eastern Shore land "Buckby" rather than "Brackley," in recognition of his English home.

A note on the administration of the will of Edward Robins, merchant, of Northampton, Virginia, for which Obedience Robins was the administrator, puts to rest any question of Robins's origin: "Richard Robins, Gent., of Longbuckbbye in the County of Northampton claimed to be the brother of Edward Robins, deceased of Virginia, and of Obedience Robins."<sup>30</sup> Finally, the Long Buckby Parish Register records the marriage of Virginians Martha Wales Horsey and Littleton Robins in 1802<sup>31</sup>. The first Littleton Robins, bearing the names of two prominent Eastern Shore families, was a grandson of Obedience. These early nineteenth-century Americans fall well beyond the scope of the present study, but this instance of a Virginian returning to the parish church of his ancestors provides a powerful example of the persistence of American acknowledgement of specific English origins.

Chapter II describes Robins family standing in the Parish of Long Buckby. The wills of Obedience Robins's father and great-grandfather, an inventory, muster and militia subsidies lists, and the Long Buckby Parish Register provide indications of relative wealth, associates, and community status. Between 1582 and 1634, evidence points to steady and substantial improvement in family prosperity, based in land and livestock, and consolidated by inheritance in eldest sons. Contemporaries inveighed against the evils of primogeniture, with resulting impoverishment of cadets. Studies confirm marked loss of status among younger sons and dowerless daughters.<sup>32</sup> Migration, both internal and external, offered hope for economic betterment. It is likely that Obedience and Edward experienced both forms:

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<sup>29</sup> John Speed, *The Counties of Britain: A Tudor Atlas* (London, reprint 1995), 134-5. Locations are from Speed's 1610 map of Northamptonshire, but scale is extrapolated from a modern map, and this distance is direct.

<sup>30</sup> Marshall, *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> LDSIGI 5,541.

<sup>32</sup> Joan Thirsk, "Younger Sons in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Rural Economy of England: Collected Essays* (London, 1984), 336-9, 341-2.

sojourns in London and other ports increased the probability of colonial emigration.<sup>33</sup> A yeoman farmer's prosperity underwrote the trans-Atlantic voyages of two Robins brothers and contributed to their subsequent success in the New World. Obedience, a second son, continued the Robins tradition of rising status and wealth. In Virginia, he accumulated land he was barred from inheriting in England, and achieved titles and offices that would have proved elusive, if not impossible, had he remained in Northamptonshire. Robins's English midlands background affected his political outlook as well as his economic and social aspirations. Through his mother he was related to Puritan families in the nearby parish of Badby. Dorothy Goodman probably influenced family names, but there is no evidence that her sons and husband were more than pragmatic communicants of the Church of England. There is no indication that Robins was subjected to religious prosecution, nor was he without options in England. Robins was literate, but the extent of his education can only be surmised from opportunities available in rural areas of the early modern era. An Obedience Robins served a seven-year apprenticeship to a London apothecary between June, 1618 and February, 1625/6, and it is unlikely that Obedience Robins of Accomack arrived in Virginia before 1627.

Robins's assumption of public responsibility and his emergence as a leading citizen of Accomack are described in Chapter III. The first decade of Robins's residence on the Eastern Shore coincided with the period of social adjustment in which office was given to promising newcomers. After 1637, recent arrivals acquired office on the basis of pedigree. Robins may have been superseded, but he was never unseated, his positions assured by experience and longevity. Sometime after 1630 he married the widow of the colorful and picaresque Edward Waters. With Grace Neale Waters, Robins gained stepchildren and family connections to the Waterses of Middleham, Yorkshire, and the Neales of Wollaston and Hanging Houghton, Northamptonshire, London, and St. Clement's Manor, Maryland. Accomack County Court records beginning in 1632 are the principle source for his activities, but offer

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<sup>33</sup> Russell R. Menard, "British Migration to the Chesapeake Colonies in the Seventeenth Century," in Lois Green Carr et al, eds. *Colonial Chesapeake Society* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 125. If landed gentry families dominated Virginia settlement before 1625, to be "replaced as the most prominent immigrants by men with mercantile backgrounds," (120) Obedience, a second son and the first brother to emigrate, is an exemplary transitional figure. He came from a landed yeoman family approaching gentle status and brought with him commercial training.

little insight into his personal life. Robins maintained a profitable equilibrium among agriculture, private enterprise and public office, a pattern common in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Virginia, when office was a legitimate means to private gain. There is no evidence that he ever practiced medicine. Accomack County Court records list each court's commander and all commissioners present: titles, the ordering of the lists, and changes over the years indicate an individual's relative standing among his peers. Robins's courtroom activities extended beyond commissioners' duties. He acted in his own interests, pursuing outstanding debts and answering claims against him, and he represented others. In 1643 Robins registered an agreement between himself and Aries Topp, in which he agreed to act as the Dutch merchant's attorney in Virginia. Robins was three times elected Burgess for the County of Accomack and appointed to the governor's council during the Commonwealth period. The continuing acquisition of Eastern Shore land indicates prosperity and an optimistic economic outlook, whether the intent was agricultural, speculative or to subsidize future generations. At a court held for Northampton County on January 26, 1662/3, the winter of his death, Colonel Obedience Robins, Esquire, court commander, headed the list of commissioners. Accomack County Court Clerks conscientiously recorded colonial government appointees and decrees, suits brought, and decisions rendered that offer glimpses of the multiple enterprises, large and small, which supported a colonial household. Gaps remain. Record entries range from isolated instances devoid of detail or resolution, to extensive investigations brought to conclusion: the former prevail. One of the most revealing documents of a life's work is not available. In light of his long association with the law and the many instances in which he witnessed and administered others' wills, it is ironic that Obedience Robins left no will himself.

Chapter IV summarizes Robins's career and his standing within the Eastern Shore community. In the absence of personal papers, cooperative business ventures and family connections established through his children's marriages reflect status. His children and stepchildren benefited from Robin's industry. He supported their enterprises and saw them intermarry with the coalescing gentry of the Eastern Shore. Robins's Virginia career spanned little more than three decades, in which time he established himself among Eastern Shore leaders, accumulated land, and served the county and colony in

many capacities. He arrived in Virginia with certain advantages, although the full extent of his financial resources, his experience, and even his education cannot be determined. He exploited these real, if undocumented, assets to the fullest, successfully combining agriculture and public office to a degree unlikely to be achieved by a second son of a minor country gentleman, *né* yeoman, in Northamptonshire. English contemporaries ridiculed the pretensions and honorifics of colonial Virginians, but acreage and a record of faithful public service, however self-aggrandizing, withstand even sceptical assessment. When Robins migrated to Virginia, his break with Northamptonshire was only geographic; trans-Atlantic family communication continued, and he followed the pattern established by his father and great-grandfather in accumulating land and increasing social status.

By 1626, the probable date of Obedience Robins's emigration, abuses of labor and the death toll among immigrants of all social levels from disease and Indian attacks were common knowledge in England. As early as the 1590s, prospects of New World gold and expansionist pipedreams were ridiculed by English poets. Prior to its dissolution in 1624, Virginia Company attempts to suppress and counter unfavorable reports failed.<sup>34</sup> Even for the solvent and well-provisioned, emigration was recognized as a risky undertaking. Rising fortunes, increasing expectations, and family adherence to primogeniture provide insights into a second son's decision to accept risk, and cross the Atlantic. In Robins's case, the act of emigration itself contradicts the composite picture of a conscientious and conservative businessman and public servant. Rare instances suggest a young man's folly and a mature man's anger. Prospects of land and status prompted a young apothecary with a completed apprenticeship and family support to abandon the familiar environs of Northamptonshire and London in pursuit of land, wealth and status. Education and practical experience combined with health and hard work enabled him to achieve those ends.

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<sup>34</sup> To a Captain Butler's accusation that newcomers were "dying under hedges" for lack of shelter, the Company replied tersely and accurately, but evasively, "Theris noe hedge in all Virginia." Kingsbury 3:382.

## CHAPTER II

### ENGLISH ORIGINS

This history of Virginia colonist Obedience Robins begins in Long Buckby, Northamptonshire, with the 1582 will of Richard (I) Robins. Obedience's great-grandfather's insistence on primogeniture concentrated his lands in the hands of a single heir. Large, long-lived families insured that younger sons and daughters survived to receive smaller inheritances and doweries of cash and livestock. Three generations after Richard (I) wrote his will, two of his great-grandsons sailed for Virginia. Richard (I) Robins's legacies, family prosperity, and increasing status and expectations characterize three successive generations. Evidence is often circumstantial, but sufficient to describe the family and milieu which produced a successful colonist. In Virginia, Obedience Robins accumulated land denied him by inheritance, and followed his father's example to enhance status. Both Obedience and his father Richard (II), firmly established within home counties on different continents, formed working and social relationships with gentlemen who were newcomers.

A prosperous yeoman farmer, Richard (I) Robins acquired freeholdings during a period of unprecedented opportunity for English farmers. In the decades after 1540, as much as a quarter of English land became available following the dissolution of the monasteries, an event that coincided with increased stability within the country. Northamptonshire, land-locked and with no major rivers, was one of the more isolated of English counties, and secure from border wars or naval invasion.<sup>1</sup> Watling Street, the Roman road between London and Chester, divided the western half of the county, and was approximately contiguous with the western border of Long Buckby Parish.<sup>2</sup> The journey from London to Chester, at the mouth of the Dee, could be made in four days riding. This distance is roughly one hundred seventy-five miles, so that Long Buckby, at the midpoint of Watling Street, was two days journey from London.<sup>3</sup> An active land market in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century is reflected in contemporary documents

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (Oxford, 1984), 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Northamptonshire Hundreds and Parishes*. Map, NPRO, n.d.

<sup>3</sup> J. A. Chartres, "Road Carrying," *Economic History Review* 2nd ser. 30.1 (1977), 85, 898-93. Chartres, relying heavily on John Taylor's 1637 *The Carriers' Cosmographie*, records nineteen commercial services per week from London to Northamptonshire, esp. Daventry, Haddon and Northampton.

and land descriptions that record recently acquired land.<sup>4</sup> One historian concluded that because of low, fixed rents and rising profits, “No yeoman with his wits about him could fail to accumulate money savings on a scale hitherto unknown.”<sup>5</sup> Cartographer John Speed judged that “the aire is good, temperate and healthful; the soyl is champion, rich, and fruitful,” adding that “the simple and gentle sheep, of all creatures the most harmless, are now become so ravenous, that they begin to devour men, waste fields, and depopulate houses, if not whole Townships, as one merrily hath written.”<sup>6</sup>

Richard (I) Robins’s 1582 will<sup>7</sup> which established a pattern of inheritance for subsequent generations, reflects a reverence for land, tempered with practical appreciation of this basis for family prosperity and continuity. He overlooked his only son, Thomas, and left his estate to his grandson and namesake, Richard (II), although Thomas was “to have my occupying as long as he liveth.” Primogeniture was occasionally broken in this period,<sup>8</sup> but there is no indication of Richard (I)’s motivation in the 1582 will. Richard (II) Robins was one of seven sons born to Thomas and Elizabeth Parker, or Parkes, Robins, married in 1565 in Long Buckby.<sup>9</sup> His grandfather, Richard (I) left grandsons John, Edward and William, respectively, money and livestock, livestock and a horse and cart, and sixty sheep and one pot. Granddaughter Jone received money and livestock. All these legacies, including Richard’s (but excepting the land), were to be delivered “at the daye of his/her marriage, or else at the age of one and twenty years.” Thomas had three more sons, Henry, Thomas and Samuel, none of whom is mentioned in Richard (I)’s will. They were probably born after 1582. Provision is also made for other grandchildren, the children of Jone by Henry Alman of Mares Ashby, and those of Alice, by William Wylles. Daughter Elizabeth was either unmarried, widowed, or incompetent, and living in her father’s household. Daughter Isabel had married

<sup>4</sup> Mildred Campbell, *The English Yeoman Under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts* (New York, 1968), 70.

<sup>5</sup> W. G. Hoskins, *Provincial England: Essays in Social and Economic History* (London, 1963), 140.

<sup>6</sup> Speed, 133. Speed is misquoting William Camden, who quoted Hythodaeus, but the metaphor of ravenous sheep is commentary on enclosure and displacement of tenants. See Edward Potts Cheyney, *Social Changes in England in the Sixteenth Century as Reflected in Contemporary Literature* (New York, 1895, 1971), 5,6,21,25.

<sup>7</sup> PROL, 35 Watson, Probate 11-67. Will of Richard (I) Robins.

<sup>8</sup> See Stone and Stone, 69-86.

<sup>9</sup> LDSIGL, 5,544.

first John Draper in 1568/9,<sup>10</sup> then, before 1582, John Creaton.<sup>11</sup> She inherited a token 6s 8 d, and no children are mentioned. Daughters usually received dowries at marriage.<sup>12</sup> A conservative estimate of cash legacies totals £19 17s, including 3s 4d to each grandchild,<sup>13</sup> counting the children of Jone and Henry Alman at a minimal two, and allowing for the seven children of Alice Robins and William Wylles.<sup>14</sup> Land, livestock, buildings, and farm and household equipment, not cash, constituted the greatest value of the estate. There is no inventory attached.<sup>15</sup> Sons-in-law Creaton and Wylles supervised the will. Wylles lived in Long Buckby Parish, and Creaton may have been one of a family in adjacent Brington-cum-Membris of Newbottle Hundred. Henry Alman, the third son-in-law, lived at "Mares [Mears] Ashby," about sixteen miles east of Long Buckby. Thomas Robins was "full executor."

In effect, Richard (I) made his minor grandson his heir, granting him "my occupying with all the domaynes lying and being within the Towne and Feildes of Longbugbie aforesayde as taxes tenements orchardes, gardens closes pastures and feedinges with all other appurtenances named thereunto belonging, for him and his heires forever." All other legacies were money, livestock or moveables. He attempted to insure that his land remained in the Robins family in succeeding generations, specifying that if Richard had no surviving male heirs, the "next of his kyndred or stock which is the senior to remain to him and his heires for ever . . . if they are of the male kynde . . . as so I will that yt shall remain to kindred and the calling of the Robince for ever." Pride in the family name and emphasis on male primogeniture were common among yeomen as well as gentry. Mildred Campbell cites the example of Thomas Newton, also of Northamptonshire, who provided for the possibility of the early death of his son, stipulating in his will that

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<sup>10</sup> Greenall, 2.

<sup>11</sup> LDSIGI, 5,540.

<sup>12</sup> For a list of housekeeping items and allowance for a newly married woman in 1601, see Campbell, 240-241.

<sup>13</sup> 3s 4d is a common bequest, or gift of remembrance—one-sixth of a pound: Jone's 6s 8d is one-third pound. For other contemporary examples see Nicholas Tyacke, "Popular Puritan Mentality in Late Elizabethan England," in Peter Clarke, Alan G. R. Smith and Nicholas Tyacke, eds., *The English Commonwealth 1547-1640: Essays in Politics and Society* (New York, 1979), Tables 1 and 2, 86-7.

<sup>14</sup> Listed in their paternal grandfather's will PROL, 84 Harte. Probate 33-21. Will of William Wylles.

<sup>15</sup> The original will is in the NPRO; a contemporary copy is in the PROL. Neither includes an attached inventory.

the land should then go to his daughter, Jane Newton, if “she marry with a Newton to keep it in the name.”<sup>16</sup> Sale of Robins land would be cause for forfeiture. Robins reiterated his directions for the disposition of his lands, attempting control even beyond a third generation.

The will contains no censure or indication of displeasure with Thomas, other than the failure to recognize him as the only son and usual heir. He is granted goods not bequeathed and occupation of the properties, and named executor. A 1602 entry in the Long Buckby Parish Register among burials reads, “July 4 William the sonne of Thomas Robbens *illegitime procreatus*.”<sup>17</sup> The specter of bastardy might contribute to a preoccupation with male heirs and family descent, and the naming of a third generation heir. At the same time, Richard (I) included a bequest to “William Robyns, sonne to my sonne Thomas Robyns,” The several Thomases and Williams of the extensive Robins family during this period make it impossible to be certain that this 400-year-old bit of scandal is relevant.

Robins’s first two bequests were 4*d* to the mother church of Peterborough and 20*s* to the poor of Long Buckby Parish. He willed “my body to be buried in the northe Ile within the p’ishe church of Longbugbie.” The north aisle may have been the site of earlier family burials or the area in which Robins stood for services. “The ‘better’ or ‘best’ sorts of people were those . . . regarded by the Bishop of St. David’s in 1583 as persons of sufficient local prominence to merit burial within parish churches.”<sup>18</sup> Campbell cites similar requests, naming specific aisles, or “near unto the scate Dore where my wife usuallic doth sit,”<sup>19</sup> and Spufford considers “the desire to be buried inside the church in a will an index of social status.”<sup>20</sup> Interment in a church yard commonly cost less than burial within a church building, while burial within the chancel cost more than the aisle.<sup>21</sup> Although the value of Robins’s personal estate cannot be

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<sup>16</sup> Campbell, 373.

<sup>17</sup> Greenall, 106.

<sup>18</sup> Keith Wrightson, “‘Sorts of People’ in Tudor and Stuart England,” in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, eds. *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (New York, 1994), 35.

<sup>19</sup> Campbell, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Spufford, “The Limitations of the Probate Inventory,” in John Chartres and David Hey, eds. *English Rural Society 1500-1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk* (Cambridge, 1990), 170.

<sup>21</sup> Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620* (Cambridge, 1991), 84. At Hornchurch Church, Havering, fourteen miles east of London, graves in the churchyard cost 2*s*. within the church, 6*s* 8*d*.



estimated, registration of his will in the Prerogative Court of Canturbury is another indication that he ranked among the wealthiest yeomen.<sup>22</sup>

At least two of Robins's children married into solid yeoman families. Isabel's husband, John Creaton, has not been traced, nor has Thomas's wife, Elizabeth Parker, or Parkes. Jone's husband, "Henry Alman, of Mares Ashby," may be the Henery Allam listed in 1605 among freeholders at Mears Ashby, in Hamford Hoe Hundred.<sup>23</sup> Alice's husband, William Wylles, or, more likely, their son, William,<sup>24</sup> represented Long Buckby in an October, 1591 muster at Daventry, as did Richard (II) Robins.<sup>25</sup> William Wylles is taxed 8s in the subsidy lists for 42 and 44 Elizabeth (1600 and 1602).<sup>26</sup> These sums represent three-fifteenths of an assessment of £3 annual income from goods,<sup>27</sup> indicating that proportionately, Wylles's assets lay more in goods than in land.<sup>28</sup> Wylles and John and Richard Robins were taxed at the same rate, although the latter's taxes were based on land.

The Robins and the Wylles families shared a close relationship based on esteem and intermarriage through at least three generations. Thomas Robins's sons were given the names of their father, grandfather and three maternal uncles, William Wylles, John Creaton, and Henry Alman or Allam. William Wylles the elder married Alice Robins before 1582, and on May 11, 1594, a William Wills and a Joan Robins were married at St. Scpulchre, Northampton.<sup>29</sup> Richard (II) called William Wills the younger "my brother" in his will of 1634. They were first cousins and, possibly, brothers-in-law.<sup>30</sup> The will of "William Willes the

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 238. Registration of a will in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury also indicated land holdings in more than one county, and could as well represent status-seeking.

<sup>23</sup> Joan Wake, ed., *A Copy of Papers Relating to Musters, Beacons, Subsidies, Etc. in the County of Northampton, A. D. 1586-1623* (Kettering, England, 1926), 114.

<sup>24</sup> As with the several Richard Robinses, there can be confusion among three generations of William Wylleses. A February, 1641/2 listing of 204 male inhabitants of Long Buckby lists six William Wills Greenall, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Wake, 49.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 64, 104.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, cxiii.

<sup>28</sup> Campell, 358, 359.

<sup>29</sup> Phillimore, 178.

<sup>30</sup> These are common names, this would have been a marriage between first cousins, and one might expect marriage between these families to have taken place in Long Buckby. The timing is right. Thomas Robins's only daughter was Joan, and a William Wills and an unnamed wife produced a daughter, Lyddca, and son Captatus baptized in Long Buckby July 10, 1597 and January 20, 1599/1600. Greenall, 17, 19.

elder, yeoman," probated in 1604,<sup>31</sup> helps to define the generation between Richard (I) and Richard (II) Robins, for which there are few surviving records.

Like his father-in-law, Richard (I) Robins, before him, Willes terms himself "yeoman," but seems content to be buried in either the parish church building or yard. His will, also, was probated in the Prerogative Court at Canterbury. Willes's cash bequests total £158 4s 4d, including "one hundredth marke of current English money."<sup>32</sup> This sum does not include a general bequest to grandchildren.<sup>33</sup> Between 1556 and 1650, an average yeoman's personal estate was £160, not including land.<sup>34</sup> Willes, who did not specify livestock, equipment or any land, nevertheless had his wits about him and did accumulate cash reserves. Alice Robins Willes was to have £20 paid over four years and was guaranteed, in standard phrasing, "sufficient meate, drinck apparrell and houserometh and all other things to her necessarie for and during the time of her naturall life," so long as she remained unmarried. She retained her own "cofer,"<sup>35</sup> including, cryptically and parenthetically, "nothing or writing excepted," and "one of my best joined beds." Homemade pegged beds were still in use, but joined beds built by cabinetmakers were another sign of prosperity.<sup>36</sup>

John [Capell] of Murcott, in neighboring Watford Parish, John Willes, either a brother or son, and "Richard Ringrose son," of West Haddon, another neighboring parish, witnessed the will. In the muster lists for 1591, "Rich: Ringrose, junior," and William Wills [younger] are listed for West Haddon, and John Willes and Thomas Capell are listed for Watford. John Capell is listed at 8s tax on £3 assessed annual income on goods in the subsidy lists for 1600 and 1602, a standard rate William Willes also paid.<sup>37</sup> These

<sup>31</sup> PROL, 84 Harte, Probate 11/104.

<sup>32</sup> The marke is "an obsolete Scottish silver coin worth 13s 4d." *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 1962. It is used formulaically as a sum of money.

<sup>33</sup> Each child gets [illegible] "apecce." The word may be "sheepe."

<sup>34</sup> Campbell, 238. This average is based on 2,000 yeoman's inventories. Cressy estimates the average 17th-century yeoman had movables worth £195, over and above his freehold land. 124.

<sup>35</sup> Coffin, a chest.

<sup>36</sup> Campbell, 235.

<sup>37</sup> Wake, 49, 65, 105.

yeoman families of similar degree paid the same taxes, intermarried, witnessed and supervised each others' wills, inventoried estates, and attended musters together.<sup>38</sup>

Knights of the shires periodically assembled and drilled fighting men, and maintained records of the men, weapons, armor and horses due from each parish and hundred. Subsidies supported these primarily defensive efforts, and assessments indicate individual wealth and status. After 1588, enthusiasm among participants declined steadily. A century later, Richard Gough of Myddle wrote, "Before the wars, in the reign of King Charles I . . . it was accounted a creditable employment to be a soldier in the county militia, and therefore many persons that were maintainers, did themselves serve as soldiers . . . but when the wars broke out, the maintainers hired others to serve in their stead."<sup>39</sup> Participants' status affected the reliability of the trained bands. Training was likely to be wasted on itinerants and laborers, nor could they be trusted with equipment. In 1586, "the substantiallest houscholders for soldiers and the fittest gentlemen best affectionated in religion for Captaines" were reminded "that in case they shall withdrawe themselves from this speciall service ther shalbe a note taken of them to the end they may be employed in forren service when ther shalbe occasion to send souldiors forth of the realme."<sup>40</sup> But by 1590 "farmers and others of the best and wealthiest householders . . . which have been daintily fed and warm lodged" were "to be spared from their personal service, their places to be supplied either by their sons, if able, or by other such able men."<sup>41</sup> Death and disease in camp and economic losses from neglected crops prompted reassessment of policies, although argument continued for enrollment of volunteers, "gentlemen, yeomen, yeomen's sons, and artificers of some behavior."<sup>42</sup> Failure to appear could result in presentment to the quarter sessions court and a fine, but hiring a substitute avoided actual impressment. Consequently, social levels represented in the militia declined through the first decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>43</sup> In Northamptonshire in the

<sup>38</sup> The Everden Parish records list the April 10, 1619 marriage of William Capell of Murcot, Watford Parish, and Anne Willes of Long Buckby. Phillimore, 189.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Gough, *The History of Myddle* (Firtle, England, 1979), 147.

<sup>40</sup> Wake, 4, 6-7, quoting a letter to Sir Christopher Hatton.

<sup>41</sup> Lord Burghley, Lord Lieutenant of Herefordshire in Salisbury MSS. Vol. IV. iv. 16-18, quoted in Wake civ, cv.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Wake, cvi., quoting Sir John Smyth on Essex infantry in 1588.

<sup>43</sup> Campbell, 348-352.

1590s, a very small sampling from a few parishes in Guilesborough Hundred indicates participation by yeomen's sons and substantial householders, and Richard (II) Robins is among twenty-two men representing "Longe Bugbye" in the 1591 muster.<sup>44</sup>

Between 1590 and 1606, it is not clear who held responsibility for the Robins's property. In the subsidy list for 1600, a John Robbins is taxed 8s on an assessed annual income of £2 from land. Thomas, father of Richard (II), does not appear in the muster or the subsidies lists for 1600 or 1602, when Richard (II) is the only Robins listed, for the same tax, based on land, paid by John two years earlier.<sup>45</sup> Thomas Robins lived until 1606,<sup>46</sup> and in 1595 he was charged with providing one corselett and one calliver<sup>47</sup> for Guylesborowe Hundred. "Longbugbeye" provided three corseletts, two callivers, and no musketts. Only three men, Robins, William Gilbert, and John Archar, are listed, and Robins's contribution was the greatest, with Archar providing one corselett and Gilbert one calliver. The source for the third corselett is not indicated.<sup>48</sup> Richard (II) should not have come into his inheritance until his father's death, although he seems to have been in possession by 1602. The John Robins taxed in 1600 was probably Richard's brother or an uncle. The absence of Thomas's name suggests that he was incompetent, but there is no ready explanation for the interjection of John's name in the 1600 subsidies lists. The sequence of Thomas, John, and finally, Richard (II) Robins, with no two names appearing in the subsidies lists for the same year, may signify that they bore responsibility for the same property rather than that each held separate properties of widely fluctuating values.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Wake, 49.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 64, 103.

<sup>46</sup> Greccall, 28.

<sup>47</sup> "A 'corselet,' . . . meant the full panoply [of armor] whether for a demi-lance or a foot pikeman." "The caliver . . . was an elementary matchlock or harquebus, fired by means of a twist of smouldering match. The name came from the need to make all pieces of a uniform calibre." Wake, *lix*, n. 1, lxxvi.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, Wake, 27, 32. In 1596, the purchase allowance for corseletts was 40s each, and for callivers, 30s.

<sup>49</sup> The 1591 "The Mannor of Longe Buckby, A Survey thereof, taken the Nyneteenth day of June in the XXXiiiith year of our Sovereigne Lady, Queene Elizabeth . . ." NPRO SG237, does not include Robins land. It was not, then, part of the Manor of Long Buckby, although many Robins associates, William Willes, senior and junior, Thomas Watts, Thomas Coleman, John Waddesworth and William Gilbert, are listed, with property descriptions and annual rents.

The Robinses paid 8s tax in 1600 and 1602, or three-fifteenths of their assessed annual income of £2.<sup>50</sup> which was judged to derive primarily from land. Then, as now, assessments were relative, not accurate, appraisals conducted by local men. During the Elizabethan period assessments declined in both real and absolute terms.<sup>51</sup> In 1602, the highest assessment in Longe Buckbye was £4, resulting in a tax of 10s 8d paid by "John Miller gent'." Seven men, including William Willes, were assessed at £3 each, and paid 8s tax. Robins and Wattes were assessed at £2, or 8s, and four men paid 4s on £1 assessments. Robins and Archer's assessments and tax equalled those of "Robert Carill gent'."<sup>52</sup> Although neither is designated "gent" or "Mr." in the eyes of the assessors and the muster-master, these yeomen were the equal of at least one local gentleman in taxes paid. At least two of the men on the 1602 subsidies list remained trusted friends of Richard (II) Robins thirty years later. In 1633, William Wills was named an overseer of Robins's will, and enjoined to advise Richard (III). The following year, two William Willses, of Montcote and "Longebuckby" respectively, and Thomas Watts of "Longbuckby" inventoried Robins's estate.

When Thomas Robins died in 1606, Richard (II) Robins was married and the father of seven, including Obedience. In his 1633 will, Robins refers to "Dorothie my loving wife." The 1599 will of "Margere Rushall de Badbye" includes her "daughter Marye the wyfe of Edwarde Goodman," and gives to Mary Goodman's "eldest daughter Dorothie, the wife of Richard Robins of Longbuckby and to her daughter, Continew Robins, each of them one sheepe."<sup>53</sup> Margery's will is dated January 13th, 1598/9, and Continew was baptised April 2, 1598. Richard (III) was the second child and first son, baptised December 10, 1599, and Obedience the third child and second son, baptised April 26, 1601.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Wake, cxiii.

<sup>51</sup> A. Hassell Smith, "Militia Rates and Militia Statutes," in Peter Clarke et al, 98.

<sup>52</sup> The 1591 Long Buckby Manor Survey lists Carell first among jurors. He held by assignment his father's indentures from Sir Christopher Hatton for two water mills, two mill holmes of four acres, three "lands of crable," and 2½ odd acres. If "lands" omits the prefix "yard", Carell held 126½ acres and the mills. His acreage was among the three highest, for which he paid £6 9s annual rent. Jurors recorded two presentments against Carell. He "neereaboute 12 yeares last past," erected "upon her Ma:ts feilds one windmill to the prejudice of her Ma:ts aunient millness;" and "doth oppresse with a surplufage of Cattell &cs the Commons." Nowhere here is Carell called gentleman, but he was a prominent and aggressive member of the community. 17-8, 23-4.

<sup>53</sup> NPRO ZB563-17-1. Archdiocese of Northampton Ist Series X.62 at Birmingham. Excerpts from the Will of Margery Rushall.

<sup>54</sup> Greenall, 18, 19, 22.

Obedience Robins's given name supports his reputation as a leader of the Eastern Shore puritan faction in the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>55</sup> He has also been labelled a cavalier.<sup>56</sup> It is difficult to assess the religious tenets of this historically taciturn vestryman of the established church, but when his father contracted an alliance with the Rushall and Goodman families, he established connections with an active puritan group centered in Badby, near Fawsley, the seat of the Knightleys.<sup>57</sup> In 1589, Sir Richard Knightley temporarily housed the press used to print the Marprelate Tracts, pamphlets attacking the established church. Knightley's prominence and known sympathies, and the proximity of Watling Street, which offered easy communication and transport for commercial traffic, dissenters, and their presses, may have attracted the "godly" to southeastern Northamptonshire. Goodmans and Rushalls were among "a persistent group of the godly" between 1578 and 1583.<sup>58</sup> In the late 1580s, these families led a revolt of copyholders, which included violence and a suit in Star Chamber, against Valentine Knightley's agricultural policies. Fellow tenants sent Edward Goodman, "a man yielding to . . . bad practices . . . a very busy and seditious fellow,"<sup>59</sup> to London for legal advice. The leaders in these disputes were apparently parochial leaders as well.<sup>60</sup>

The Goodman and Rushall family names are well represented in Badby Parish records. Margery Rushall, the great grandmother of Obedience Robins, bequeathed to her "daughter Marye the wyfe of Edwarde Goodman one paire of sheets and two pewter dishes one bigger onc lesser." To her son, John Rushall, and his son Thomas after him, she bequeathed house and farm equipment. That same year, 1599, a John Rushall was appointed overseer of a will noted for its puritan language and charitable bequests.<sup>61</sup> Edward Goodman's active role in religious and tenancy disputes and selection to pursue Badby farmers' interests in London suggest that Obedience Robins's immediate maternal antecedents had some degree of education.

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<sup>55</sup> Horn, 56, terms him "one of the colony's leading non-conformists."

<sup>56</sup> Jennings Cropper Wise, *Ye Kingdome of Accawmacke or the Eastern Shore of Virginia* (Baltimore, 1967), 75.

<sup>57</sup> Shiels, W. J., *The Puritans in the Diocese of Peterborough, 1558-1610* (Northampton, 1979), 135.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 59, 135.

<sup>59</sup> PROL, Star Chamber 5/K 10/17; 13/10, quoted by Shiels, 135.

<sup>60</sup> Shiels, 136.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

Goodmans and Rushalls also contributed to defense. In the 1595 assessment of armour for Fawsley Hundred, Edward Goodman is responsible for one “muskett.”<sup>62</sup> In the subsidy lists for 1600 and 1602, he is assessed 6s on 30s assessed income from land, and John Goodman paid 4s on 20s assessed. In the same lists, Roger Rushall’s listing equalled Edward Goodman’s in 1600, but fell to equal John Goodman’s in 1602.<sup>63</sup> Assuming some correspondence in appraisal levels between hundreds, the Goodmans and Rushalls were less prosperous than the Willses and Robinses of Long Buckby, but remained tax-paying copyholders.<sup>64</sup>

Biblical Christian names were introduced among Badby families in the latter half of the sixteenth century.<sup>65</sup> Western Northamptonshire, in the area of Daventry, along with east Sussex and the border of Kent, are areas in which Puritan names were most prevalent and persisted. John Penry, later martyred, married a Northampton woman, thus influencing a trend continued by John Barebone, rector of Charwelton, whose wife was from Daventry. Puritan names, most common in these three counties between 1587 and 1592, decreased steadily through the 1590s, perhaps in part due to a 1597 requirement that parishes forward records to the diocese.<sup>66</sup> Puritan names of the later sixteenth century, consisting of “scriptural phrases, pious ejaculations, or godly admonitions,” are a departure from Old Testament names which became popular in the 1560s.<sup>67</sup> Obedience, Obedient and Obey appear among baptismal names of both male and female children in Sussex parishes.<sup>68</sup>

Dorothy Goodman Robins’s influence may have been responsible for the introduction of the names Continewe, Obedience, Saray, and Lemuel or Lannal, although Obedience Robins of Brackley was baptized in 1600, a year earlier than his Long Buckby namesake. The youngest daughter, Mary, was probably named for her maternal grandmother, Mary Goodman, and Dorothy, who only lived fourteen years, for her mother

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<sup>62</sup> Wake, 28.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 64, 104.

<sup>64</sup> Goodmans continued contentious, and perhaps lost status during the interregnum. In 1657, Thomas and Edward Goodman, and Thomas Draper, all termed husbandmen from Badby, were presented and indicted in the quarter sessions county court for assaulting John Smyth of Upton. Joan Wake, ed., *Quarter Sessions Records of the County of Northampton: 6 Charles I and Commonwealth A.D. 1630, 1657, 1657-8* (Hereford, 1924), 181-2, 196.

<sup>65</sup> Shiels, 136.

<sup>66</sup> Tyacke, 81, 90, 94.

<sup>67</sup> C. W. Bardsley, *Curiosities of Puritan Nomenclature* (New York, 1880), 83.

<sup>68</sup> Tyacke, 91, 79.

and great grandmother. Richard (III) continued his father and great grandfather's name, and John, Edward and Thomas were doubtless diplomatically named for antecedents in both parents' families.<sup>69</sup> Continewe, sometimes Continne, is an unusual, perhaps unique name, peculiar to the Robinses. William Robins, Richard (II)'s brother, had eight, possibly nine children, among them a son, Continew Robins, baptised in Long Buckyby Parish May 8, 1603.<sup>70</sup> He may have had a ninth child, William, but seven of his children shared names with one family of first cousins. There is no immediate evidence that the names Continew or Lannal/Lemuel<sup>71</sup> persisted, but Obedience was the second Robins to carry a name that continued through several generations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Proximity to recognized godly congregations, intermarriage with two families of recorded puritan sympathies, and puritan naming practices suggest that Obedience Robins's formative years were spent in a staunchly Protestant household. Another indication of religious belief is in the wording of preambles to wills. The simple religious statements of Richard (I) Robins and William Wiles, in 1582 and 1604, are brief and similar in phrasing, and may be taken to represent a neutral Protestantism.<sup>72</sup> Both, though "sicke in bodie," thank "god" for "p'fect remembrance" and "good and perfect memory." Wiles is unusually perfunctory, but Robins continues, "First I bequeath my soule unto Allmightie god whoe is my maker Lord and Savior." His statement is conventional and expresses neither Catholic (mention of the Virgin or saints), nor Calvinist (hopes for of election or unique scriptural references) sentiment.<sup>73</sup> Many wills were written by scribes who affixed standard phrasing, and the existence of ambiguous preambles which combine conflicting elements of both faiths raises questions of dependence on preambles alone to determine religious attitudes. Robins's will was written by "Johans Woodsworth scriptorem,"<sup>74</sup> and the first few lines and format may well

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<sup>69</sup> For New England and Virginia family naming patterns and their English origins, see Daniel Scott Smith, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Puritan Naming: Massachusetts, 1771," *William and Mary Quarterly*, hereafter *WMQ*, (January, 1994), 67-91, and David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1989), 306-10.

<sup>70</sup> Greenall, 23.

<sup>71</sup> A third variation, "Lamuel f. Edward Bates & Joan ux," was baptised in 1630. Greenall, 46.

<sup>72</sup> McIntosh, 188-193.

<sup>73</sup> Shiels, 15-17, 20-22.

<sup>74</sup> There are no Woodsworths listed in the parish register, "A Survey of the Manor of Long Buckyby" lists a John Waddsworth.



have originated with the writer rather than the testator. Occasionally, bequests contradict preambles.

Examples of Protestant preambles to wills containing bequests for masses are not uncommon.<sup>75</sup> Robins's preamble is followed immediately by a bequest "to the Mother church of Peterboroughe flowre pence," and another, "to be bestowed amongst the poore of p'she twenty schillings to be distributed by the discretions of my Executors." Four pence, or one groat, was roughly one day's wages for an unskilled laborer of the 1580s.<sup>76</sup> Prior to the Reformation, bequests to church buildings were common, but after 1530, the poor were the beneficiaries of most charitable bequests.<sup>77</sup> Most testators specify deserving or Christian poor, but Robins relied upon his executors, with likely similar results. The token "flowre pence to the Mother church" may represent local custom, or even lingering Catholic tradition.<sup>78</sup>

The preamble to Richard (II) Robins's 1634 will<sup>79</sup> indicates a strong Christian faith, but no puritan leanings, and there is nothing to suggest that the will is in other than Robins's own words. He evokes the Trinity separately and as one, and, most tellingly, leaves to "Dorothie my loving wife" thirty pounds a year to be payed "quarterly at the severall feasts of St. Thomas the Apostle, Th'annunciation of the blessed virgin Mary, the nativity of St John the Baptist, & St Michael the archangel." Although use of the traditional Catholic church calendar persisted even into Virginia records, abbreviated references to "Th'annunciation" or "Michaelmas" would have been more common. No puritan would have countenanced references to popish feast days, much less included these fully embellished references to Roman practices. Despite

<sup>75</sup> M. L. Zell, "The Use of Religious Preambles as a Measure of Religious Belief in the Sixteenth Century," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 50 (Nov. 1977), 246-249.

<sup>76</sup> Campbell, 215. Laborers in Devon, Sussex and Essex earned 3 to 6d *per diem*, including food, from spring to Michaelmas, less (2 to 4 pence) during winter. Thirksh puts the average daily wage at 6d in 1524-5, and 8d in 1619, in "Sources of Information on Population, 1500-1760," *The Rural Economy of England: Collected Essays of Joan Thirksh* (London, 1984), 19.

<sup>77</sup> McIntosh, 276-77.

<sup>78</sup> W. K. Jordan, in *Philanthropy in England 1480-1660: A Study of the Changing Pattern of English Social Aspirations* (London, 1959), 339-40, 345-6, finds that two-thirds of charitable bequests of the period coming from a total of 17,450 donors in London, Somerset, and Yorkshire, ranged from 1d to £9, 19s. Yeoman charity was most often directed to the poor, and they were "only mildly concerned with religious needs." D. M. Palliser writes of "a traditional fourpence for the mother church . . . not to be compared with the generous sums frequently offered to the parish churches and friaries," in *Tudor York* (Oxford, 1979), 227.

<sup>79</sup> NPRO. E.V. Northamptonshire Wills, 1st Series, 1634-1636. Will and Inventory of Richard (II) Robins.

Robins's children's names and indications that his wife came from aggressively godly families of Badby, his will suggests that this Long Buckby Parish church warden supported the established church of England.

Few records of Richard (II)'s life survive, and these include county muster and subsidy lists, his 1634 will and inventory, and the Long Buckby Parish Register. In 1538, Thomas Cromwell ordered parishes to maintain records of baptisms, marriages and burials. These instructions were not effective, and in 1598, Queen Elizabeth approved an order that each parish purchase parchment registers, into which earlier records should be copied, especially those from the first year of her reign.<sup>80</sup> The Long Buckby register begins, "This rygester booke was wrytten by Thomas Bradshaw viccar of Longe Bugby in Anno Domini one thousande five hundred Ninty eight . . . And bought by Richard Robbens and Thomas Capell Church Wardens of Longe Buckby in the same year."<sup>81</sup> Records were irregularly kept, and nine years, between 1611 and 1620, are missing, but the signatures "Ric[h]ard[us] Winter vicar. . . Ricardus Robins. . . William Willes. . . Churchwardens" appear in 1624.<sup>82</sup> Vicars recorded baptisms of the eight children born before 1610 to Richard and Dorothy Robins, and the death of a daughter, Dorothy, in 1624. In 1632/3, a memorandum signed by the incumbent states that "Mr Robins within the sayd parish had a license to eat flesh fro[m] March the Anno p[re]dicto for eight dayes next next (sic) following." Robins wrote his will the first day of March, 1633/4, no doubt prompted by the illness which exempted him from the Lenten fast. On May 19, 1634, "Richard Robins Gent" was buried. The final entry of Richard (II) Robins's name is February 20, 1640/1, recording the burial of "Dorothe Robins wife sometime of Richard Robins Gent."<sup>83</sup>

Both his church and his peers designated Richard (II) Robins "gentleman." Eight days after the burial, "a true and perfect inventory of all and singular the goods and chattells of Richard Robins late of Longe Buckby in the county of North'ton gent deceased," was taken by long-time associates William Wills of "Montcote in Longe buckbye" and William Wills and Thomas Watts of "Longebuckbye." The three

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<sup>80</sup> Greenall, vi.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, I.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. Winter is the only vicar who regularly recorded church wardens, between 1620/1 and 1624/5. Other wardens include Edward Pickforke and Richard Waldern, 1620/1; William Wats and William Coleman, 1621/2 and 1622/3; and Thomas Wiles and Richard Line 1623/4. The names Wats or Watts, Coleman, Wiles and Line are linked with Robins through wills or marriage.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 50, 56, 77.

appraisers termed themselves “yeomen,” the designation Robins chose for himself in the preamble to his will. Robins named several friends and associates in the will, and his use of titles is further indication of their, and his, status in a wider community. “John Thornton of Brock . . . Hall, Esq.”<sup>84</sup> “Mr William Cartwright of North’ton,” and “my brother William Wills” are named overseers of the will, and the first two were to dispense an annuity left to the poor of the parish. In addition, it was “by the consent and advise of the forenamed John Thornton” that the two youngest daughters, Lemuel and Mary, should marry. William Gilbert is mentioned as the previous owner of a half-yard land in Buckby, and William Cartwright, Richard Carwell and Valentine Robinson witnessed. The latter two signed with their marks. The parish register lists no Carwells and no suggestive perturbations of that name, although the 1591 “Survey of the Manor of Long Buckby” lists a Robert Carwell among tenants. Valentine Robinson (1592-1658/9), a probable namesake of Sir Valentine Knightley of Fawsley, was the progenitor of a large local family by two wives.<sup>85</sup> William Gilbert, the second son of that name born to “Thomas Gylbart et ux” in 1601, survived to marry Elizabeth Capell in 1630. His name does not appear in the parish register after his marriage, and Robins may have acquired the twenty acre half-yard land when Gilbert either left the area or died, unrecorded.<sup>86</sup> “Mr. William Cartwright of Northton” left few traces. Robins’s qualifier, “of Northton” must refer to the town, not the county generally, but Cartwrights were not a large presence outside of Aynho, the southernmost parish in the shire. There were no Thorntons at Brockhall before the seventeenth century. Then, according to Lawrence Stone, “between 1625 and 1931, they had nine descents, seven from father to eldest surviving son, one to a younger brother, and one to a nephew.”<sup>87</sup> Later in the century a Thornton<sup>88</sup> was in correspondence with “the great botanist of our age, Mr. Ray.”<sup>89</sup> In his notes on the natural history of Northamptonshire, for the 1695 edition of Camden’s, Ray credits Mr. Thornton for his specimen of Common Eryngo, “observed not far from Daventry, beside the old Roman way called Watlingstreet, near a

<sup>84</sup> One variant spelling of Brockhall is Brackenhall, which may have been used here. NPRO. E. V. Northampton Wills, 1st Ser. 1634-1636. Will and Inventory of Richard (II) Robins.

<sup>85</sup> Greenall, 13, 74.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 20, 22, 45.

<sup>87</sup> Stone and Stone, 106.

<sup>88</sup> John Thornton was the second at Brockhall, and died in 1637. The third Thornton, also John, died in 1692. Oswald Barron, *Northamptonshire Families* (London, 1906), 207.

village named Brookhall.<sup>90</sup> Yeoman farmer Richard Robins maintained long-standing neighborhood associations while expanding his social horizons to include gentlemen and esquires.<sup>91</sup>

In the half-century following the death of Richard (I) Robins, during the stewardship of Thomas Robins and Richard (II)'s tenure, the Robins estate increased markedly. At his death in 1634, Richard (II) Robins left nine living children, one of whom, Obedience, had been in Virginia for seven years. A second son, Edward was a merchant in London. Like his grandfather a half-century earlier, Robins called himself "yeoman," and concentrated his estate in the hands of a single heir and namesake. Two bequests of £100 each went to Obedience and Edward. John inherited £240, and Thomas £40 and the lease of "Only pasture," and each was willed land. Only lands outside the parish of Long Buckby, those acquired since 1582 by Richard or his father Thomas, were willed to John and Thomas. Lands given to the third and fifth sons had the stipulation that Richard might buy them back within three years at set prices. John's legacy, in the parish of Norton, a close called the "heather Throp," was redeemable by Richard at £250. Thomas's legacy included "ground called corne meadow," in the parish of Watford, redeemable at £350, and "my lease and tearme for yeares which I have of any lands or tenement in West Haddon p'ish." Richard (III) received "all the rest of my lands."<sup>92</sup>

The "heather Throp," in Norton Parish, might refer to land in the vicinity of Thorpe Grounds or Thorp Lodge, two and two and one half-miles, respectively, from Long Buckby, or, more generally to heather land or fields.<sup>93</sup> Watford, site of a "corne meadow," is the adjacent parish to the northwest and the town of Watford is less than two and one-half miles from Long Buckby.<sup>94</sup> West Haddon Parish is also adjacent, and the town is two and three-quarter miles north. Specific locations are also listed in the

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<sup>89</sup> Camden, introduction, n.p.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 442.

<sup>91</sup> These associations might reflect the relatively recent arrival of Thorntons and Cartwrights in the county, and recent elevation to gentle status of the Aynho Cartwrights. Barron, 9.

<sup>92</sup> Richard (III) probably did acquire John's legacy. In his will, written in 1648 and probated in 1674, Richard gave "all my close of pasture land lying in Thrupp in the p'ish of Norton conteyning by estimacon eighty acres" to his youngest daughter. NPRO, Third Series, 1674-1680, Will of Richard (III) Robins.

<sup>93</sup> *OED*, "Thrup: a dialect form of Thorp, as Thorpe, Troop. Thrupp occurs as a place-name and is a frequent second element in these forms -thorp, -thrup, -trup, chiefly in the Daneclaw district, indicating a hamlet, estate, land or field."

<sup>94</sup> Distances are direct, between central village intersections.

inventory. The first item in the inventory is “a stock of cattle going at Onley.” Musters, beacons and subsidies lists for Fawsley Hundred include “Barby-cum-Onley.”<sup>95</sup> Barby Parish is the western most in that hundred, and “Onley Grounds” is approximately seven and one half miles from Long Buckby.<sup>96</sup> The second item is “a stock of cattle going at Thrupp in the p’ish of Norton.” The third item is “a flock of sheep going in Shenley field.” There is a Shenley Farm also about six miles distant, northwest between Watling Street and Crick, on the border between Gulesboro and Fawsley Hundreds.<sup>97</sup> Current place names may or may not indicate seventeenth-century locations, but suggest the geographic extent and separation of Robins family land holdings.

The only indication of land area is another inventory reference to one yard land in West Haddon—a yard land being variously interpreted at between twenty and forty acres. The 1591 “Survey of the Manor of Long Buckby” states that every yard land in Buckby “containeth forty acres.”<sup>98</sup> That comment confirms that a yard land was not a consistent measurement between, or even within, given regions. Whatever the acreage, Robins holdings supported a large number of livestock. In 1634, Robins owned 304 sheep at Onley alone, with a total of 654 sheep in four locations. In addition, he owned sixty-six cattle, “eight drawing oxen,” three bulls<sup>99</sup> and 28 “milch boufe” in five locations, three yearling “cubies,”<sup>100</sup> seventeen horses and colts, seven hogs, eleven “stocks of bees,” and assorted “poultry about the yard.” In contrast, Richard (I) left 190 sheep, six horses, seven cows, and seven “bease,”<sup>101</sup> but this total is derived from bequests, and although these include “six milchekine and three score sheepe,” and five horses to his heir, this does not necessarily represent a complete accounting.

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<sup>95</sup> Wake, 162.

<sup>96</sup> *Daverney*, Map. Sheet 52 *Old Series Ordnance Maps*, first printed 1834 as sheet 53. Reprint (Devon, 1970).

<sup>97</sup> *Northampton and Milton Keynes*. Map. Ordnance Survey, Landranger Series of Great Britain, Sheet 152. 1982, also *Northamptonshire: Hundreds and Parishes*, Map (NPRO, n.d.).

<sup>98</sup> NPRO SG237, 24; Greenall, iii.

<sup>99</sup> “The possession of bulls was usually [a] certain . . . sign of economic prosperity in an inventory.” Spufford, “Limitations of the Probate Inventory,” 170.

<sup>100</sup> *OED*: “cubby: a hutch or coop for rabbits or other small animals,” and “cubbe: a stall, pen or shed for cattle.” Cattle seems a reasonable guess.

<sup>101</sup> *OED*. Bease: first included sheep, goats, etc., became restricted to bovines, and chiefly applied to fattening cattle.

Robins's inventory totaled £1663 17s 4d, compared to the average yeoman's personal estate of £160 to £195, not including land. Recent work in English probate inventories leads to warnings against "their air of spurious exactitude."<sup>102</sup> Foremost among the pitfalls in using inventories to assess net worth is the absence of debts outstanding against the estate, although, when available, probate final accounts provide more realistic assessment of an estate. Inventories can indicate the level of consumption, economic exchange, and social status.

Robins's inventory lists two houses. The first contained at least an upper parlor, a chamber over the parlor, a kitchen chamber and, perhaps attached, a buttorie and a cheese chamber, though the latter is listed among farm equipment. In addition, a new house and contents are mentioned, with no distinction made among rooms. Outbuildings include an upper and lower barn, sheep cribs, granaries, and a kilne. Appraisers Watts, Wills, and Wills were not consistent in their descriptions and in providing locations. This is not to say that their evaluation was inaccurate, but it leaves uncertainty about the number of rooms in the two houses and an incomplete sense of the contents. The widow's dower and possessions were often considered to be separate from the husband's estate and omitted from the inventory.<sup>103</sup>

Robins was among the wealthiest of yeomen and he left a large family. Three of his five sons remained in Northamptonshire, evidently dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods, but only one inherited his father's lands. John's and Thomas's freehold legacies could be redeemed by Richard, leaving them with inheritances of cash and leases. Obedience's and Edward's unwritten legacies probably included apprenticeships in London. Richard (III), Obedience and Edward Robins were literate. In England between 1548 and 1640, there was a marked increase in educational opportunities for all classes.<sup>104</sup> Education distinguished individuals, just as the availability of education distinguished prosperous from backward regions.<sup>105</sup> English protestants encouraged education in the fight against papists, and to further

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<sup>102</sup> Spufford, 174.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 145

<sup>104</sup> Jay Angelin, "Private-Venture Grammar Schools: An Elizabethan Alternative to the Endowed School System," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, V (1979), 2.

<sup>105</sup> Peter Clark, 215.

commerce.<sup>106</sup> If Dorothy Robins came from a strong “godly” background that stressed literacy, her children’s education may well have begun at home, and continued at a “petty” school emphasizing, but not necessarily limited to, reading, writing and simple arithmetic.<sup>107</sup> In 1576, a Londoner’s legacy established a free grammar school at Daventry to instruct fifty poor children in “that liberal science of gramer and the understanding of the Latin tongue.”<sup>108</sup> Clergyman Nicholas Latham, a Northamptonshire native, established “several small schools with salaries in country villages,” by 1620.<sup>109</sup> The extent and formality of the Robins children’s education cannot be determined. Opportunities existed, even for poor children, and Richard (II) Robins could afford to forego his sons’ labor to further their chances for success in careers outside of agriculture. Eventually, both Obedience and Edward left Long Buckby for London, where Edward was probably apprenticed to a merchant, and Obedience to an apothecary.

In the early seventeenth century, apprentices formed a large part of London’s rapidly increasing population. Between four and five thousand young men, mostly from rural areas and villages, traveled to London each year.<sup>110</sup> The Society of Apothecaries was incorporated with the Grocer’s Company in 1606, and received their own charter in 1617.<sup>111</sup> The Apothecaries’ Company court minute book, 1617-51, contains these entries:

1618  
June the xiii th  
Obedience Robbins bound to Mr Barton

7th February 1625  
This daie Obedyence Robyns late apprentice to Mr  
Adrian Barton was made a freeman of the companye  
paid his fees gave a spoone gave xiii [shillings] iv  
[pence] for a fyne.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Jordan, *London Charities*, 220.

<sup>107</sup> Clark, 190.

<sup>108</sup> Jordan, *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>109</sup> Esther S. Cope, *The Life of a Public Man: Edward, First Baron Montague of Boughton 1562-1644* (Philadelphia, 1981), 54.

<sup>110</sup> Christopher Brooks, “Apprenticeship, Social Mobility and the Middling Sort, 1550-1800,” in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, eds., *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (New York, 1994), 55.

<sup>111</sup> Godfrey Davies, *The Early Stuarts 1603-1660* (Oxford, 1959), 365-6.

<sup>112</sup> Guildhall Library Ms 8200/1. These entries are supplied by courtesy of Stephen Freeth, Keeper of Manuscripts.

Apprentices had to be of free birth, and a standard indenture was for seven years, rules common to all guilds. Applicants for admission were tested, and “the London Apothecaries would admit no apprentice until he had been examined, proved and tried concerning his knowledge and election of simples before the Master and Wardens.”<sup>113</sup> An apothecary’s training and his examination included Latin,<sup>114</sup> a knowledge that marked the educated man, and could be applied to law in colonial courts. If Adrian Barton trained Obedience Robins of Long Buckby, Robins completed his apprenticeship in February of 1625/6, and emigrated to Virginia before October of 1627. There, he abandoned medicine and acquired land denied him in England by accident of birth.

Under a system of inheritance ruled by primogeniture, younger sons presented a problem for families and society. Cadets insured survival of the family name, but with accession of an elder son to the estate, they became extraneous, and possible drains on family fortunes.<sup>115</sup> Lawrence Stone points out the quandary of gentry progenitors in estimating the survival rate of potential heirs.<sup>116</sup> Contemporary writings reflect conflict inherent in a system that allotted younger sons “that which the cat left on the malt heap, perhaps some small annuity during his life, or what please him [the elder brother] and my mistress his wife.”<sup>117</sup> In turn, elder brothers, charged with supporting siblings, complained of ingratitude that could “overthrow the house you came of, . . . like the viper that is not born but with the too unnatural destruction of her dame.”<sup>118</sup> In 1624, Richard Eburne addressed the problem of a “great many of children,” and

<sup>113</sup> O. J. Dunlop and R. D. Denman, *English Apprenticeship and Child Labour* (New York, 1912), 76-7, 214, 217. Richard Grassby classifies apothecaries as businessmen rather than professionals. “Although the apothecaries needed a sophisticated knowledge of botany and chemistry to make up medicines and resembled the modern general practitioner, they were closely associated with the grocers and, as suppliers of drugs, were in effect retailers who served an apprenticeship in a shop.” *The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1995), 69 n. 158.

<sup>114</sup> Brooks, 252 n. 32.

<sup>115</sup> Barron comments, “It is remarkable that Richard Cartwright, the first of his name at Aynhoe, was succeeded for four generations by a single surviving son, to the great advantage of the estate, which remained unburdened by the portions of cadets.” *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>116</sup> Stone and Stone, 97-8.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas Wilson, *The State of England, 1600* (London, 1936), 24, quoted in Thirsk, “Younger Sons,” 337.

<sup>118</sup> Draft letter of John Newdigate to Henry Newdigate, 15 October, 1609, quoted in Vivienne M. Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture: The Seventeenth-Century Newdigates of Arbury and their World* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1995), 65.



advised, "The only way to rid idleness out of your house, having no work for them at home, is to place abroad your children into other houses, as it were unto colonies."<sup>119</sup> Eburne shared a widely-held belief that "forty of (sic) fifty years ago [England] was not so overcloyed and pestered with multitudes as now it is."<sup>120</sup>

Obedience Robins's father and great-grandfather's prosperity was based in land. Both men's wills emphasize the singular importance of this vital possession, held intact. During their lifetimes, the two Richards' appreciation for orchards, gardens, closes, and pastures must have been reiterated in countless ways. Richard (II) was one of eight children, of whom six were sons: Obedience was one of ten, of whom five were sons. Two successive generations of Robinses produced nine sons who did not inherit freehold land. Their ability to support families depended on other resources. In 1600, one writer offered an optimistic assessment of younger sons' situations: "This I must confess doth us good someways, for it makes us industrious to apply ourselves to letters or to arms whereby many times we become my master elder brother's masters, or at least their betters in honour and reputation, while he lives at home like a mome<sup>121</sup> and knows the sound of no bell but his own."<sup>122</sup> By the second decade of the century, the options of arms and letters expanded to include possession of foreign land. Eburne chid reluctant emigrants: "For so are men, Englishmen especially, and of them most of all the inland sorts, wedded to their native soil like a snail to his shell or, as the fable is, a mouse to his chest, that they will rather even starve at home than seek store abroad."<sup>123</sup> Obedience Robins, a younger son with ability and ambition, succeeded in surpassing his elder brother in land holdings and office, accomplishing in Virginia what would have proved elusive, if not impossible, in England. No mome, he.

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<sup>119</sup> Richard Eburne, *A Plaine Pathway to Plantations* (1624), Louis B. Wright, ed. (Ithaca, 1962), 36.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>121</sup> *OED*: "a dull, blockish fellow."

<sup>122</sup> Wilson, 24.

<sup>123</sup> Eburne, 90.

## CHAPTER III

## VIRGINIA

"Obediens Robins, of Accawmacke, Chirurgion, Sworn and examined . . . at a Court at James City," January 21, 1627/8: This, the first record of Obedience Robins in Virginia, is the only time he is identified with medicine in America.<sup>1</sup> Medical practitioners are among the most easily distinguished and active litigants in the Accomack-Northampton County Court Records, and Obedience Robins is not one of them. Seventeenth-century medicine was rarely successful, surviving patients paid bills reluctantly, and physicians were first on the list of outstanding debts owed from their failures' estates. If this Obedience Robins, "Chirurgion," served an apprenticeship with London apothecary Adrian Barton, he was guilty of misrepresentation, but not necessarily of inflating his station.<sup>2</sup> Medicine was only beginning a process of differentiation, standardization and professionalization that would continue into the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> In England and in Virginia, medical titles were applied liberally and loosely. John Stringer, probably the most successful of seventeenth-century Eastern Shore physicians, had a long career during which he was identified as "chirurgicon," "Practitioner in Physick," and "Philo medicy."<sup>4</sup>

When Robins traveled to the James City Court, his testimony concerned an agreement made between Captain Wilcoxes and Walter Scott the previous October. October, 1627, then, is the earliest date at which Robins can be placed on the Eastern Shore, or in Virginia. If Robins served an apprenticeship in London until February 7th, 1625/6, he emigrated within the following nineteen

<sup>1</sup> Lothrop Withington, *VMHB* 28 (1920), 326; Wyndham B. Blanton lists Robins in a "Biographical Dictionary of Physicians," in *Medicine in Virginia in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1972), 285. Blanton's survey is thorough, and Robins is included on the basis of this single reference in the James City Court Record.

<sup>2</sup> "Physicians were expected to have a gentlemanly bearing to match that of their wealthy patients . . . lower in status . . . was the surgeon . . . Parallel to the surgeon was the apothecary . . . In practice however, particularly in the countryside, the apothecary increasingly acted the physician's part. Indeed, the surgeon and the apothecary overlapped . . ." Roy Porter, "The Patient in England, c. 1660-c. 1800," in Andrew Wear, ed., *Medicine and Society: Historical Essays* (Cambridge, 1992), 29-93.

<sup>3</sup> See G. Holmes, *Augustan England: Professions, State and Society 1680-1730* (London, 1982), esp. Chapter 6, "The Coming of the Doctor," 172-3.

<sup>4</sup> Susie M. Ames, ed., *County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia 1640-1645* (Charlottesville, 1973), hereafter Ames II:95; Ames, ed., *County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia 1632-1640* (Washington: 1954), hereafter Ames I:36; Ames II:172

months, although he has been placed in Virginia as early as 1621.<sup>5</sup> Following the Indian attack of 1622, lists of the dead were incomplete, and the Virginia Company proposed maintenance of records, both of emigrants and of indentures.<sup>6</sup> Ensuing census listings of children and servants are often vague, but appear to be accurate in cases of persons with status. In 1624 and 1625, censuses of Englishmen in Virginia do not include Obedience or Edward Robins, nor does either appear on any extant passenger list. The brothers did not necessarily make the voyage together. Edward, usually identified as "merchant," or occasionally, "of London,"<sup>7</sup> sailed from Plymouth, probably in 1637. After his death in 1641, a question of Edward's servants' terms of indenture went to court in March of 1642/3. By this time, three of these servants lived with and worked for Obedience Robins, and one John Coleman appealed to the court for release.<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Charlton testified that "Edward Robins deceased was very urgent both att Plymouth and at Sea for to by some of her servants," and promised to shorten their length of service by one year.<sup>9</sup> Terms of indenture varied, and there were abuses, but a standard, seven-year term reduced by one year, contracted in 1636 or 1637, would have concluded by March, 1642/3, and January 1637/8 is the first year in which Mr. Edward Robins appears in the Accomack and Northampton County Court Records.<sup>10</sup> Edward Robins, christened in September, 1604, was the fourth son of Richard (II) Robins, and three years younger than Obedience. It seems unlikely that Robins abandoned a successful London enterprise, but the ability to pay for servants indicates some measure of prosperity. If

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<sup>5</sup> Warren M. Billings, "English Legal Literature as a Source of Law and Legal Practice for Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *VAMHB*, 87 (1979), 406 n. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Kingsbury V*:129,130.

<sup>7</sup> Ames II:131.

<sup>8</sup> The court denied Coleman's appeal. It was ruled he must serve out his time to Obedience Robins, and that Stephen Charlton, husband of Elizabeth, should produce the three indentures. Ames II:262.

<sup>9</sup> Ames II:260.

<sup>10</sup> Ames I:72. Coincidentally, two Edward Robinses made inaugural appearances in court during the same period. Mr. Edward Robins, was represented by Thomas Joyner, Attorney, January 2, 1637/8. Ames I:98. May 1, 1637, "Thomas Nuton prefered a petition against Edward Robins for 400 pounds of tobacco and three barrrells of corne . . ." Robins did not pay, and October 15, the court ordered "execution," or the seizure of goods, against Robins for the debt. Robins is not designated "Mr." In May of 1638, the court ordered an Edward Robins "paied a halfe share for his worke and labour." Ames I:110.

Edward served an apprenticeship to a London merchant and established a business there, his emigration may have been prompted by his elder brother's achievements during a decade in Virginia.<sup>11</sup>

January 24, 1628/9, Obedience Robins made a second appearance at James City Court. George Medcalfe had filed suit against him, had him "arrested," and then failed to attend court himself. The suit was declared "non-suited," and Robins was awarded fifty pounds of tobacco in compensation for his trouble in crossing the Bay.<sup>12</sup>

The following year, Robins was one of four burgesses "ffor Accowmacke," at "The General Assembly holden the 24th of March, Anno Domini 1629-30."<sup>13</sup> Sir John Harvey, Knight and Governor, presided over a group of forty-five men representing twenty-three locales, excluding Westover, for which "none appeared."<sup>14</sup> At the previous assembly, October 16, 1629, "ffor the Easterne shoare, noe burgesses did appear."<sup>15</sup> Robins was not among burgesses for 1631/2, when the assembly, "accordinge to the former orders of the assembly the 5th of March 1628," established "mounthlic corts, and oftener uppon extraordinary causes in remote parts of this colony"--"Warwicke River, Warrosquyoake, Elizabeth-Citty and Accawmacke."<sup>16</sup> Travel to James City assemblies and courts was difficult, and may account for absentees and Medcalfe's failure to pursue his suit against Robins. The numbers of Eastern Shore men summoned to James City quarter courts and the hazards of crossing the bay led to increasing powers, both granted and assumed, for the Accomack-Northampton courts.

<sup>11</sup> Rachell and Elizabeth survived Edward Robins and inherited as orphans. Children of Edward and Jane Robins were christened in London, at St. Lawrence Jewry and St. Mary Magdalene Church, Milk Street, Rachell on November 20, 1631, and Elizabeth on May 20, 1635. LDSIGI, London, fiche pp. 127,020, 126,967.

<sup>12</sup> "Council and General Court Minutes, 1622-1629," *VMHB* 30 (1922), 350. Noel Curren-Briggs, in *Virginia Settlers and English Adventurers* (Baltimore, 1970), 681, abstracts for the same date, "George Medcalfe and Obedience Robins appeared before the court for causing a brawl."

<sup>13</sup> Ames: I. xxviii. Perry observes that commissioners' appointments often followed election to the assembly, suggesting that governors based selection on personal knowledge of potential county officials. Robins's sequence of office fits this pattern. James R. Perry, *The Formation of a Society on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1615-1655* (Chapel Hill, 1990), 215, n. 48.

<sup>14</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia*, 13 vols. (New York and Philadelphia, 1809-1823), I:148-49.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 168. In 1628, Governor Pott commissioned monthly courts at "several" undetermined sites: In 1633 an Accomack commissioner, not appointed in 1631/2, described himself as "formerly of that commission," suggesting that there existed an earlier court. Ames I:xx.

Court commissioners appointed for Accomack in 1631/2 were Capt. William Claybourne, Esq., Obedience Robins, gent., Capt. Thomas Grayes, John Howe, gent., Capt. Edmond Scarborough, Roger Saunders, gent., and Charles Harmar, gent.<sup>17</sup> The oath of office instructed:

Doe equall right, to the poore and to the riche after your cunninge, witt, and power, and after the lawes and customes of this colony, and as neere as may be after the lawes of the realme of England and statutes thereof made, you shall not be of counsell in any case or quarrell hanging before you, and that you . . . shall not lett for guift, or other cause . . .<sup>18</sup>

Court commissioners determined suits to the value of five pounds sterling, petty offences, and "whatever a justice of the peace . . . may doe, such offences onlie excepted, as concerne the taking away of life or members."<sup>19</sup> Parties retained the right of appeal to the governor and council at the quarterly court held at James City.

Records of the first courts held in Accomack are missing or illegible.<sup>20</sup> Obedience Robins attended at least one court prior to January 7, 1632/3, the first for which the record survives, but on January 7th, he was listed third among five commissioners, after Grayes and Scarborow. "And the last shall be first,"<sup>21</sup> was a lesson lost on seventeenth-century Englishmen, for whom precedence and spatial arrangement were a primary concern.<sup>22</sup> Over the next thirty years, relative position in listings of commissioners and signatory order as well as accumulation of honorifics indicate Robins's increasing status and experience. Initially, Robins was not a commissioner "of the quorum," but he actively participated in court business, particularly throughout the fall of 1633. No lists of commissioners in attendance or records for fall court meetings survive, but Robins, Commander of Accomack<sup>23</sup> and court

<sup>17</sup> Hening I:170.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Ames I:1 n. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Matt. 10:31.

<sup>22</sup> See Robert Tittler, "Seats of Honor, Seats of Power: The Symbolism of Public Seating in the English Urban Community, c. 1560-1620," *Albion* 24 (1992) 205-223, esp. concluding remarks: "Along with such phenomena as competition for precedence on commissions of the peace among shire gentry . . . the frequent disputes regarding church seating reflect the intensity of English social relations at that time: the striking potential for social mobility, the constant quest for respect, the emulative competition for symbols of status, and indeed the evolving nature of such symbols themselves." The original court notes list names vertically. Ames I:1 n. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Originally, commanders of plantations combined military and judiciary responsibilities with duties later relegated to sheriffs, holding monthly courts with powers corresponding to those of justices of the peace. Hening I:xvi-xvii, 140, 125.

commissioner, witnessed four writs of recognizance.<sup>24</sup> Four years earlier, Governor Pott had appointed Edward Waters "Commander of and for the plantations within the precincts of Elizabeth City." In Waters's commission, commanders are "men of sufficiency and experience . . . appointed to command and governe the several plantations and inhabitants within the same, both for the better order of government and in the conservation of the peace . . . alsoe for the preventing and avoyding of such mischiefes as may happen unto us by the intrusions and practizes of the Indians our irreconcilable enemies."<sup>25</sup> The commission appointing monthly courts named Waters and Thomas Purfory, principle commander of Elizabeth City, among eight commissioners. The commission empowers all, or as few as three commissioners to hear suits, but specifies that one of the two commanders must be present. From his appointment in 1631/2 until his death in 1662/3, Commissioner Robins faithfully served the Accomack-Northampton monthly courts.

Robins's first recorded colonial office was burgess for Accomack. Only twenty-nine years old and three years in Virginia when he first represented the Eastern Shore in the General Assembly of March, 1629/30, Robins rapidly gained administrative responsibilities. He served in assemblies of 1641/2, October, 1644, April and November of 1652, and on the governor's council in the commonwealth period, for the sessions of 1655, 1657/8, 1658/9, and 1659/60.<sup>26</sup> Robins also served at the James City Quarter Court. In March of 1657/8, Governor Samuel Matthews, Esquire, presided, followed by "Coll Tho. Pettus, Coll Obed: Robins," two more Colls and a Captain. "Leift Collon// Obediens Robins" followed "Collon// Argoll Yardley, Esq." on a list of twelve Northampton court commissioners, January 30, 1654/5. July 5, 1634, "Capt wm Clayborne being appointed Lieutenant for this shire did appoint and constitute Obedyence Robins gent. his deputy to perform all such services . . . to be done in that office . . . the Clarke. . . to send the said mr. Robins a commission for the authority of a Justice of Peace." A 1634 Assembly divided the colony into 8 shires, "which are to be governed as the

<sup>24</sup> Robins witnessed sureties for the appearances of Anthonie Wills, George Traveller, William Berriman and Daniel Cugley. In the same period, warrants also named four other Eastern Shore men "to be arrested and kept in safe custody until they entered into bond with sufficient sureties for their appearances." Ames I:3-6.

<sup>25</sup> Hening I:131-2.

<sup>26</sup> Ames I:xxvii-viii; II:141; Hening II:408, 432, 504, 526. No councilmen are listed for 1653 and 1654.

shires in England . . . And Lieuten'ts. to be appointed the same as in England, and in a more especial manner to take care of the warr against Indians." A commission for the authority of a justice of the peace was redundant. As commissioner of the monthly court, his authority encompassed "whatever a justice of peace . . . may doe." Robins was "Commander of Accomack" in 1633/4, an appointment that then carried both military and judiciary duties, and in 1637 collected "castle duties." When five servants escaped from his Kicoughton plantation to St. Mary's, Maryland, Sir Edmond Plowden wrote to Yardley and Robins to "attach and stay any of the Maryland servaunts by way of Reprisall." Two years later, in 1645, Plowden had recovered only one servant, Maryland Governor Calvert continued uncooperative, and the request was repeated. Governor Berkeley directed Plowden to "take Attachment from any Comander or himself." Throughout this period, only Littleton assumed the title, Commander, when he led the court, but Plowden assumed that Yardley and Robins could address or direct his request.<sup>27</sup> May 10, 1651, the county court appointed eight captains for defense and safety, including among them Robins, Charleton, and William Andrews.<sup>28</sup>

Robins's comparative youth and health were factors in his increasing administrative duties. In August of 1633, Governor Sir John Harvey appointed four more commissioners "for that divers of the Commissioners of Acchawmacke are deceased and gone from the plantation." The December 30th court meeting opened with the administration of the oath to William Stone, William Andrews, John Wilkins and William Burdett, who then joined Clayborne, Scarborough and Robins on the bench.<sup>29</sup> Stone, a future governor of Maryland, was the nephew of London merchant Thomas Stone. Andrews, who held four plantations, may have been a son of a Cambridge merchant.<sup>30</sup> Burdett may qualify as a "self-made

<sup>27</sup> Beverley Fleet, *Virginia Colonial Abstracts*, Vol. II, *Charles City County Court Orders 1658-1661* (Baltimore, 1961), 143; Ames II:359; Northampton County Deeds, Wills, No. 5, 40; Ames II:359; I, 18; Hening I:224, 169, Act XXXII, March 1, 1631/2; Ames I:90; Ames II:273-4, 440, 445.

<sup>28</sup> *JMIB* 5 (1897), 34.

<sup>29</sup> John Navin correlates survival with status in "Hard Beginnings: The Changing Face of Plymouth Society, 1620-1633," a statistical analysis. Paper read at the 3rd Annual Conference of the Omohundro Institute of Early American Culture, June 6, 1997, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Ames I:7-8.

<sup>30</sup> Trading partnerships included London merchants, ship owners, and Virginia planters, often with family connections. Robert Brenner traces activities of the Stones, Andrews and Claiborne in a plantation economy that required new approaches to investment. *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders* (Princeton, 1993), 185-9, 194.

man." A servant in 1615, he became a commissioner, vestryman and burgess, but died in debt in 1643. Wilkins, Robins's neighbor, signed a bill of sale to Scarborough "J W," and a 1643 deposition states that Wilkins sent for servant John Williams to read a note from Argoll Yardley.<sup>31</sup> The likelihood of Wilkins's illiteracy indicates a great range of background and education among appointees to the Eastern Shore bench.

The first extant list of commissioners for Accomack in 1631/2 begins with William Claiborne, surveyor of the colony, secretary of state, and member of the governor's council. He may have had legal training in the Middle Temple, but his interests were commercial and centered on Kent Island.<sup>32</sup> Thomas Grayes, or Graves, "ancient planter" and gentleman, served as burgess for Smythe's Hundred in 1619, and Accomack in 1629/30. John Howe's titles also include burgess and commander. Edmund Scarburgh, or Scarborough, a younger son of an armigerous Norfolk family, was to receive training at one of the inns of court, by terms of his father's will. Roger Sanders, originally a mariner, acquired with land and servants the designation "gentleman," and served as burgess for Accomack. Charles Harmer's family included clerics and scholars at Oxford and Winchester, but he began his career on the Eastern Shore managing Lady Dale's plantation. A landowner and planter, he owned slaves, participated in the fur trade and acquired further fortune and status through marriage to heiress Ann Southy. Burgess and commissioner for eight years, he sat on the Accomack court only once.<sup>33</sup> This brief and incomplete outline of the early court commissioners for Accomack suggests the variety of experience and social background that came together to rule the county. Accidental associations intensified through time; these men extended their civil powers, forged business relationships, and saw their children intermarry. Among the group, Robins was of "middling" origins. Conscientious attendance to duty and longevity were important elements in Robins's career of public service, despite a fourteen-month absence in 1637

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<sup>31</sup> Ames I: xxxi-iii, 162-3; Ames II: xiii; I, 3; II: 175-6. In 1645, Wilkins appended his mark to a jury decision. Ames II: 453. In fairness, Wilkins was not a young man in 1643; failing eyesight could be a factor.

<sup>32</sup> Ames II: xxiv.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvii-xxix.



and 1638. By 1640, of the commissioners appointed in 1632, only Claiborne and Robins were still alive,<sup>34</sup> and Claiborne's interests lay elsewhere.

When, in the spring of 1638, Robins resumed commissioner's duties, he found marked changes with the advent of Littleton and Yardley.<sup>35</sup> Nathaniel Littleton's name first appears among Eastern Shore commissioners May 1, 1637, the date on which Obedience Robins's long absence began. This is also the first court meeting led by John Howe. One of the first six commissioners named, Howe led the following six meetings, progressing from "Mr. John Howe commander," to "Captayne John Howe Comaunder etc."<sup>36</sup> By January 2, 1637/8, John Howe was dead, and Nathaniel Littleton led the list of commissioners. Littleton, sixth son of the chief justice of North Wales, had impressive credentials and catapulted to pre-eminence among Eastern Shore leaders.<sup>37</sup> He also served conscientiously, leading thirty-two consecutive court meetings between January, 1637/8 and July, 1641. Similarly, "Argoll Yeardeley Esquire eldest sonne and heyre of my father Sir George Yeardeley,"<sup>38</sup> debuted on the court January 11, 1640/1. Yardley, like Littleton, began his judicial career listed second, and substituted for Littleton in his first absence. When Littleton took a prolonged leave from May, 1642 until April, 1645, Yardley led the court.

Before the ascendance of Littleton and Yardley, court leadership was divided among commissioners, but precedence is readily discerned. From May, 1636, until September 1645, Robins

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxviii.

<sup>35</sup> Included in the Feb. 12 court notes is a writ of recognizance for Stephen Charlton to answer the suit of Robins the first Monday in March at James City. A representative may have filed the suit. If Robins had returned to the Eastern Shore, he did not sit on the court until a second, undated, May meeting. Ames I:103, 108.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 71, 91. Titles, as well as order of listing, were important. Honorifics and their evolution are clues to status. Instances of revision indicate the value placed on titles. August 1, 1637, the clerk replaced "mr." and "Licutenant" with "Captain," to precede the names of Howe, Stone and Roper. *Ibid.*, 81 n. 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxv. A 1632 deposition in the Amsterdam City Archives by a Dutch ship's carpenter states, "The skipper also used the sloop of the governor Littleton who governed over Akkenak." "Amsterdam and Rotterdam Notarial Acts Relating to the Virginia Tobacco Trade," compiled and translated by Jan Kupp. Special Collections, McPherson Library, University of Victoria, British Columbia, VA 18 732/745-745v.

<sup>38</sup> Ames II:34.

missed approximately fourteen of eighty-one recorded courts.<sup>39</sup> In the period between January 7, 1632/3 and March 27, 1637, Robins led thirteen of twenty-nine courts. Claiborne, Graves, and Scarborough, all of whom took precedence over Robins, also led courts. Claiborne, colony surveyor, councilor, and secretary of state, always headed the list of commissioners when he was present, only six times in these four years.<sup>40</sup> Captain Thomas Graves led eight times; Captain Edmund Scarborough, senior, dead by 1635, twice. Robins headed the list only in the absence of all of these three. In turn, Robins took precedence over Howe, Sanders, Stone, Burdett, Andrews and Wilkins, and even Harmar, in his single appearance. Wilkins's position, almost invariably last on the list and outranked even by more recent appointees, may reflect his lack of schooling. Robins began as "mr Obedience Robins" listed third, at the first recorded court meeting. He became "Obedyence Robins gent" at the following meeting, and remained "mr" until May 19th, 1634, when "mr Obedience Robins Commander" headed the list. When "Capt. william Clayborn Esq." presided July 5th, Robins reverted to "mr.," although he retained the office of Commander of the County. Robins led courts July 7 and September 8, 1634, using the title "Commander," but when he next led a court, November 16, 1635, he reverted to "Mr."<sup>41</sup> Again, titles, honorifics and precedence counted; clerks observed rank and included titles in attendance lists, and individual signatures follow a predictable order.

Considering difficulties of travel, vagaries of weather, pressures of business, and seventeenth-century health, Robins and the majority of the commissioners compiled remarkable attendance records. Population growth and expanding settlement increased the work load and distances traveled.<sup>42</sup> More commissioners met more frequently and for longer sessions, and in 1643 the Assembly extended powers

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<sup>39</sup> Some court sessions lasted two days, commissioners' names and/or dates were omitted entirely (rarely) or obliterated; and court notes were bound out of sequence. 26 April, 1640. Two names following Littleton's are torn away. Other county or James City Court meeting days could coincide, raising the possibility that commissioners attended other courts on personal business. In 1643, the Assembly assigned court meeting dates in an attempt to coordinate court sessions. Ames I:167 n. 40; Hening I:272-3; Perry, 176.

<sup>40</sup> Ames I:xxiv. Claiborne's interests ranged from Kent Island, Md., to Honduras. Brenner, 185, 188.

<sup>41</sup> Ames I:1, 2, 15, 17, 28, 22, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Perry, 175, estimates a 250% increase between 1632 and 1635, and correlates meeting sites and commissioners' residences with attendance.

of individual commissioners, while limiting meetings to six per year.<sup>43</sup> In 1644 the court met for nine days; in 1650 for thirteen; and in 1655 for thirty-four.<sup>44</sup> No man whose livelihood depended upon his own labors could afford to participate in colonial government at this level.

Attempts by the colonial administration to control settlement patterns in the interest of consolidating defenses failed. Despite increased settlement, relations between English colonists and their "irreconcilable enemies" were cautious but remained peaceful on the Eastern Shore, which escaped the 1622 massacre. Accomack, initially considered a source for salt,<sup>45</sup> became particularly attractive after 1622, despite shallow waters that hindered shipping.<sup>46</sup> When trade, travel and personal interaction between the two groups were carefully regulated, Commander Robins's military responsibilities brought him into contact with Indians. A 1668 court deposition recalled one such encounter of 1633 or 1634:

About Esq. Yardley's and John Savage's land--The deposition of William Jones, aged 59, sayeth, That being at the house of the late Col. Robins about 35 years since (when Laughing King came annually to visit him in the Spring) was desired by Col Robins's to ask the said King, whose land such a neck of land was? He replied, that he had given that neck of land from Wissapouson Creek to Hungar's Creek to Sir George Yardley, and the south side of Wissapouson to his son Thomas Newport (that is, Thomas Savage).<sup>47</sup>

Debedcavon, the "Laughing King,"<sup>48</sup> and Eastern Shore Indians maintained a cordial relationship with the English, until increasing numbers of colonists and livestock encroached on Indian lands and damaged crops. John Pory, secretary for the Virginia Company, and Captain John Smith encountered the Laughing King, and Smith left young Thomas Savage to live with the Indians, who believed him to be ship captain Newport's son. The Assembly at James City sought to regulate trade, limit contact between colonists and Indians, and prevent Indian access to arms with a series of

<sup>43</sup> Hening I:272-3; Perry, 176.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-176.

<sup>45</sup> As late as 1628 a court at James City ordered a Mr. Capps to locate sites "on the other side of the bay" for accumulating salt by evaporation. "Minutes of the General Court," *VMHB* 30.1 (1922), 52.

<sup>46</sup> In 1613, Samuel Argoll wrote of "very good harbors for Boats and Barges, but not for ships of any great burthen," and commented on the friendly native inhabitants. "A Letter of Sir Samuel Argoll Touching his Voyage to Virginia, and Actions There: Written to Master Nicholas Hawes, June 1613," in Alexander Brown, ed., *Genesis of the United States* II, (New York, 1964), 644.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Brown, 421.

<sup>48</sup> Ames II:34 n. 10.

prohibitive acts that were commonly modified for Accomack.<sup>49</sup> Act XXIX, by the February, 1631/2

Assembly, orders:

That no person or persons shall dare to speake or parlie with any Indians either in the woods or in any plantation, yf he can possibly avoyd it by any means, but as soone as he can, to bringe them to the comander, or give the comander notice thereof upon penalty of a monthes service for any free man offendinge and twenty stripes to any servant. But for the planters of the Easterne Shoarc, the commanders are required to observe all good termes of unitie; but that they cause the planters to stand upon their guard, and not to suffer the Indians especially the Mottawombes to make any ordinarie resort or aboade in their houses, and yf any English without leave resort unto their townes, the commanders to bynd them over to the next quarter court.<sup>50</sup>

Presumably, Robins regularly entertained Debedeavon "to observe all good termes of unitie," but incidents between the two groups threatened even the long-standing Eastern Shore truce. Within a year or two of the recorded visit to Robins, the Laughing King sent emissaries with compensation for the deaths of Englishmen. Robins's September 5, 1636 deposition at the Accomack Court is a rare statement in his own words:

At this court mr. Obedyence Robins aged 35th ore ther abouts sworne and examined sayeth that about a yeere sithence certine Indyans [came to the house of] Daniell Cugly from the laughing kinge with a message [and brought a parcell of] Roanoke, at which tyme, the said Cugley sent for me, and [William] Brooks, to interprett their message, which message, as then I [underst]ood, was that they had brought, the forsayd Roanoke for some [poo]r Englishman that had been kyld, how and wher I could not tell, neither could the Interpreter understand them, but that it was for some man, ore other that was kyld I well understood, and therfor said that for all the world I would not receive it, and so departed and went to my house, notwithstanding this the said Daniell Cugley not only received the said Roanoke, at that tyme, and a day ore two after told me, that the Indyans stole away and left the said Roanoke, but after I had charged him to send it back to them againe, hath impyously kept the same, and further since a rumor hath bene that, that the Indyans have obraded our boats, that they weere the men, that kild the man and the chyld at the Ile of kent, and that they had payd for it to me and divers have complayned to me and of me for it I charged the said Cugley, that the said Roanoke should be forth cominge at all demands, he confessing he had the same in his custody, notwithstanding this being the fifth of this instant month, I charged the said Cugley to be present at the court and to bringe the said Roanoke with him, which he promised to doe, he hath contemned the command, and falsified his promise, this is all.  
OBEDYENCE ROBINS<sup>51</sup>

Robins could not accept payment for English lives, nor could he ignore rumors that he had done so. Cugley's expropriation of the Indians' offering countered English practice and threatened Robins's

<sup>49</sup> Acts X, XI (1633), Hening I:219.

<sup>50</sup> Hening I:167.

<sup>51</sup> Ames I:57. Words and letters in brackets were illegible or missing in the original, but are supplied from context or a 19th-c. transcription. Ames II:xviii.

reputation. Cugley complied with Act XXIX when he notified Robins, but in retaining the roanoke, he offended the English sense of propriety.<sup>52</sup> Acts X and XI of August, 1633 reiterated bans on selling or trading arms and ammunition to the Indians, and banned sales of cloth, temporarily in short supply. Controlled trade was encouraged. Act XI includes the reminder, "all trade with the natives is to be cherished for many respects," but lives for roanoke was beyond the pale.<sup>53</sup> Redemption of Robins' reputation was the primary purpose behind Cugley's arrest; Kent Island dead were catalysts and cultural differences the cause of misunderstanding, but a year later these factors were incidental. Corroborating testimony by Francis Pettit, who refers to "my brother Robins," and James Cooke emphasizes Robins' unconditional refusal of the roanoke. The court ordered Cugley to deliver all the Indians' roanoke and other "truck" to Robins and to offer surety or remain prisoner to answer at the next quarter court.<sup>54</sup>

Only two months later Robins exacted retribution upon William Croop for "approbus words." Two witnesses agreed that on board a vessel, Mr. Croop accused Mr. Robins of writing a lie to Mr. Menefye.<sup>55</sup> "Quoth mr. Robins, I writ nothing, but that I will prove; quoth mr. Croope it is a ly, and said he would prove himselfe an honeste man than he, quoth mr. Robins pray god it may prove soe, quoth mr. Croope, you keepe a house not fitt to give any man intertayment and said that he would speake his pleasure in that place." The court found that Mr. Croope did abuse Mr. Robins, and ordered that Croope should "ly necke and heales halfe-an houre [and] acknowledge his fault."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Cugley had run afoul of colonial authorities in 1630, when "for scandalous speeches against Governor and Councill, Daniell Cugley sentenced to be pilloryd, but was forgiven." Hening I:146. He also twice offered writs of recognizance for his appearance at James City, witnessed by Robins in the fall of 1633. Ames I:3, 5. For insight into Anglo-Indian cultural encounters, see Martin H. Quitt, "Trade and Acculturation at Jamestown 1607-1609: The Limits of Understanding," *WAMQ* 3rd. Ser., 52 (1995), 227-258, esp. 256-7.

<sup>53</sup> Hening I:219. In 1626, the governor and council prohibited trading with Indians for corn, again because of a shortage. *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>54</sup> Ames I:57-8.

<sup>55</sup> March 11, 1633/4, De Vries describes "a great merchant, named Mr. Menifit (sic), who . . . treated us very well." David Pieterz de Vries, *Voyages from Holland to America, A.D. 1632-1644*, Henry C. Murphy, ed. and trans. (New York, 1971), 48, 49. In 1629, the Assembly paid ninety pounds of tobacco "for 300 of fish bought of Mr. Menefie." Hening I:142. Menifite, active in the ousting of Governor Harvey in 1635, was also a member of London trading partnerships. Brenner, 185, 188.

<sup>56</sup> Ames I:59-60.

Croope maligned Robins, throwing into question his word and his hospitality. Seventeenth-century planters depended on credit, and credit upon reputation. Robins's elective and appointive administrative positions were based on his "good conversation,"<sup>57</sup> a requirement occasionally enforced. The Assembly of November, 1652, found "Mr *John Hammond* returned a Burgess for the lower parish of the *Ilse of Wight*, to be notoriously knowne a scandalous person, and a frequent disturber of the peace of the country, by libell and other illegal practices, and conceive it fit he be expelled the house, and that a warrant issue to the sherriffe of the said county, for the election of another Burgess in his roome."<sup>58</sup> Seven years earlier, Christopher Burroughs's punishment included public acknowledgement of his offense at four sites—the Assembly, the Lower Norfolk County Court, and two parish churches—and disqualification from public office for seven years.<sup>59</sup> The accusation that Robins had written a lie could not go unchallenged.

When Croope disparaged the commissioner's "entertainment," he questioned the legitimacy of Robins's claim to gentle status, a standing characterized by the English tradition of hospitality. Contemporary English country house poems extol a simpler life and time, when the lord of the manor offered open-handed hospitality to visitors, regardless of station. Treatment of guests, even in early colonial Virginia, was inextricably linked with status and the merit of the appellation "gentleman."<sup>60</sup> When, in 1649/50, Colonel Norwood and his party were abandoned by the *Virginia Merchant*, they made their way south along the eastern shores of Maryland and Virginia, finally reaching Accomack. There, "we had our choice of hosts for our entertainment, without money or its value; in which we did not begin any novelty." "When I came to the house of one Stephen Charlton, he did not only outdo all that I had visited before him, in variety of dishes at his table, which was very well order'd in the kitchen, but would

<sup>57</sup> Hening I:111. Act VII of the Assembly of 1655 specifies that burgesses be "persons of knownc integrity and of good conversation." Hening II:412. Conversation: "manner of conduct, behavior, mode or course of life; occupation or engagement with things . . . in the way of business or study; circle of acquaintance, company, society." *O. E. D.*

<sup>58</sup> H. R. McIlwaine, ed. *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1619-1658/9*. Vol. 6 (Richmond, 1945), 86.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>60</sup> By the first decade of the eighteenth-century, Virginians celebrated a tradition of hospitality. See Cynthia A. Kierner, "Hospitality, Sociability, and Gender in the Southern Colonies," *Journal of Southern History* 62 (1996), 451-452.

also oblige me to put on a good farmer-like suit of his own wearing cloathes." By "esquire Yardy," refugee royalist Norwood "was receiv'd and caress'd more like a domestick and near relation, than a man in misery, and a stranger . . . welcomed and feasted not only by the esquire and his wife, but by many neighbours that were not too remote."<sup>61</sup> Norwood conveys a sense of surprise at the warmth of his welcome and the available provision.<sup>62</sup> In turn, his hosts were no doubt pleased to dispel misconceptions with a display of colonial hospitality. Croope's second insult, deprecating the commissioner's hospitality, effectively questioned Robins's place among these Eastern Shore gentry.

In 1652, Robins again took slanderers to court, this time the minister of the lower parish, Thomas Higby, and his wife, who had maligned Grace Robins as well.<sup>63</sup> Injudiciously, Higby had denigrated the quality of the commissioner's judicial decisions. Before ordering the taking of depositions, the court stated that "words and Actions of this consequence Reflect to the dishonor of the Government and undervaluinge and publique scandall of all the Magistrats of the Country."<sup>64</sup> Higby, like a predecessor, William Cotton, frequented county court meetings. The Assembly divided the Eastern Shore into two parishes in 1643, but one minister and vestry continued to serve both parishes. By 1652, Higby was minister for the lower, and older, parish, and Thomas Teackle, another royalist refugee and Robins connection, served the northern parish. Higby had married the widow of Robins's neighbor, John Wilkins, in 1651, and his disagreements with Wilkins's son also went to court. At the

<sup>61</sup> "Col. Norwood's Voyage to Virginia, in 1649," *Virginia Historical Register and Literary Advertiser*, 2 (1849), 135-6.

<sup>62</sup> Despite emphases on harsher aspects of colonial life—mortality, treatment of labor, food shortages and the impermanence of housing—archaeological discoveries support written evidence that some Virginians enjoyed luxuries and plenty. Excavations from tenant houses near Jamestown revealed Chinese porcelain, delftware, mirrors and books. Alain Charles Outlaw, *Governor's Land: Archaeology of Early Seventeenth-Century Virginia Settlements* (Charlottesville, 1990), 53-4, 80. Similar deposits at Kingsmill indicate that even lower-status colonists could be cavalier in use and disposal of expensive imported goods, particularly in the 1620s. William M. Kelso, *Kingswood Plantations, 1619-1800: Archaeology of Country Life in Colonial Virginia* (Orlando, 1984), 177-9, 183-5.

<sup>63</sup> The court confirmed Mrs. Robins's good name in a 1639 decision based on physician John Stringer's deposition that "Mr Joyner . . . declared that the said Mrs. Robins for calling the said Joyner knave was a dishonest woman (*sic*)." Evidently Joyner was a knave. The court ruled that "Joyner hath injured Mrs. Robins." Joyner, for "contumelious and unreverent speeches shall forth with aske forgiveness . . . acknowledge his fault and pay the charges in this sute." Ames I:146.

<sup>64</sup> Accomack-Northampton County Court Records, 4, 141; quoted in Perry, 205.

same time, Teakle and Edward Scarborough, who had a history of disagreement with Robins, were also at odds.<sup>65</sup> Conflict between parishioners and ministers was not limited to religious questions

Virginia courts frequently dealt with questions of respect and reputation, and ill-considered words brought far harsher punishment than Croope's.<sup>66</sup> Business agreements and the outcome of disagreements hinged on the individual's word, and authority required respect, or failed. Robins spoke for longtime neighbor, sometime business partner and fellow commissioner John Wilkins, stating he never heard of any ill-carriage, whereas Melling, Dennis and Pasco "lived very basely and suspiciously."<sup>67</sup> The value of Robins's support lay in the strength of his own reputation, or "conversation." The court did not specify time or place for Croope's punishment, or the clerk might have abbreviated a fuller statement. Particularly in cases of morality and slander, public confession and example were essential elements in punishment, and public sites and times were clearly specified for exaction. The court ordered Thomas Dewey and James Davis for disordering and abusing themselves upon the Sabbath, to "sitt by the heeles in the stockes the next Sabbath followeing in tyme of devyne service, and also to pay 30 pounds of tobacco per peece towards public uses."<sup>68</sup> Retraction and the public spectacle of retribution served to warn the population at large, humiliate the offender, and often, further public works: most important, in cases of slander, it vindicated the wronged party. Robins could not ignore Cugley's, Croope's or Higby's attacks on his standing within the community and his authority as a public figure.

<sup>65</sup> Perry, 187 n. 44.

<sup>66</sup> Colonial leaders were zealous in prosecution of slanderers. A 1643 deposition repeated Thomas Parks's statement, "Yardleys father did worke upon a Taylor's Stall in Burchin Lane in London and that Mr Yardleys mother was a midwife not to the honorable citizens but to by blowes." Parks was bound over to appear at the next James City quarter court. Ames II:313-6. Sir George Yeardley was a son of Ralph Yeardley, merchant-taylor of London, and his brother Ralph was an apothecary. *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 1963-5). John Carleton wrote Dudley Carleton in 1618, "Here be two or three ships redy for Virginia, and one Captain Yardley a meane fellow by way of provision goes as governor, and to grace him the more the King knighted him this weeke at Newmarket, which hath set him up so high that he flaunts yt up and downe the streets in extraordinarie braverie, with fowtreen or fifteen fayre liveries after him." John Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. Norman McClure (Philadelphia, 1939), 188.

<sup>67</sup> Ames I:165-6.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.



No Virginia colonist survived without good health and few succeeded without financial support. A third element, arguably vital to exploitation of New World opportunities, proved to be interpersonal networks. Crafted from common interests, favors, and extended kinship, and sustained despite the uncertainties of seventeenth-century communications, these networks effectively served business and private ends. When Obedience Robins married Grace Neale Waters,<sup>69</sup> the widow of Edward Waters, sometime after 1630, he acquired stepchildren and familial connections to colonists John Neale of Elizabeth City and Accomack, and James Neale of St. Clement's Manor, Maryland. Within the decade, members of his own family joined him on the Eastern Shore, but through marriage, Robins was immediately linked to an armerigerous Northamptonshire family that included merchants and landowners.<sup>70</sup> Robins's future wife began her official New World history inauspiciously, with a 1622/3 death notice, but survived to be "lately deceased" in March of 1682/3.<sup>71</sup> A 1623/4 census of quick and recently dead Virginians lists Edward, Grace and William Waters alive at Elizabeth City. This corrects an earlier account of the March 22, 1622 massacre, including "those that were massacred by the treachery of the Savages in VIRGINIA . . . At Master Walters (*sic*) his house . . . Master Walters his wife, a Childe, a Maid a Boy."<sup>72</sup> Waters and his wife remained among the missing and presumed dead for some time following the massacre. John Smith wrote of their escape,

*Edward Waters*, one of the three that first stayed in Summer Iles, and found the great peece of Amber-greece, dwelling in Virginia at this Massacre, hee and his wife these Nandsamunds kept Prisoners till it chanced they found this Boat, at which purchase they so rejoiced, according to their custome of triumph, with songs, dances and invocations, they were so busied that WATERS and his wife found opportunity to get secretly into their Canow, and so crossed the River to Kecoughton, which is nine or ten miles, wherent the English no lesse wondered and rejoiced, then the Salvages were madded with discontent. Thus you may see how many desperate dangers some men escape, when others die that have all things at their pleasure.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Grace Neale is sometimes called Grace O'Neill. Given correspondence from "cousins" Neale, Neale is the name that will be used here. Remarriage often occurred within six months, and usually within two years. Perry, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Christopher Johnston, "Neale Family of Charles County," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 7.2 (1912), 201-5.

<sup>71</sup> Marshall, 114-15.

<sup>72</sup> Edward Waterhouse, "A Declaration of the State of the Colony and . . . a Relation of the Barbarous Massacre," in Kingsbury III:521.

<sup>73</sup> John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, in Philip L. Barbour, ed. *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1590-1631)*. Vol. 2. (Chapel Hill, 1986), 153-154.

Waters had indeed escaped many desperate dangers, if only half the stories this picaresque adventurer generated are true. Among those listed in the 1625 Musters of the Inhabitants of Virginia is "Mr Edward Waters 40 by *Patience* 1608." Waters's claim to have come by the *Patience* contradicts legends of his sojourn in Bermuda, where he was shipwrecked in the *Seaventure* with Somers and Gates in 1609.<sup>74</sup> Edward Waters did not settle in Virginia for eight more years. Justifiably, a claim to have arrived in 1608 might be based on original intent, and designed to gain land patents unrelated to headrights and awarded "ancient planters" the earliest settlers.<sup>75</sup> It is also possible that there were two Edward Waterses,<sup>76</sup> although Smith is not alone in accepting that Edward Waters of Elizabeth City was that same shipwrecked Waters who was accused of murder and only narrowly escaped execution on Bermuda. Smith puts Waters in Virginia in 1617.<sup>77</sup> Sometime after 1618, he married Grace Neale, by whom he had two children, William by 1623, and Margaret by 1625. The 1624/5 Muster List for

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<sup>74</sup> Waters may have been a servant of Sir George Somers. John Head Lefroy, *Memorials of the Discovery and Early Settlement of the Bermudas or Somers Islands*, VI, (London, 1877), 14; Henry C. Wilkinson, *The Adventurers of Bermuda: A History of the Island from its Discovery until the Dissolution of the Somers Island Company in 1684*, (London, 1958), 50. Strachey says the murderer was Robert Waters, a sailor. Edward Strachy, "True Reportory," in Louis B. Wright, ed. *A Voyage to Virginia in 1609* (Charlottesville, 1964), 53-55. The Bermuda castaways constructed the pinnaces *Patience* and *Deliverance*, from cedar and the wrecked *Seaventure*, so that the date and probably the ship's name, are wrong. According to Smith and Lefroy, Waters twice remained on the islands voluntarily; first for fear of punishment for mutiny and murder, and later to hide ambergris, then came to Va. via the Canaries and capture by pirates.

<sup>75</sup> The Charter of Orders from Sir Thomas Smyth, November 18, 1618, stated, "... the ancient adventurers and Planters which were transported thither with Intent to Inhabit at their own costs and charges before the coming away of Sir Thomas Dale Knight, and have so continued during the space of three years, shall have upon a first Division to be by us augmented one hundred acres of land ... and ... for each of their Heirs and assigns ..." Quoted in Nell Marion Nugent, ed., *Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants 1623-1666*, Vol. I (Richmond, 1934, 1977), xxvi.

<sup>76</sup> Waters may have been one of four children born to William Waters and Alice Canon of Willian, Hertfordshire; the first son, William was christened in 1583, a second, John, in February, 1588/9, a third, Edward, in November, 1589. This Edward Waters would have been 36 when the Virginian was listed at 40 in the 1624/25 muster. LDSIGI, Hertfordshire fiche, p. 18,216. Waters might have deliberately exaggerated his age. In a discussion of court commissioners' qualifications, Ames notes: "In a community characterized by the youth of its people, recognition and respect were accorded to those older members who seemed to have acquired wisdom and understanding." L:xxxvii.

<sup>77</sup> John Smith, 180-1, 187.

Elizabeth City includes "Grace Waters 21 by *Diane* in 1618" and William and Margaret Waters, "born in Virginia."<sup>78</sup>

Waters owned land in Kecoughton, later Elizabeth City, and during the last decade of his life served as churchwarden, commissioner, commander and Burgess,<sup>79</sup> a marked contrast to his earlier career. In 1624, Edward Waters, "gent" registered a patent on 100 acres in Elizabeth City,<sup>80</sup> and in 1628, Lt. Edward Waters registered "100 acres within the precincts of Elizabeth City."<sup>81</sup> His petition to "seat himself and plant upon the strawberry banks within the circuits of the companys land laid out at Elizabeth City," was granted for ten years.<sup>82</sup> Among Waters's "servants" was the well-connected Adam Thoroughgood.<sup>83</sup> With Francis Chamberlaine, Waters represented Elizabeth City at a "Generall Assembly May the 10th 1625," and again May the 21st, at James City.<sup>84</sup> In court depositions of 1625 and 1626, Waters is termed "gent."<sup>85</sup> When, "ffor the ease of the people," the General Assembly commissioned a monthly court at Elizabeth City "for the conservation of the peace soe far as is belonging to the Quarter Sessions of the justices in England,"<sup>86</sup> "Leift" Waters was among those appointed commissioners. Waters, "as being the lawful attorney and deputy unto William Capps" collected "200 wt of merchantable Tob" in 1627,<sup>87</sup> and administered estates, including those of Thomas Hunter and Captain Wilcocks in 1629.<sup>88</sup> Both Waters and Obedience Robins had claims against the estate of "Capt John Wilcoxes . . . lately passed away in going over the Bay,"<sup>89</sup> and Waters later collected 200 pounds of tobacco.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Nugent, xxix; Peter Wilson Coldham, *The Complete Book of Emigrants 1607-1660* (Baltimore, 1987), 50.

<sup>79</sup> Perry, 156.

<sup>80</sup> Kingsbury IV:55.

<sup>81</sup> "Extracts of All the Titles and Estates of Land, Sent Home by Sir Francis Wyatt," in May of 1625, included "Edward Watters, 100 [acres] By Patent." *Ibid.*, 557. References may be to the same acreage.

<sup>82</sup> Lothrop Withington, ed., "Minutes of the General Court and Council of Virginia, 1622-1629," *VMHB* (1919), 27, 33.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 28, 341. Two brothers of Adam Thoroughgood were knights; Waters was therefore in a position of responsibility. Thoroughgood was "Mr." and a commissioner by March, 1628/9, and a Burgess by October, 1629. Hening, I:133,139. Waters may have been "servant" to Somers in the same sense that Thoroughgood was later servant to Waters.

<sup>84</sup> *WMAQ*, 2nd ser., 7 (April 1927), 131.

<sup>85</sup> Withington, *VMHB*, 24 (1916), 142; 25 (1917), 113.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 31, 209.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 145.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, 50, 358-9.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 326.

Edward Waters survived a decade of adventure that included shipwrecks, murder, disputed treasure, privateering and six years' exile on Bermuda, to settle and survive in Virginia, an equally hazardous environment. He and his young wife escaped the 1622 massacre, subsequent captivity and endemic disease, and Waters prospered socially and economically. Waters traveled to England in 1630, and died at Great Hornead, Hertfordshire. He willed all his lands in Virginia to his son, William, and directed "all my other goods in England, Virginia, Ireland or else where" to be sold by his executor, "by the advice of my loving brother John Waters of Midleham in Yorkshire." The proceeds were to be equally divided among his wife and two children.<sup>91</sup> Waters also directed payment of 88 pounds for "freight, custom and other charges . . . to cleare my Tobacco." The value of Waters's estate cannot be estimated, but his son William prospered under the aegis of Obedience Robins. Public office, legal services, planting, and business enterprise in combination effectively furthered canny seventeenth-century colonists' fortunes, and a similar course of economic diversification was adapted and expanded by Robins, who married the older man's widow.<sup>92</sup>

Colonial women were in short supply, and remarriage was often swift. Grace Neale married two men of varying experience, but similar approaches to economic survival and social standing. Both Waters and Robins were vestrymen, court commissioners, burgesses, militia leaders and planters, and represented contemporaries in legal matters. Robins acted as commercial agent for Dutch merchant Aries Topp and London merchant Thomas Crowdie,<sup>93</sup> and Waters played an active role in the marketing of his own tobacco. John Neale represented Grace Neale Waters's natal family in Virginia,<sup>94</sup> and he held positions comparable to her husbands' in the emerging social strata of Elizabeth City and Accomack. Neale was a vestryman, commissioner, burgess, planter, merchant, and active litigant, whose pursuit of

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 354.

<sup>91</sup> PROL, Probate Wills II, 81 Scroop.

<sup>92</sup> For the profitable amalgamation of planting, trade, and politics among 17th-century Virginia entrepreneurs, see Brenner, 116-8.

<sup>93</sup> Ames II:321-22; Perry, 150.

<sup>94</sup> July 8, 1654. Grace Neale Waters Robins's son, William Waters, was appointed guardian to orphan Margaret Neale (Waters's sister was also Margaret), daughter of Elizabeth and John Neale, deceased. Marshall, 35.

outstanding debts is documented in court records.<sup>95</sup> A large landowner, Neale also owned a store at Kicoughton.<sup>96</sup> This consistency of connection suggests that Grace Neale, like Obedience Robins, disembarked in Virginia with some advantages.

Through her Maryland "cousin," James Neale, it is possible to establish Northamptonshire connections for Grace Neale, although her immediate family and exact origin remain uncertain. James Neale, merchant, emigrated to St. Clement's Manor, Maryland, in 1635.<sup>97</sup> The son of Raphael Neale of Drury Lane, London, and Jane Forman, and a grandson of John Neale and Grace Butler of Wollaston, County Northampton, James was baptised at Wollaston in 1615, where his parents had been married in 1612.<sup>98</sup> Raphael Neale's eldest brother remained at Wollaston, and fathered four daughters, among them a Grace, and two sons, the second, John. At least five descendants of John Neale and Grace Butler carried the name Grace, and among these is likely Grace Neale Waters Robins, who may have emigrated with a brother, John.

Three letters written between 1641 and 1643 and recorded in the Northampton County Court Records<sup>99</sup> establish the relationship between James Neale and Grace Neale Robins. The first two, addressed to James Neale are from "his Loveing Cosen," John Pemell, a London draper and merchant.<sup>100</sup> Pemell "did furnish your Cosen William Waters who goeth to Virginia upon this shipp Honor with Cloathes to the value of seven Pounds which your mother and my Cosen Hoskins did request mee to doe and to put to your Account which they were confident you would thankfully pay mee."<sup>101</sup> The first letter, dated October 8, 1641, traveled with Waters on the *Honor*; a second letter, written two months later, is a

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxvi.

<sup>96</sup> Perry, 53.

<sup>97</sup> Gus Skordas, ed., *The Early Settlers of Maryland: An Index to Names of Immigrants Compiled from the Records of Land Patents, 1633-1680, in the Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland* (Baltimore, 1968), 331-2. For a condensed life of James Neale, see Christopher Johnson, "Neale Family of Charles County," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 7 (1912), 202-5.

<sup>98</sup> LDSIGI Northamptonshire, fiche, pp. 4,764, 4762.

<sup>99</sup> Ames II:281-3.

<sup>100</sup> Pemell continued active in trade until at least 1658. In 1648 depositions in the Lord Mayor's Court of London stated that a Richard Parr, deceased in Barbados, had signed a bond to Pemell, and a series of petitions in 1657-8 asked relief for Pemell and partners Robert Knightley and Jeremiah Baxter from a debt of £700 due them from Capt. Strange of Barbados, a fugitive. Coldham, 239, and Great Britain, *Colonial Papers: Colonial Series I, 1574-1660*, W. Noel Sainsbury, ed. (Vaduz, 1964), 460, 467, 470.

<sup>101</sup> Ames II, 281-2.

reminder. The final letter reiterates James Neale's position in the affair, and exemplifies a trans-Atlantic and inter-colony network of kinship and familial obligation.

Cosen Robins.

Yours of the 18th of Aprill I received by this bearer Mr. Gill wherein you seeme to misdoubt whether the seven pounds your sonne had of Mr. John Pemell were dew to bee paid to mee or not. I thought I needed not to have brought more proofes than what I showed your husband att James Towne under Mr. Pemells own hand This Lettre is not here otherwise I would have sent it downe to you that you might see your selfe what hee saith And that hee had never trusted him had it not bine for my sake and the promise my Mother made him to see it satisfied which I thinke is alreadye done by beaver and tobaccos I formerlie sent home the bill hee promised to send in to mee or deliver it to whome you should appoint, Mr. Pemell tooke bond as holding it sufficient for his security but to prove the justnes of the debt, And for the things hee had apperes in the very cloathes he had on his back when hee came to you To say my mother passed her worde to pay the money for some private ends or reasons to her selfe I dare swear shee had noe more then what proceeded of Affection to one whome sprang from soe neare a kindred as your selfe to her husband, and the great care shee found I had insertched him out for you when I was in England. Witnes my voyage into Yorkshire to find him out though mist of my designe through his default and not my willingnes both my purs and paynes if this deserves so ill a requitall I most bee Contented. If you please to satisfy the debt unto this bearer Mr. Benjamin Gill it shall bee asaid to my selfe or Mr. Pemell, And Mr. Gill shall give you a full discharge for it and what security you please to restore the bond eyther to yourselfe your husbands sonne or whome you shall appoynt I must pay 8 pound percent for soe long as the monie hath been dew but if you thinke it not fitt to repay it unto mee I am contented to suffer that losse for your sake there is noe other proofes then Letters betweene Mr. Pemell and myselfe for all that I doe owe him and would not that bee testimony sufficient your sonne is present to Justifye the debt. What I write to yourselfe I conceive is to your husband Likewise which makes mee write only this Lettre For I doubt not but it must bee by his meanes if it bee pay'd. The bond might have bine sent over by mee had I any way misdoubted the payment without it. This with my best respects and kinde love to you both, not forgetting your sonne

I Rest

Your Lovinge Kinsman

Maryland May the 2nd 1643

James Neale<sup>102</sup>

Benjamin Gill,<sup>103</sup> James Neale's father-in-law, carried this and an earlier letter from Grace Robins between Virginia and Maryland. Neale's mother, the wife or widow of Raphael Neale—"so neare a kindred" to Grace Robins—contracted with Pemell for Waters's benefit, and Neale himself had traveled into Yorkshirc, seeking William Waters. Waters's proposed destination might have been Middleham,

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 282-3.

<sup>103</sup> The name of Gill's plantation, "Wollaston Manor," in St. Mary's City, Md., reiterates the tie between himself and his son-in-law, whose family came from Wollaston, Northamptonshire. During the interregnum, James Neale and his family left Md., and Robert Cole, "his only available kinsman," applied to administer Gill's estate. Witnesses attested to Gill's specific objection to any involvement by Cole, and the court denied his request. See Lois Carr, et al., *Robert Cole's World: Agriculture and Society in Early Maryland* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 145. James Neale's plantation in St. Clement's Manor, later Charles County, was also named Wollaston Manor. *Archives of Maryland*, LXI, 237.

home of his uncle, John Waters. This first generation Virginian traveled in England with the assurance of family contacts in London, Northamptonshire, and Yorkshire.<sup>104</sup> Survival of these letters with so much information on a far-flung family is a boon to the researcher, but their preservation in court records suggests that the Robinses remained immune to Neale's appeals, or that any settlement was less than amicable.

Family friction may have been exacerbated by differences in religion. James Neale's choice of St. Clement's Manor, Maryland, Calvert's patronage, and service in England, Holland and Spain for the royalist cause—even a daughter named Henrietta Maria—advertise his Catholicism. Wollaston constables twice presented "Mistris Marie Neale, wife of Edmund Neale, esquier," a cousin, to the Northampton, England sessions "ffor a convicted recusant."<sup>105</sup> Neale was, however, baptised in the parish church at Wollaston, and his will of 1683/4 includes a bequest to the poor of St. Giles' Parish, near London. He bequeathed "my soul to God that gave it and my body to the Earth."<sup>106</sup> Neale's inventory includes "a library of books most Latin and Spanish therefore of little worth here," and "1/2 a doz. of old small English books."<sup>107</sup> There is no evidence that either John or Grace Neale of Accomack was Catholic, but Robins's extended family ran the gamut between the Godly of Badby and Catholics of Maryland and Wollaston.

If Robins was "one of the colony's leading nonconformists,"<sup>108</sup> his actions were contradictory. The first recorded business in the Accomack County Court Records addresses delinquent tithes. The following year, minister William Cotton registered a complaint that church wardens had not levied or collected tobacco and corn due from parishioners. In their defense, John Major testified that Mr. Robins

<sup>104</sup> Perry suggests that Waters lived in England after his father's death. 156.

<sup>105</sup> Joan Wake, ed. *Quarter Sessions Records of the County of Northampton: Files for 6 Charles I and Commonwealth (A.D. 1630, 1657, 1657-8)* (Hereford, 1924), 178, 235. Bridges lists an inscription in the Wollaston parish church to Edmond Neale, "Armigeri Qui obiit 20, die Septebr. Ao Dni. 1671 Aetatis suae 73," and adds, "the impropration is now in Charles Neale Esq; who hath here a good mansion house . . ." John Bridges, *The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire*, 2 vols. (London, 1791), II:201.

<sup>106</sup> Maryland State Archives, Prerogative Court (Wills) 4, 40.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, (Inventories and Accounts) 8, 217.

<sup>108</sup> Horn, *ibid.*

three times refused to sign warrants for tithes. Walter Scott, provost marshal, added that he "brought such warrant to mr Robins to signe, and he tore the same." The court, which did not include Robins, ordered warrants for twice the quantities from defaulters, according to acts of the assembly.<sup>109</sup> Robins, who may not have been present, was not rebuked for his actions, nor were any defaulters named. In March of 1642/3, Cotton's successors Nathaniel Eaton and John Rosier chose Robins, Littleton, Neale and Gookin to arbitrate a division of tithes.<sup>110</sup>

A church building existed in Accomack in 1623,<sup>111</sup> and needed repairs by 1634. The court of May 19th, led by Commander Robins, ordered Daniel Cugley "to acknowledge his fault . . . for miscalinge and striking of William Berriman," and to pay for "daubing the Church as sone as the roofoe of the Church is repaired with all charges."<sup>112</sup> No vestry existed until September 14, 1635, when Cotton presented an order from James City for a parsonage. Traditionally, this undertaking was the responsibility of a vestry, which was appointed that day. The five commissioners present, Graves, Robins, Howe, Andrews and Wilkins named themselves, Cotton, and six others for a total of twelve. They scheduled the first vestry meeting for September 29th, when nine vestrymen, including Obedience Robins, recorded specifications for a parsonage to be "built upon the gleeb land by Christyde next."<sup>113</sup> Robins did not attend a meeting the following May, but John Neale joined vestrymen who approved fees and regulations for burials, fines for absentee vestrymen, and "conveniencs . . . a Pulpit cloth, a Chusen, a Carpett, a Bear, and a cheast."<sup>114</sup> Neither vestry nor wardens acted to Cotton's satisfaction. Between 1633 and 1639, he regularly petitioned the court or brought suit to collect tithes, funeral expenses, and

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<sup>109</sup> Ames I:1, 10-11.

<sup>110</sup> Ames II:331-2.

<sup>111</sup> Warren Billings, ed., *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606-1689* (Chapel Hill, 1975), 70 map. De Vries commented in 1642, "The first thing which the English built, after their dwellings, was a fine church." 148.

<sup>112</sup> Ames II:15. Courts often adhered to and extended the practical spirit of James P's instructions to Governor Wyatt, "All servants to fare alike in the colony, and their punishment for any offenses is to serve the colony, in public works." Hening I:117. Accomack acquired new stocks, a ferry and a bridge from offenders. Ames I:28, 78.

<sup>113</sup> Ames I:39, 43. Notes for three vestry meetings are included among court notes for 1632-40, but none appear in the court notes for 1640-45.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-5. "Bear," is probably "bier."



civil damages, and presented parishioners for swearing.<sup>115</sup> Cotton, despite reinforcing orders from the assembly and family connections to three Accomack court commissioners, father-in-law Thomas Graves and brothers-in-law William Stone and William Roper,<sup>116</sup> met stubborn resistance in collecting tithes. The first seven acts of the "Laws and Orders Concluded on by the General Assembly, March the 15th, (1623/4)" specify places reserved for worship and burial, church attendance, adherence to the canons of England, and respect and "means," from the best tobacco and corn, for the minister.<sup>117</sup> These acts were restated and expanded to fifteen by the assembly of 1631/2, adding to tithes of corn and tobacco a 20th of calves, pigs and kids in Act XIV.<sup>118</sup> Robins was not alone in his objection to tithing, but the church wardens bore the brunt of refusals. Shortages in ministers' levies were taken "by distress out of the church-wardens goods and chattells."<sup>119</sup>

Robins's objection to tithing validates the label "nonconformist," but he was no separatist. He was pragmatic, maintaining secular and religious positions within the ruling order, whether that order originated in crown or in parliament.<sup>120</sup> Traditionally, members of English "select" or "close" vestries came from the "masters," "gentlemen," or "better and ancients sort of the parish," and held office for life.<sup>121</sup> There is no indication that Robins gave up his seat, despite a succession of ministers and open rancor between Robins and Higby.<sup>122</sup> When Robins tore the warrants for Cotton's tithes, and repeatedly refused to sign them, he may have been secure in knowledge of his fellow commissioners' sympathies.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 15. See also Clara Ann Bowler, "The Litigious Career of William Cotton, Minister," *VMHB*, 83 (1978), 281-294.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 286, 4n; Ames I:xiii. The Church of England had its adherents. Stephen Charlton, of Nuswattocks, left 1000 pounds of tobacco for repair of the parish church and, if his daughter had no issue, land, a mill and a house "to be employed wholly upon the use of an orthodox Devyne." Marshall, 38.

<sup>117</sup> Hening I:123-4.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-61.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>120</sup> James Neale echoes Robins's contradictory actions: Catholic and Loyalist, he nevertheless left money to the poor of a London parish church.

<sup>121</sup> Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *English Local Government: The Parish and the County* (London, 1906; Hamden, Connecticut, 1963), 182, 189, 193.

<sup>122</sup> There is one recorded instance of refusal to serve. In August, 1642, Phillip Taylor, gentleman and commissioner, "about Fower Months sithence elected and Chosen to serve our Sovereigne Lord the King in the Office of a Church warden and the said Mr. Taylor this present day refused to take the Oath Tendered unto him." Ames II:202. Taylor's refusal did not check his career. He was appointed commissioner in June of 1642, sheriff and burgess in 1643. Ames II:xiv-v.

One legal scholar suggests that conflicts among Eastern Shore ministers and parishioners resulted from varying degrees of Puritanism, rather than Puritan against Anglican.<sup>123</sup> Robins's overt protest could have been based in personalities as well as principle. The following year three witnesses testified that Henry Charelton threatened, "If he had mr Cotton without the Church yeard he would have kickt him over the Pallyzados caling of him black cotted raskoll."<sup>124</sup> Conflict and controversy centered in the contentious Cotton, for whom the court room, cloth and church yard provided necessary sanctuary.

Robins did not sit on the February 19, 1633 court that addressed his destruction of warrants for tithes. The commissioners' oath warns "you shall not be of counsell in any case or quarrell hanging before you," but sitting commissioners' actions commonly filled the agenda. On this occasion there is no indication that Robins was present in any capacity. He did not attend court in April, 1634, despite having had Alexander Braiborn "arrested." With the exception of these two sessions, Robins attended every court meeting of record, from the first, January 7, 1632/3, until March 27, 1637. After that date, Robins absented himself until May, 1638.<sup>125</sup> Given his conscientious attendance, one historian suggests that he was out of the country.<sup>126</sup> At the January 1, 1636/7 court, Robins initiated five separate suits for the recovery of 2,927 pounds of tobacco for himself, and 166 for Mr. Raynbert. The court, Robins himself presumably abstaining, found for Robins in all cases. Almost three months later, on March 27, the court granted execution against three of these debtors. Thomas Wyatt, who had owed Robins and Raynbert 300 and 166 pounds tobacco, respectively, was assessed "466 lbs. besydes some skilletts."<sup>127</sup> This was not an unprecedented level of personal court business for Robins, but in an era when wills prefaced judicious travelers' journeys,<sup>128</sup> these several suits, in conjunction with a subsequent prolonged

<sup>123</sup> Bowler, 286.

<sup>124</sup> Ames I:28. Richard Grassby states, "Self-made men were always cool towards a centralized church and the pretensions of clerics and they were hostile to interference in their affairs by enthusiasts of any religious persuasion." *The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1995), 281. Grassby discusses businessmen and religion in his chapter "Religion and Ethics," 271-301.

<sup>125</sup> Ames I:108.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, xli.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 64, 66, 70.

<sup>128</sup> Nicholas White "being . . . bound a voyage to New England," wrote his last will and testament, recorded in December, 1639. Ames I:137. John Wilkins, "preparing for a voyage to England," wisely wrote a will. Ames II:xiv. The same week, in December of 1649, Edward Drew, "intending to take a

absence, suggest a purposeful ordering of affairs. Grace Robins's first appearances in Accomack County court records coincide with this fourteen-month hiatus in her husband's career. An August, 1637, court decision grants "Mrs. Grace Robins the quantity of Six pounds of good and merchantable Beaver" by the first of October.<sup>129</sup> No details survive. Again, in September, William Stephens registered a complaint against Mrs. Robins "for certayne pitch Tarr which was lent." The court ordered "the stuffe" repaid, with twenty pounds tobacco "in consideration of Forbearance."<sup>130</sup> In these transactions, Grace Robins acted for her husband, who did not appoint an agent, although brother Edward Robins, in Virginia by 1637, relative John Neale, or a long-time associate and neighbor such as John Wilkins might have served.<sup>131</sup>

If, after an absence of ten years, Robins returned to England in 1637, he found his brother, Richard (III) embroiled in his own rebellion against ship-money. Excerpts from the *Calendar of State Papers, Charles I, 1636-7* include a report for September 26, 1636:

Information of Roger Tudor and John Corderoy, servants of the sheriff of county Northampton, as to the violent rescue by the servants of Richard Robins, of Long Buckley, county Northampton, of a fore-horse in a team belonging to Robins, dis-trained by Richard Austell and John Newton, two of the sheriff's bailiffs, and Thomas Andrew, bailiff of the hundred of Guilsborough, for ship-money. One of Robins's servants would doubtless have "mischieved" one of the sheriff's bailiffs with a "pick-fork," had not one of the informants drawn his sword.<sup>132</sup>

The following month, the Sheriff of County Northampton wrote to Archbishop Laud of his difficulties despite resorting to imposing "the whole tax on some of the sufficientest inhabitants."<sup>133</sup> In 1638, Robins petitioned the Council, noting the unequal assessment of ship-money, and requesting "a speedy time to be fixed for petitioner to answer."<sup>134</sup> Two years later, the freeholders of County Northampton began a

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voyage to England," also wrote a will. Marshall, 27. Wilkins's and Drew's wills were both probated January 28, 1650/1.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 89. Stephens, a boatwright, leased twenty acres from Robins in 1643. Ames II:272-3.

<sup>131</sup> Other wives represented husbands in their absence. Anne Littleton acted for Nathaniel between May, 1642, and April 1645, and Anne Wilkins appeared as the "law full Attourney of Mr John Wilkins." Ames II:2-3, 26, 387-8.

<sup>132</sup> Great Britain, *Calendar of State Papers, Charles I, 1636-1637*. Vol. CCCXXXIII:150-1. John Woodforde described one Northamptonshire town's resistance to the sheriff's men: "The women assembled and some men and affrighted them, there was much running with forkes and cowle staves, etc." Quoted in Esther S. Cope, *Politics Without Parliaments 1629-1640*, (London, 1987), 109.

<sup>133</sup> Great Britain, *Calendar of State Papers, Charles I, 1637-38*. Vol. CCCXXXVI, 150-1.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

petition to the House of Commons: "That of late we have been unusually and insupportably charged, troubled and grieved in our consciences, persons and estates by innovation in religion, exactions in spiritual courts, molestations of our most Godly and learned ministers, ship-money, monopolies, undue impositions, army money, waggon money, horse money, conduct money, and enlarging the forest beyond the ancient bounds, and the like." The petition closes with hopes for "a Parliament once a year, as by law we ought, 4 Edward III, Statute 4, 36 Edward III, Statute 10, for preventing the like inconveniences for the time to come."<sup>135</sup> In England and in Virginia, Robins brothers employed the mechanisms of government to assert rights and protect property.

January, 1640/1, the Accomack court certified Robins's right to a patent of 2,000 acres based on the transportation of forty men. Patent applications followed transportation at irregular intervals, and many are reiterations of earlier claims or present cumulative lists of those whose passages were subsidized. Of the forty on this list, only one appears in the court notes before 1640, making it unlikely that Robins involved himself personally in recruiting in England. More likely he relied on recruiting agents, active before 1620 in supplying indentured labor. Unlike others, Robins does not include himself on lists of men transported. He was entitled to fifty acres for his own passage, and if he returned to England, a second fifty on his second arrival in Virginia. Not all patents were recorded, but the absence of his name on any patent argues against the assumption that he was in England in 1637.<sup>136</sup>

Richard (II) Robins died in 1634; his wife Dorothy survived until February, 1640/1. If Obediencia returned to England in 1637, he might have claimed his £100 legacy from his father's executor, Richard (III).<sup>137</sup> It is also possible that Obodiencia persuaded his brother, Edward, to emigrate,

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 1639-1640, Vol. CCCXXXVII, 7. The Virginia Assembly, in an act of March, 1658/9, established biannual representative assemblies, allowing the governor power to convene assemblies more often, if necessary. Hening II:517. Commonwealth Virginians cited the authority of Magna Carta. *Ibid.*, 496.

<sup>136</sup> Ames II:54-5; For agents' methods of recruitment see Abbot Emerson Smith, "Indentured Servants: New Light on Some of America's "First" Families," in *Journal of Economic History*, 2 (1942), 41. Smith quotes a 1634 letter to Lady Verney from an agent who told her he could supply forty servants at a day's notice for her son's plantation in Virginia.

<sup>137</sup> Robins's 1634 will stipulated family control of forty shillings of his £5 per annum to Long Buckley poor. Richard (III) provided for continuance of the bequest in a will written January 3, 1648/9, although it was not probated for almost thirty years. The Robins charity was formed 24 March, 1648/9, and

but estimates of the brothers' arrival and departure dates are rough. Mr. Edward Robins's first appearance in Accomack court records is January 2, 1637/8, and Obedience is not listed among sitting commissioners between March of 1637 and May of 1638, although records suggest he returned before February 12, 1637/8. The clerk's failure to distinguish between two Mr. Robinses makes it difficult to determine which Robins was in residence and involved in a particular suit. Thomas Joyner, attorney, acted for Edward Robins in the winter of 1637-38. A November, 1637 deposition describes Edward Robins as Joyner's master, Joyner having arrived in Accomack "about a yeare since." They did not necessarily travel together, but Edward Robins's courtroom activities indicate that he was well integrated into the local economy by the winter of 1637-38.<sup>138</sup>

In an era when remote familial connection prompted requests for credit, introductions or hospitality from virtual strangers, and relationships were not always precisely defined, other Eastern Shore colonists termed Obedience Robins "brother." In 1636, Francis Pettit, "aged 24th ore therabouts," referred to "my brother Robins" and said "he was with Mr Robins at Mr. Cugleys" when Indians brought roanoke in compensation for slain Englishmen. By the following spring, Pettit was "Mr.," and in 1638 lived at a plantation on which Mr. John Neale and Nicholas Harwood allegedly owed back rent. A month later, Pettit complained that Neale and Harwood still owed "700 poundes of tobacco arrears of rent for the Plantation which they sold" him. A network of family connection may have cushioned young Pettit's settlement on the Eastern Shore, although he continued to have problems with land. In November of 1638, the court ordered John Towleson to "pay Francis Pettit for his plantation . . . or else . . . to replace the plantation againc to the said Pettit." Pettit lived in the vicinity of Robins land holdings. In 1644, Indians threatened colonists, and plans for defense instructed Obedience Robins and Mr. Phillip Taylor to order and direct all inhabitants "from the house of Francis Pettett on both sides of Churrstone Creecke to the North side." Pettit's social standing was marginal. In a 1645 deposition, and on a list of estate appraisers, he does not merit a "Mr." Pettit was dead by 1652, and probably before 1650, when

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continues in effect today. This information is kindly supplied by Mr. J. R. Hobbs, Trustee, the Long Bucky United Charities.

<sup>138</sup> Ames I:103, 100, 92, 98-9, 95. In 1640/1, a certificate was granted to Edward Robins's orphans for transportation of seven men, including Thomas Joyner. Marshall, 8.

Mrs. Ann Pettitt willed her entire estate to her sons, Francis and Justinian, "except to Dorothy Robins my husband's goddaughter, one heifer." Ann Pettit named "friends" Obedience Robins and Stephen Charlton to oversee her will, and mentions her sons' aunt, Mrs. Francis Fludd, also resident on the Eastern Shore.

In 1654, Mrs. Francis Flood, widow of Lieutenant Flood, referred to her "brother" Robins. After 1645, Richard Robins of Long Buckby gave power of attorney to his sister-in-law, Jane Puddington, wife of George Puddington, in a letter establishing his relationship to Edward Robins, dead in 1640, and Obedience. In 1640, the court noted that Nicholas Waddilowe plaintiff and George Puddington defendant, ended a "difference between themselves." Five years later, William Stephens, boatwright, paid court costs for the "wrongful molestation of George Puddington, having arrested the said Puddington upon an Action of Slander and can make noe proove of his Allegations." Stephens leased land from Robins, but there is little evidence of interaction between Robins and Puddington, although they, and Pettit, owned land on Cherrystone Creek. Puddington served on the jury that found for Henry Boston against Obedience Robins, granting Edward Robins's former servant a year off his indenture. In 1645, He leased William Shatell 100 acres on Cherrystone Creek "with full power and Authority to topp fell Cleare and build plant and geather and Reaple," for ten years. Puddington is always plain "George," but signed the lease agreement with his seal.

Thomas Teackle, minister, royalist refugee, and perhaps another Robins relative, patented two tracts of land in 1652—seven hundred acres in May, and three hundred acres in October. In 1658, he patented two hundred more acres. All his land was on Pongoteague Creek, approximately twenty-five miles north of Robins's land. Teackle married former commissioner, burgess and sheriff Edward Douglas's widow after 1657, and later, Margaret Nelson, sister of Bostonian John Nelson. Teackle earned parishioners' trust and respect in a career spanning four decades, but arrived in Virginia with some financial resources and prestige intact, despite refugee status. Precise relationships among Robins, Pettits, Puddingtons, Floods and Teackle are not established. Incomplete records combined with the rare inclusion of maiden names make resolution of these questions unlikely, if not impossible. Teackle's father

died in battle in the English Civil War.<sup>139</sup> One motive for emigration is clear, but did communication with Robins suggest Teackle's destination? Floods, Puddingtons and Pettits left no indications of their origins, and Northamptonshire parish and county records offer no immediate suggestions. If Robins's absence from public responsibilities indicates a return to England, he may well have directly influenced decisions to emigrate. If Robins attracted family members to the Eastern Shore, were they, too, younger sons with limited resources? Robins and his kin demonstrate family influence on migration, despite gaps in the supporting evidence.<sup>140</sup>

Obedience Robins resumed his seat on the Accomack County Court in May, 1638, but commissioner's duties extended beyond attendance at monthly sessions. Experience and standing within the community enhanced the value of character recommendations and recognizances.<sup>141</sup> Commissioners and commanders served in various capacities, overseeing and witnessing wills,<sup>142</sup> certifying sales,<sup>143</sup> and drawing up warrants. Robins took depositions out of court, singly, and with other commissioners.<sup>144</sup> In January, 1635/6, the court required him to "take the oth of Richard Nuton which now lyeth sick at Mr. Charles Harmers house and not able to come to the court in the behalf of William Blower against John Symons as concerning his dog killing a Cow." In court, May 17, 1641, Robins testified to events of 1633-34: Following examination of John Leech, and "fynding in his judgment being then Commander of the sayd County, that the business was fowle, whereupon this deponant drew a Warrant with his owne hande for the apprehending of the three parties."<sup>145</sup> Governor Francis Wyatt ordered commissioners to hear tobacco shippers' oaths specifying the quality of tobacco, and "dilligently and exactly view from house to

<sup>139</sup> Ames I:57, 69, 105, 113, 130; Ames II, 359, 442; Marshall, 16, 33, 25, 37, 8-9; Ames II:10, 442, 453, 461; Perry, 187, 44n; Nugent, 260, 264, 357; Perry, 34-35, map; The Reverend Thomas Teackle was born in Gloucestershire in 1624 and died in Virginia in 1695. *VMHB*, 22 (1914), 84-5; Marshall, 50, 63, 106, 117.

<sup>140</sup> Neill connects John Robins, Charles City burgess and councilor, with Obedience Robins. A footnote appended to Obedience Robins mentions John Robinscs. father and son. Neill cites no evidence for family connection, but it has been suggested that these were uncle and cousin to Obedience. Richard (II) had a brother John, and chronology could accomodate a familial connection, but any relationship is speculative, pending verification. Edward Duffield Neill, *Virginia Carolorum* (Albany, 1886), 158.

<sup>141</sup> Ames II:165-6, 331.

<sup>142</sup> Marshall, 8, 11, 21, 24-5, 33, 45.

<sup>143</sup> Ames II:158.

<sup>144</sup> Ames I:44, 119, 169; II:243, 392-3.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-7.

house and examine by oath and all Lawfull means what old Tobacco there is remaining in the Custodye of any person." Commissioners were to limit planting and burn excess, efforts towards "advancing the price of tobacco by Regulation," a continuing concern of colonial authorities.<sup>146</sup> Demands on county officials' time extended beyond court days. John Wilkins, commissioner since 1633, in February, 1645, "being sent for by the commissioners to come and sitt in Court, sent an Answer, by the undersheriffe; which was that hee had foresworne to sitt any more in Court therefore hee said hee would not come by reason whereof the Inhabitants doe suffer in Respect Court cannot bee held." Wilkins, absent from the bench but active in court business since August, 1643,<sup>147</sup> may well have determined to decline further honorary but onerous public positions.

In addition to commissioner's duties and associated tasks, Robins represented others at court. His exact role is unclear, when he guaranteed payment by Rowland Williams of two barrels of corn to William Bibby, in 1633. Five years later, he signed a formal recognizance with John Neale for the latter's appearance at James City Court. Robins and Mr. Major, perhaps the beleaguered churchwarden, arbitrated between Drew and Mountney. With Littleton, Neale and John Gookin, Robins arbitrated between ministers Eaton and Rosier in a dispute over tithes. In the 1640s, Robins acted for Mrs. Hanser, Ambrose Bennett, and Phillip Farrant, and successfully defended Richard Land in a suit brought by the attorney of Anne Littleton. Mrs. Littleton charged that Land had transported her servant Constantine Monahawten out of the colony. William Claiborne, present at this James City Court hearing, stated that he had transported Monohawten, clearing Land.<sup>148</sup> September 2, 1643, "Aries Top, Merchaunt of the Good Shipp Sancta Marie of Amsterdam . . . in my place and stand have put my welbelovd Freind Obedience Robins . . . gentleman to bee my true and lawfull Attorney."<sup>149</sup> If Robins ever acted for Top,

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-2, 106-8.

<sup>147</sup> Ames II:407, 297.

<sup>148</sup> Ames I:3, 121, 100; II:331; I:150; II:224, 310-11, 385. For a discussion of the use of arbitration in Accomack, see Ames I:vi-ix.

<sup>149</sup> Ames II:321-2. The voyage of the *Sancta Maria* was ill-fated. Governor Berkeley certified that she had met colonial customs requirements July 22, 1643. Ames II:296. Depositions in the Amsterdam City Archives of 1644 and 1645, from the captain of *Abraham's Offerande* and the first mate of *St. Jan Baptiste*, report that Captain Claes Florisz van Naarden of the *Sta Maria* sailed from Virginia October 16th, 1643, and arrived in Barbados "in the last part of the year. The said ship had suffered from heavy storms and bad weather in such a way . . . that the said skipper in order to save life and goods had been



no Virginia record remains, but a decade later, during the commonwealth period, Robins defended Dutch traders and residents of the Eastern Shore.<sup>150</sup>

Throughout his thirty-five years on the Eastern Shore, Robins effectively used the courts to further his private interests. Many disputed sums seem insignificant, and were computed in Virginia "currency," primarily pounds of "good and merchantable tobacco," but often barrels of corn.<sup>151</sup> In January and February of 1634/5, the court awarded Robins 24 pounds of tobacco from John Dennis and 500 pounds from William Berriman. Since Anthony Wills owed Berriman 1150 pounds, Robins's 500 pounds was attached from Wills's debt. A year later, three suits netted 80, 92, and 160 pounds of tobacco. In January, 1636/7, in preparation for his extended absence, Robins successfully brought four suits for 300, 581, 100, and 1046 pounds of tobacco.<sup>152</sup>

Robins rarely lost. Fellow commissioners and the poorest laborers paid. A difference over 6 1/2 bushels of corn led to a suit against fellow commissioner Charlton at James City Quarter Court. Robins entered actions against Argoll Yardley for 3000 pounds of tobacco and James Perreen for 40s sterling. Richard Jacobs paid a debt of £4 4s 6d and one hogshhead of "good and well Conditioned tobacco well and sufficiently pack't for the payment . . . unto the Assignees of Mr. Obedience Robins in England," with shipping and court costs. Robins collected 700 pounds of tobacco from Commissioner Stone, and a total of 1631 pounds of tobacco and 8s 6d from Florington Payne, Samuel Lucas, and Samuel Powell. For Powell, 825 pounds of tobacco was the price of freedom, to be paid "within six days or else to

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forced to seek land." Repairs could not be done in Barbados, and the undamaged tobacco was loaded into the *St. Jan Baptiste*, and delivered to Hamburg. Amsterdam City Archives, Notarial Archives, No. 1503/74, 1813/703v., Jan Kupp, trans., McPherson Library, Archives and Special Collections, University of Victoria, B. C., VA 24, 26.

<sup>150</sup> The January 1652/3 Northampton County Records include a communication from the commissioners to the governor and council in support of Dutch residents. The English-Dutch war led to seizure of ships in the Chesapeake, and a petition from Dutch Eastern Shore inhabitants requesting protection from violence. The commissioners attested that the Dutchmen "here behaved themselves like honest men and legal subjects to the government they live under." Obedience Robins's signature is the first of seven appended. *VMHB*, 5 (1897), 37.

<sup>151</sup> In 1637, one pound stripped tobacco equalled six pence. In 1639/40, the Assembly, faced with falling tobacco prices established a minimum price at three pence per pound for the previous year's crop, and twelve pence for the 1640 crop. Corn could be bought from Indians or neighboring colonies at 16 shillings per barrel, and exported only at less than 12 shillings. Hening I:225-7.

<sup>152</sup> Ames I:25-6; 44,49-50; 64-6.

remayne a servant as formerly he was." Masters commonly hired out servants, and Robins sued to collect "one and Forty shillings sterling monie . . . for the use of Thomas Dewin." Nicholas Hall testified that "hee heard Esawe Butterfield saye on his death bedd all his money he had given unto Mr Obediens Robins and all his clothes to Robert Merritt." Hall, Butterfield and Merritt are recorded in a 1640/1 list of forty persons transported by Robins. When John Andrews died at the "Dutch plantation," estate administrator Robins claimed to be the sole heir. Farmer Jones testified that "Mrs. Reyneberd came to her husband a little before [his] death desiringe to knowe what he would give her for her mayntenance hee answered that he had nothinge to dispose of, For the estate [was] all Mr. Robins, and until hee was satisfied, the said Mr. Reyneberd could give her nothinge." Occasionally, the court awarded destitute widows and orphans some items from an encumbered estate, but Mrs. Reyneberd's fate is unrecorded.<sup>153</sup> Robins's record of court actions is not exceptional; many of his contemporaries appeared more often, in part because of the nature of their business. The cumulative history of Robins's personal legal transactions conveys the impression of an exacting opponent, but one whose cautious and capable approach to finance minimized risk and the necessity for court resolutions.

Between 1637 and 1640, Edward Robins's presence on the Eastern Shore gives ambiguity to the transactions of "Mr." Robins. By 1641, Edward was dead, and Obedience's duties as administrator of his brother's estate added to his courtroom activity. When Edward Robins's former servant sued Obedience for the early release agreed upon by Edward and Elizabeth Charlton at Plymouth, a jury found that the agreement was never legally incorporated into John Coleman's indenture, and required him to serve out his time. Henry Boston was more fortunate. Two years later, in July of 1645, another jury found "that Edward Robins deceased agreed to give Henry Boston one year of his time." Robins paid all court costs and was ordered at the next crop to pay "three barrells of Corne and Cloathes according to the custome of the Country." Robins probably outfitted another freed servant when, as a Mr. Stafford's surety, he was

<sup>153</sup> Ames I:103; II:255, 204-5;133; 133, 137-8, 141; 54; Marshall, 33; Ames I:95. Outside of bequests, recorded examples of early 17th-century personal charity are rare. Colonial administrators met needs with taxes. Littleton, Robins, Stone, Roper, Douglas and Walker "voluntarily contributed each one a bushell of Corne," and ordered a levy of corn, tobacco and cow's milk for Dorothe Jones for keeping the child of James Ravis. Ames II:426.

ordered to pay Andrewe Bashawe "on Shuit of clothes, on pare shoes on pare of stockins and one shert."<sup>154</sup>

Robins was primarily a creditor. In a 1644 exception, "William Shrimpton of WhiteChurch . . . surviving Executor of the last Will and Testament of Dame Elizabeth Dale Widdow deceased, the Relict of Sir Thomas Dale Knight deceased," lists Robins, Littleton and Yardley among others for "All such Somme and Sommes of money as they and every or any of them doe owe," Yardley and Littleton acknowledged debts to the estate dating to the dispersal of Lady Dale's cattle, but the extent of Robins's indebtedness, if any, is not specified. Robins owed the estate of Daniel Cugley 110 pounds tobacco for two hogs, two hen turkeys and a cock, a goose and a gander. This debt is included in an account following an "outcry," or auction, and there is no suggestion that Robins was delinquent in payment. Through at least 1645, the court never resorts to awarding "execution," or the seizure of property to satisfy a creditor, against Robins. Even when "a steere going amongst the cattle of Mr. Robins and belonginge to Mr. Barnaby" bore the "marke of Mr. Robins cattle," the court ordered the animal returned to Barnaby, "hee payeing unto Mr. Robins for the keepinge thereof."<sup>155</sup>

Suits brought, decisions rendered and agreements recorded offer glimpses of the multiple enterprises, large and small, which supported a colonial Virginia household. Obedience Robins and John Wilkins contracted with Anthony Linny to "build sett upp and finish a Wyndemill within the County of Accomack for their use." The two neighbors and fellow commissioners agreed to pay Linny £220 and 20 barrels of Indian corn, and to provide all necessary iron. Linny received an advance of £100 and, "in regard of Martallity sakk," pledged his "whole Estate and goods moveable and immoveable."<sup>156</sup> In 1621, the Virginia Company's "Instructions to Governor Wyatt" included, "to build water-mills."<sup>157</sup> Water mills presented difficulties in tidewater Virginia or the Eastern Shore, but the same year George

<sup>154</sup> Ames II:85-6, 90-1, 140-1, 260-2, 288-9, 453; 228-9; 432, 453; I:18. Bashawe was transported by Court Clerk Henry Bagwell, whose goods and one servant were seized by Stafferton, who had since left Accomack. A I:148, 16.

<sup>155</sup> Ames II:347,409; 338-348; 114; I:107, 110.

<sup>156</sup> Ames II:154-5.

<sup>157</sup> Henning I:115.

Yeardley built a windmill at Flowerdeew Hundred.<sup>158</sup> There are no other references to Eastern Shore windmills before 1645, and no doubt Robins and Wilkins expected generous returns on their investment. To a Northamptonshire native, windmills were familiar structures. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, English cartographer Speed commented on the numbers of windmills found in that county, and included one in an inset map of the city of Peterborough.<sup>159</sup> In a mid-sixteenth-century map of Byfield and Chipping Warden, an imposing windmill dominates the landscape, dwarfing five churches.<sup>160</sup> Unfortunately, "mortality" proved a factor, and Linny never finished the windmill. He signed the contract March 1, 1641/2, but by May 9, the court recorded the "the estate of Anthony Linny Millwright deceased doth stand engaged unto Henry Waldron doctor of Physick . . . in consideracon of Physick Administered . . . the visitation of his last illness." Elinor Linny, relict, retained a few household furnishings and relinquished the rest of the estate. Robins and Wilkins assumed administration, produced an inventory, paid debts to Mrs. Claiborne and Capt. William Hawley, and perhaps recouped losses with the acquisition of Linny's four servants and tools.<sup>161</sup>

Eastern Shore communication and trade depended on boats. Ketches, canoes, shallops and pinnaces transported men and goods along creeks and across the Chesapeake. Captain Stone, John Howe, William Claiborne and Joris Hack owned pinnaces. Marylanders made off with Claiborne's *Longtaylor* and her crew, and Howe's *Beardless John* was newly built when he died. Hack's wife, Anna bought the *Fortune* for 1,000 guilders in 1652. John Neale sold a "pinnaas" to Littleton and Burdick.<sup>162</sup> Robins owned boats. In February, 1643/4, the court ordered William Stevens to "deliver the said shallop of 26 foote by the Keclc with Masts oars and yards correspondent," which were "longe since" overdue, to the "detriment and dammage" of Mr. Robins. Stevens eventually delivered the boat, but a year later, the court appointed William Berry and James Bruce arbiters to "end and determyne of all differences"

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<sup>158</sup> James Deetz, *Flowerdeew Hundred: The Archaeology of a Virginia Plantation, 1619-1864* (Charlottesville, 1993), 25. Turman describes extant remains of mill ponds, and government encouragement and specifications for water mills. Turman, 67-8.

<sup>159</sup> Speed, 133-6.

<sup>160</sup> P. D. A. Harvey, *Maps in Tudor England* (Chicago, 1993), 105.

<sup>161</sup> Ames II:167-8; 181, 210, 244.

<sup>162</sup> Ames II:196, 195; I 122; II 179-80; I, 112, 122; Whitelaw, 685; Ames I:137-8.

between Robins and Stevens "concerning workmanship of Boates."<sup>163</sup> Robins already owned the pinnace *Accomack*. In August of 1648, two servants went by boat to Robins's house for corn, and "put the said Boate on shoare att the stoare." They used but did not replace a rope, the mainstay of the *Accomack*, and were ordered to deliver a replacement. If Robins owned the *Accomack* in 1640, Ambrose Dixon and "some others" successfully brought suit "for thier service and Labour done and performed [on board the] Pinnace called the *Accomack*." The court ordered that wages be paid from the cargo lately arrived in that same boat, but did not name a defendant.<sup>164</sup>

Robins's riparian properties on Cherrystone Creek offered transportation and access to trade, and are recorded in court certifications of headrights and in patent books. A May court in 1639 certified that nine people, including Grace Robins and "Maragrett Watrs," "were transported at the proper Cost etc. of Mr. Obedience Robins." Both Grace and Margaret were in Virginia well before Robins, and Margaret was born at Elizabeth City. As heirs and assigns of Edward Robins, "ancient planter," Grace, Margaret and William each qualified for one hundred acres of land from the Virginia Company, provisions honored by royal governors. But the March 25, 1643 patent for five hundred acres includes Robins himself, for a total of ten persons transported, each, then, worth the standard fifty acres. A patent for 450 acres, recorded March 22, 1643 in Robins's name, lists nine persons, at least two of whom, Coleman and Boston, were servants of the deceased Edward Robins. In January of 1640/1, the court certified Robins's right to two thousand acres for transporting forty persons, but there is no other record of that patent. A final land patent, recorded in April, 1661, lists thirty persons for fifteen hundred acres.<sup>165</sup>

Land descriptions vary, but usually identify owners of adjacent land, and boundary creeks. Robins's five hundred acre patent records two parcels, and bounds including a branch of Cherrystone Creek, and lands of John Wilkins, Peter Taylor, and Robins himself. The patent for 450 acres notes contiguous lands of Samuel Scott, Peter Taylor, and Robins, and "the former grant of Cherristons." The

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<sup>163</sup> Ames II:327, 411-2.

<sup>164</sup> Ames II:306; 16. Dixon was a ship's carpenter. II:322.

<sup>165</sup> Ames I:145; Nugent, xxxvi, 224-5, 225, 401; Ames II:54-5; Nugent, 407.

final recorded patent places the fifteen hundred acre tract on "the south side of Anancock, being two necks of land, bounded entire by branches." Anancock, or Onancock, Creek is thirty miles north of Cherrystone Creek, or Cheriton Inlet. John Little registered a patent for one hundred acres "near Cheristone Creek, adjacent land commonly called the Companies land, the Secretaries Land, Lands of Mr Obedience Robbins & John Wilkins," in 1647. Two years earlier, Robins had attested to Little's right to the land.<sup>166</sup>

Landowners often reestablished titles. In 1643, Robins, John Major, and John Wilkins all recorded land "due by virtue of former patent." In September, 1640, the administration enjoined, "all Patentees lessees or others possessed of Landes should bringe in their Patentees leases or other evidences whereby such landes are or have been holden and enjoyed . . . with their Severall quantiytes dates and rentes Being in like manner certified." Obedience Robins held three parcels of one hundred, one hundred, and two hundred acres under patents granted to William Williams in 1622, Clement Delk in 1627, and John Howe in 1637, for a total yearly rent of 7s. Howe's patent for two hundred acres was dated December, 1637, and by January 2, 1637/8, Howe was dead. In a 1634 deposition, Howe mentioned Captain Delke, and Williams achieved only this single listing in Accomack court records. Robins bought the first two parcels, and "since possessed" the last, after the death or relocation of the original owners. These four hundred acres increase Robins's total acreage from the generally acknowledged 4,450 acres to 4,850 acres.<sup>167</sup>

Robins owned cattle and grew tobacco; he had a house and a storehouse on the shore, and boats, but the multiple uses to which he necessarily put his land can only be estimated from others' records and archaeological findings. In May, 1643, Robins leased twenty acres to boatwright William Stephens for five years. The terms indicate Robins's ideas of husbandry and land use. "Message" describes land including a house, and the description reiterates "housing and Ediffices thereon." Stephens had the right to "sell and use all such Timber" he might use in his trade. The lease agreement also specified that Stephens would make annual payments of "one hundred pounds of tobacco and Fower Capons att the

<sup>166</sup> Whitelaw, frontispiece map; Nugent, 170; Ames II:411.

<sup>167</sup> Nugent, 152; Ames II:14; I:96; II:16.

nativity of our Lord god and two dayes worke in Harvest," Further, Stephens promised "to Fence in all his Plantable ground to plant tenn Peere trees tenn Apple trees Tenn Cherry trees tenn peach trees (the said Mr. Robins Finding him stocks,) and protect them with fence. Stephens was to leave "all the Housing tennentable" at the end of five years. In December of 1641, Nathaniell Littleton leased Dutch immigrant Arent Corsen Stam a plantation "sixty Pole in Breadth and soe running in Length into the Woodes," for nine years, at an annual rent of fifty pounds of tobacco, and "two good Laying henns or Capons per Annum." The lease specifies that Corsen Stam "leave thereupon a good, and sufficient Tennantable house," probably yet to be built. Land was cheap, labor expensive. The Robins-Stephens lease states the amount of land in question, but does not locate the property. The Littleton-Corsen Stam lease is vague even by seventeenth-century standards of accuracy. In both leases, the emphasis lies in physical improvements accruing to the ultimate benefit of the landowner himself, rather than in the rents themselves.<sup>168</sup>

Historians credit Obedience Robins with the influence to rename Accomack after his English home. Act XIII of the Assembly of March, 1642/3, "enacted and confirmed that the plantation and county now known by the name of Achommack shall be known and called by the county of North'ton." The same act changed Charles River to York County, and Warwick River to Warwick. The change of name had already been effected when Phillip Taylor and Edmond Scarbrough represented Northampton in that Assembly. The preceding June, Berkeley commissioned the monthly court at Northampton, granting Argoll Yeardley, Commander, and ten commissioners, any four of whom "whereof Argoll Yeardley, Mr. Obedience Robins and Capt. William Stone too bee always one," authority to hear suits and controversies. Three months earlier, Berkeley appointed Edwin Conaway to the clerk's position for the county court of Accomack. It was also in March of 1641/2, that Accomack elected John Neale and Obedience Robins to the Assembly. Hening does not list burgesses or include Assembly proceedings for 1641/2, but the action to Anglicize Accomack's name must have originated during Robins's and Neale's

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<sup>168</sup> Ames II:272-3; 48-9. In April of 1635, two men "made a Bargine for the plantation for 150 lbs. of tobacco per yeere," but the acreage and "bargine," whether for lease or sale, are not specified. Ames I:32.

tenure in that session. Of seven sitting Accomack court commissioners in March, 1641/2, at least three, Robins, Neale, and William Stone, had Northamptonshire antecedents. Replacement of Indian place names with English names was an on-going process; Warrosquoyacke became Isle of Wight in 1637 and Cheseake Parish became Hampton in 1642/3, while Upper Norfolk, changed to Nansimum in 1645/6, is an exception. In 1663, the vast area of Northampton County, encompassing the entire Eastern Shore from Cape Charles to the Maryland boundary, was divided, the northern portion becoming once again, Accomack. Robins demonstrated nostalgia for Northamptonshire when he called land "Buckby," and appreciation for Virginia when he named his pinnace *Accomack*. The change from Accomack to Northampton must have pleased him, but it is likely that he, Neale and Stone together influenced that choice.<sup>169</sup>

By mid-century, Obedience Robins was a leader in Eastern Shore politics, a substantial landowner, planter and entrepreneur, and a force to be reckoned with in colonial courtrooms. The advent of commonwealth government, with attendant uncertainties and likelihood of change, threatened Virginians' recently structured county hierarchies. During the English Civil War, colonial opinion was divided but, officially, Virginians maintained their loyalty to Charles I and his representative, Governor Berkeley, capitulating to Parliament's naval force only in March 1651/2. In 1644, de Vries had declared "the governor and all the people of the country were in favor of the King."<sup>170</sup> A year earlier, William Roper denied "a Rumor that there was a healethe druncke Att the house of Mrs. Alice Burdett Widdow To the damnation of Pymms God and the Confusion of the Parliament." The sentiments expressed followed the official stance. That the incident appears in court records may reflect religious, not political concerns. Open hostilities flared. De Vries reported two London ships of the parliamentary persuasion prevented from loading tobacco by a twelve-gun flyboat, and forced to return empty. Governor Calvert and Marylanders also remained loyal, but opportunists advanced property claims under political pretexts. In 1644, William Claiborne captured Kent Island, in which he had a longstanding interest. At the same

<sup>169</sup> Hening II:249, 239; Ames II:176-7, 141 n. 16; Hening II:230, Ames II:138, 163, 170, 182; Hening II:xlvii, 251, 321; Ames II:xvi, 306.

<sup>170</sup> de Vries, 185-6.



time, Richard Ingle attacked St. Mary's. Ingle was a sea captain and merchant, also described as "pirate" and "rebel."<sup>171</sup> On board ship in the summer of 1643, Ingle told Argoll Yardley and his brother Francis, "All those that are of the Kings side are Rattleheads." When Yardley tried to arrest him, Ingle threatened the Commander of Accomack with a cutlass, ordered him off the ship, and later bragged about the incident. By 1643, Ingle commanded the *Reformation*, definitely a "London," or Parliament ship, and William Munns questioned the legality of loading tobacco in her in the face of a proclamation forbidding such trade. Munns "went to Mr Obediencie Robins and Asked his Advice, and hee Advised this deponent to pay the sayde Ingle his tobacco saying god forbidde wee should Refuse to pay Turks or Jew for what we have Received." While Robins clearly had no sympathy with Ingle, neither did he advocate citing government regulation to excuse a just debt. His choice of epithets equates Ingle, a contentious supporter of Parliament, with sub-human blasphemers beyond the bounds of society. If Robins supported Parliament, he was singularly circumspect.<sup>172</sup>

Paradoxically, authorities charged royalist James Neale, Grace Robins's Maryland cousin, with aiding Ingle's 1643 escape from custody. According to a 1666 petition to the Lord Proprietary of Maryland requesting naturalization of his foreign-born children, Neale served Charles II and the Duke of York in Spain, Portugal and Holland during the commonwealth period. Maryland authorities arrested Ingle on several charges of treason, including flouting Yardley's command at Accomack, inciting rebellion in Gravesend, Kent, and slandering Prince Rupert on the Potomac. Any collusion between Ingle and Neale seems unlikely, but His Lordship's Attorney General charged Edward Packer, sheriff of

<sup>171</sup> Ames II:297. John Pym was an outspoken critic of Charles I and leader of parliamentary opposition to the king and Laud. Kenneth O. Morgan, *The Oxford History of England* (Oxford, 1988), 359-61; De Vries, *ibid.*; C. M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History*, II (New Haven: 1964), 308-9; Edward Ingle, "Captain Richard Ingle, the Maryland 'Pirate and Rebel,' 1642-1653," *A Paper Read Before the Maryland Historical Society May 12th, 1884* (Baltimore, 1884), 53. Ingle admits that his ancestor's case is weak, and resorts to quoting Jefferson: "I hold it that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical."

<sup>172</sup> Ingle continued to trade in Virginia. February 6, 1644/5, Yeardeley recorded that "he did aquit and discharge Richard Ingle of and from all manner of debts suites and controversies From the beginning of the World to this present day." Ingle and Yeardeley had earlier business dealings, and Yeardeley had shipped tobacco on Ingle's ship *Ellinor* in 1642. Ames II:269-70, 304-5, 437, 162, 405-6; See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), 165-167, for seventeenth-century European views of "the other," particularly non-Christians.

St. Mary's County, James Neale, and others with aiding Ingle's escape. Allegedly, Neale took custody of the prisoner from the sheriff, accompanied him to his ship, and effected his escape, injuring guards in the process. Neale was acquitted, and despite detailed charges, counter-charges, and rulings, his role, interest and degree of involvement remain uncertain.<sup>173</sup> Neale was a merchant, and interest can override politics. Similarly, Robins's dismissal of Ingle does not eliminate the possibility of parliamentary sympathies. Personalities can also override politics. That Maryland authorities accused Neale, indisputably royalist, of aiding the same aggressive round-head soundly denounced by Obedience Robins, is fair warning against labels and related assumptions. Robins's response to Ingles does not negate his long-standing reputation as a leading non-conformist and commonwealth man; it does suggest that colonial interests could outweigh political and religious struggles in England.

The first act of the Virginia Burgesses at a Grand Assembly, October 10, 1649, warned colonists against dishonoring the memory, questioning divine right or the succession, or proposing change in government of "the late most excellent and now undoubtedly sainted king." No burgesses from Northampton attended, and the names of the governor and council do not precede the list of participants. March 12, 1651/2, three commissioners of the council of state for the Commonwealth signed sets of sixteen and eleven articles for the surrendering of the plantation of Virginia to commonwealth rule. The first sixteen dealt with continuation of existing laws and practices, including use of the *Book of Common Prayer*, and convention of assemblies. The second set protects persons and property of the surrendering governor and council. A final act grants "indemnity and oblivion to all the inhabitants of this colony from all works, actions or writings that have been spoken, acted, or writt against the parliament or common wealth of England or any other person from the beginning of the world to this daye." In the face of Parliament's fleet, Virginia burgesses surrendered, after "long and serious debate, and in sad contemplation of the greate miseries and certaine destruction, which were soe nearly hovering over this whole country."<sup>174</sup>

<sup>173</sup> *Archives of Maryland* II, 89-91; IV, 231-8, 246-7, 252-8.

<sup>174</sup> *Hening* II:359; 363-368.

New Year's Day, March 25, 1651, Eastern Shore residents engaged and promised "to be true and faithful to the Commonwealth of England as it is now established without King or House of Lords." Commissioners Nathaniel Littleton, Obedience Robins, Edmund Scarborough, Edward Douglas and Argoll Yardley head the list of seventy-four names. Officials registered more pledges five days later, when the county court met, and Northampton elected a new sheriff and burgesses. Voters named William Waters, Robins's step-son, sheriff, and Robins, Scarborough, Thomas Johnson, William Jones, Anthony Hoskins and Ralph Barloe, burgesses. After debate, Northampton freemen agreed to protest imposition of a poll tax, "conceiving them selves noe waye ingaged unto, for that they had noe Burgesses nor vote in the Constituting of such paymente." Sheriff Waters was to collect the tax of 46 pounds of tobacco on every titheable person and store it pending outcome of the protest, although the written protest itself counters those instructions. Northampton County residents charged the governor with failure to notify the sheriff to call elections since 1647, with one exception. Signatures of Stephen Charlton, Levyn Denwood, John Nuthall, William Whittington, John Ellis and Stephen Horsey represented all the freemen, who sent an exceptionally large group of burgesses to carry their protest and underline their point. Littleton's and Yardley's names are conspicuously absent, but at the April 30 Assembly, both were appointed to the governor's council. There is no evidence that any of Northampton's leaders protested the change to commonwealth government. They maintained leadership on the Eastern Shore, and continued active participants in colonial government at Jamestown.<sup>175</sup>

If the representatives from Northampton presented their county's protest against the poll tax, any response from the Assembly went unrecorded. Five of the six elected burgesses attended the April Assembly, but seven months later, only "Left. Coll Robins and Mr. Step. Charlton" represented the Eastern Shore at the November Assembly.<sup>176</sup> Robins served on governors' councils of March, 1655,

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<sup>175</sup> Marshall, 34-5; N. C. O. 4:66, quoted in Elizabeth S. Haight, "The Northampton Protest of 1652: A Petition to the General Assembly from the Inhabitants of Virginia's Eastern Shore," *American Journal of Legal History*, 28 (1984), 364; *Ibid.*, 375; Hening II:371-2. May 10, 1651, the county court appointed eight captains for defense and safety, including Robins, Charleton, and William Andrews.

<sup>176</sup> "Northampton County Records in the Seventeenth Century," *VMHB* 5, (1897), 34.

<sup>176</sup> Hening II:370-4. A March, 1658 proposition to limit burgesses to two per county and limit compensation from public levies, was voted down. Hening II:498.

March, 1657/8, April, 1658, and finally, March of 1660. The council of 1660 served Governor Sir William Berkeley, elected by the Assembly to the position he had vacated eight years earlier. The first act of this Assembly placed the supreme power of the government in the burgesses, "there being in England noe resident absolute and gen'll confessed power." The Assembly would issue all writs, "until such a comand and comission come out of England as shall be by the Assembly adjudged lawfull." Virginians acknowledged "obedience to his Highnesse Richard, Lord Protector," but retained reservations. Act IV of the 1660 Assembly placed government in the representatives of the people.<sup>177</sup> Reinstatement of Berkeley before the Stuart restoration was a clear statement of continuity in Virginia political power, irrespective of the resolution of English uncertainties.

During the Commonwealth period, Robins also served on the councils of elected governors Edward Diggs and Samuel Matthews, advancing from burgess and "Major" in 1652, to Councilor and "Left. Coll." and finally, "Coll." So, too, did he advance in the order of listings, from 12th of 14 in 1655, to 5th of 12 in 1657/8, and 6th of 12 in 1659/60. Again, longevity and seniority were factors. Nathaniel Littleton died in 1654, and Argoll Yardley in 1655. Both had early "achieved the pinnacle of colonial prominence . . . being appointed to the Virginia Council," Yardley in 1639, and Littleton in 1641. Seven men listed above Robins in 1655 were no longer councilors in 1657/8: Matthews advanced to become governor, and the four names preceeding Robins's—West, Pettus, Bernard and Dew—held the same relative positions in both lists. Virginians observed precedence at both the county and colonial levels of government.<sup>178</sup>

When Governor Samuel Matthews and his Council, including Claiborne, Robins and Nathaniel Bacon, dismissed the Assembly on April 1, 1658, the burgesses refused, declaring "the supreme power of this country of Virginia is by this Grand Assembly declared to be resident in the Burgesses, the representatives of the people." The Assembly had just completed a review and revision of all colonial

<sup>177</sup> Hening II:408, 432, 499, 505, 530, 510, 531.

<sup>178</sup> Hening II:408, 432, 370, 374, 408, 432, 526. Sitting burgesses acted to protect their offices in Act CXXXI, of March, 1657/8, providing "that if a new Burgess should be chosen for any place in stead of any of the present Burgesses now bound out of the country, if the present Burgesse returne before the next session, then the new election to be void." Hening II:493-4; Ames II:xi-xii.

acts and laws, and Act CXXXI *For the Adjournment of the Assembly*, made Matthews's contested dismissal redundant. Refusal to honor a dismissal they themselves had just enacted seems a mercurial assertion of power. The assembly ordered Colonel William Claiborne, "late secretarie of state, forthwith" to surrender colonial records to Speaker John Smith. On April 3, the burgesses, having made their point, readministered the oath of office to Matthews, and approved his appointments to the council. Claiborne, Pettus, Bernard, Robins, Walker and Reade were sworn, and seven more councilors were not. Beginning March 13, legislators reviewed and revised 131 colonial acts and laws and, by the end of the month, many burgesses welcomed dismissal by any authority, taking advantage of three separate opportunities to escape. A partially obliterated resolution of April 1st or 2nd states "that noe Burgesse . . . and if any shall depart, That he shall be censured as a person betraying the trust reposed in him by his country." So many departed prematurely that the clerk marked names of those who stayed long enough to be sworn for the following year's session with an "S." True to form, Robins was one of five councilors who remained, while six did not. In the waning years of the commonwealth, when the forms and direction of English government were problematic, the Virginia Assembly filled a void, insisting on allocating power pending instructions from a recognized English authority. The March 1657/8 Assembly stated, reiterated and jealously guarded assumed rights of appointment and legislation, convention and dismissal. In the process, members echoed sentiments expressed by proponents of regular English parliaments in years preceding the Civil War, including the provision for an Assembly "to beginn the tenth of March everie two yeares, reserving a power to the Governour to convene an Assembly sooner upon the intervencing of any important occasion." The Assembly did not condemn the council as a whole, "conceiveing that some persons of the present councill endeavour by setting up their own power to destroy the apparent power resident only in the burgesses." Actions or opinions of individual councilors went unrecorded, but Robins's position places him among those responsible for "the many lets and obstructions in the affaires of this Assembly."<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Hening II:503-5, 429, 500, 505, 502. A letter from Whitehall, September 17, 1657, announced the accession of Richard Cromwell and described Virginia's "condition and affaires whereof appearing under some unsettledness through the looseness of the government." The death of Oliver Cromwell prevented

Robins consistently supported authority, and maintained a presence within the framework of colonial institutions. When he obstructed church wardens in the collecting of tithes, his objections may have rested in religious principles, personal animosity towards Cotton, or simple disapproval of an additional tax burden. When he advised William Munns to fulfill a just debt to Ingles, despite a government proclamation prohibiting trade with London ships, he supported business ethics over regulation produced by the vagaries of distant war. Robins's own business dealings, preserved in public records, portray an individual of precise habit and ordered affairs. His contracts are specific. In an era and economy that depended upon credit and barter, Robins avoided debt, and expected others to fulfill their obligations promptly.

Robins arrived in Virginia with financial resources, education and health. Within two years, he had translated these advantages into a seat in the Assembly, the first of many public offices. Only later did he acquire family connections through marriage and immigration. Robinses of Long Buckby had experienced decades of prosperity that increased social status and expectations. Richard (II) Robins counted friends among substantial yeoman farmers and gentlemen newcomers to the county's manor houses. Obedience Robins brought expectations to Virginia, and during the formation of a colonial hierarchy, based his ascent in public office and land. Public office affected private business, and equally important, indicated social status. In England and in Virginia, Robinses accumulated land, another index of status.<sup>180</sup> What proportion of Obedience Robins's income derived directly from land, and how much he gained from divers enterprises, cannot be determined. Robins's enduring appreciation for land is evident in his final patent for fifteen hundred acres in 1661. He was sixty years old. This late investment demonstrates optimism both for the colony, and for his descendants' futures on the Eastern Shore.

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enactment of Parliamentary resolutions designed to remedy that unsettledness, but the assembly took the responsibility for Virginia's government throughout the Commonwealth period. Hening II:509-10.

<sup>180</sup> Yeardley held 3,700 acres; Stone, 5,250 by 1640; Burdett, 1550; William Roper only 150; and Stephen Charlton, 3,950. Ames II:xii-xiv. For comparisons of court commissioners' land holdings see Perry, 197 table, and discussion 194-200.

## CHAPTER IV

## LEGACY AND CONCLUSION

Like his father before him, Obedience Robins established working and social relationships with local gentry. Richard (II) formed associations with Thornton and Cartwright, newcomers to Northamptonshire manors. Obedience's fellow commissioners and burgesses, Littleton and Yardley, came relatively late to Virginia's Eastern Shore. When they arrived, Robins had a decade of experience. Burgess, commissioner and commander, he was a seasoned veteran of colonial politics and prospering in an economy based in agriculture and trade. Obedience and Richard (III) both shed their father's retention of the designation "yeoman," and adopted "Mr." and "Colonel." Neither Obedience nor Richard hesitated to resist perceived government infringement upon their rights. Both protested what they viewed as unwarranted taxation. Richard (III)'s servants protected his livestock and wagon from attachment to meet Charles I's ship-money subsidies. Their violent action reflected their master's views, later expressed in communications to the Council and Commons. The record of Obedience Robins's relationship with colonial government survives in greater detail. He tore warrants for tithes. He used colonial courts for self-aggrandizement. An Accomack-Northampton County court commissioner's seat, effectively exercised for thirty years, garnered authority, titles, and working and social connections on the Eastern Shore and across the Chesapeake among colonial Virginia's emergent *élite*. Robins rendered decisions, collected debts, formalized and enforced business agreements, controlled labor, and registered land holdings at monthly court meetings. Court meetings and attendant duties demanded sacrifice and dedication from commissioners, who concomitantly promoted their own interests, furthered by their familiarity with the parameters of colonial regulation. Local courts became effective instruments of government and of self-interest.

Robins also early associated himself with men of initiative and diversified approaches to economic survival, associations reinforced by his marriage to Grace Neale Waters. Edward Waters, John Neale and Obedience Robins had different backgrounds, but followed similar courses to establish themselves in a nascent colonial agricultural economy. Experience and continuing family connections probably account for the varying emphases each placed on tobacco, trade, and public service. Waters

profited from the early demand for Virginia tobacco. Neale and his Maryland cousin, primarily merchants, also provided essential labor. Robins, like his Northamptonshire forebears, accumulated land. All three held public office at county and colony levels, but Obedience Robins maintained the most consistent and highest level of public service.

Conscientious records maintained by the clerks of Accomack suggest Robins's wide-ranging activities. Not only court suits, but the preservation of contracts and incidental testimonies offer insights into one colonist's enterprise. He exploited his land according to location, building wharves and storehouses for his own use, and leasing riparian land and timber to boatwright William Stephens. With neighbor John Wilkins, he contracted to have Anthony Linney construct a windmill. Lease agreements specify improvements and maintenance of buildings, fencing, and permanent plantings. He raised poultry and livestock, and grazed others' cattle on his land. He planted corn and fruit trees. Tobacco provided credit and an established market system, but Robins, like his father and neighboring Northamptonshire farmers, hedged his bets, and diversified.<sup>1</sup> Richard (II) Robins's 1634 inventory lists sheep, cattle, oxen, horses, hogs, poultry and bees. His stores included bacon, butter and cheese, barley, rye and wheat in the barns, corn, peas, maslin and hay in the ground, and lumber. The farm had a kiln, salting troughs, a buttery and a cheese chamber. This equipment represents a very nearly self-sufficient household of parents, ten children and servants, but it also presents possibilities and suggests flexibility. Other Northamptonshire farmers sold wool, sheep, and mutton in Northampton and London, and Richard (II) Robins likely found markets for his farm products beyond Long Buckby parish.<sup>2</sup> He extended his land beyond the Long Buckby inheritance into neighboring parishes by lease and purchase.<sup>3</sup> Robins took at least two of his younger sons from an agriculturally diverse milieu and

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<sup>1</sup> H. P. R. Finberg, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: 1500-1640*. Vol. 4. (Cambridge, 1967), 676. Records of Sir Thomas Tresham of Rushton, from the 1590s, indicate annual rents of £1,000, but greater revenues from sales of wool and sheep, other livestock, and hides, hops, corn, cheese, lime timber and rabbits.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 644.

<sup>3</sup> Varieties of land tenures in early modern England bewildered knowledgeable contemporaries. Length and flexibility of terms, lack of standardized measurements, and the coexistence of common and enclosed arable or pasture land belies the myth of simple, yeomen farmers responding to seasonal cycles in a paternalistic, Elizabethan society. Crop rotation, seed selection and inter-regional distribution, and



equipped them with education and a trade. Obedience exploited both his education and his farming background. If he succumbed to the lure of the "stinking weed" and quick profit, he had his father's example and the practical adaptability to diversify for the long haul.

Grace and Obedience Robins had five children who survived to adulthood. Each of the three daughters and John, the elder son, married second-generation Virginians, and "married well" in terms of land, status, or both. The younger son, Obedience, probably did not marry. Dorothy married first "Montjoy Evelyn, Gent.," who patented 650 acres in James City County in 1651.<sup>4</sup> They had at least one son, George, dead by 1679, who left horses to each of his Andrews half-siblings and heifers to three Robins cousins. Dorothy then married William (II) Andrews, also a second-generation colonist whose father, an "ancient planter," arrived in Virginia before 1616. On the Eastern Shore since 1623, William (I) Andrews became a court commissioner in 1633. The senior Andrews patented three hundred acres in two parcels in 1635, and 100 acres in 1629. His son patented fifteen hundred acres in 1654, the year of his father's death, and renewed that patent in 1663, adding five hundred acres in 1665. Major William Andrews, Gent., Northampton County sheriff in 1655 and burgess in 1663, died in 1673, leaving to his "son-in-law George Evelin when 21 the estate set apart for him at the time I was married to his mother . . . I have made use of some of his animals to prevent the wolves from getting them all." Dorothy Robins survived him, and Andrews named her brother and half-brother, John Robins and William Waters, to oversee the will.<sup>5</sup>

Mary Robins married John Savage, son of ancient planter Thomas Savage, thirteen years old when he came to Virginia in 1607, on the *John and Francis*.<sup>6</sup> Savage's mother, Hannah, held fifty acres of Eastern Shore land in her own right, "Savage's Choice," patented in 1627. "Thomas Savage, Carpenter," recorded a twenty-one-year lease of ten acres in 1632, and was dead by 1633. In 1635, the

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manuring were standard practices, and from the sixteenth-century, manuals of husbandry offered advice.

<sup>4</sup> Nugent, 401.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall, 110; Nugent, xxxiii; Amcs II:xiii; Nugent, 13, 23, 300, 483,534; W. G. Stanard, "Virginia Land Patents," *VMHB*, 2 (1894), 68-9; Marshall, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Nugent, xxix; Stanard, *VMHB*, 1 (1894), 443-4.

"relict of Ensigne Thomas Savage, late of Accomack, planter," patented an undetermined area of land "graunted unto her husband by the King of the Eastern shoare as by deed calling himselfe Esmý Shichans." Savage did not achieve salaried public office, but served the colony as interpreter. John Pory commended him in a 1624 letter to the Virginia Company, stating he "with much honestie and successe served the publique, without any publique recompense, yet had an arrow shot through his body in their service."<sup>7</sup> Hannah Savage renewed this patent in the name of John Savage. She married and survived Daniel Cugley, but in May, 1641, on her death bed, left "her sonne the heyer and Orphant of Ensigne Savage," then seventeen, under the guardianship of John Webster. In 1644/5, the court ordered Webster to pay quit rent to Claiborne for 4000 acres of young Savage's land. Early fiscal and moral supervision may have been lax, but Captain John Savage represented Northampton in the assembly for a decade between 1666 and 1676, and assumed the title "gentleman" when he wrote his will in 1678. He left 3700 acres to be divided among young children, John, Elkington and Mary, all "to be put to school for five years," and son Thomas. He mentions married daughters Susanna Kendall and Grace Corbin, and left "To my wife Mary Savage 20s or 200# t." She was his second wife; Ann Elkington, his first. According to Grace Robins's 1682/3 will, Mary then married William Coudrey, listed by Savage as a son-in-law holding a one-hundred acre plantation for life.<sup>8</sup>

Two of Obedience and Grace's children married Littletons. March 7, 1661/2, "Mrs Frances Robins married Mr Edward Littleton," and John Robins married Easter or Heaster Littleton. A study of marriages in Plymouth Colony found a pattern of siblings—brother and sister—marrying siblings of another family between 1660 and 1760. First-generation colonists, and later eighteenth-century Americans followed English marriage patterns. Multiple marriages between two families "would strengthen the solidarity of the local community, and may have contributed, however slightly, to social

<sup>7</sup> Nugent, 9, 23, 19; Ames I:35; Nugent, 30; Kingsbury, IV:2,76.

<sup>8</sup> Ames II:86; 400. James Bruce's 1643 deposition described a John Savage "doing his good will" upon Richard Hudson's girl behind a tree. "Presently the sayde Savage lay down on one side and sayde Goodman Bruce I am weary, the ground is hard I can worke noe longer." Ames II:291-2; Stanard, *ibid.*; Marshall, 103-4, 114, 104.

isolation.<sup>9</sup> The Littletons and Yardleys constituted Eastern Shore aristocracy. Both Littleton and Yardley established residence in Accomack in the later 1630s, and preempted leadership of the county court over long-term commissioners such as Robins, by virtue of lineage. Yardley, son of former colonial governor George Yardley, had a short pedigree of one generation. Edward (II) and Heaster Littleton's claim to genteel status, secure in the paternal line, doubled with their mother's family. Anne Southey Harmer Littleton was the only surviving child of Henry Southey who, in 1622, brought a wife, six children, and ten servants to take up a patent for nine-hundred acres issued by the Virginia Company. Ann Littleton's 1656 will divides property among three young children, and lists possessions representing prosperity and a high standard of living. Heaster received six Negroes, one a personal servant, from a human inventory including twenty-one Negro, one English, and three Irish servants. She inherited jewelry, clothing and household linens, six cows and one ewe, "to be added unto that stock of Cattle, Sheepe & Horses her father . . . gave her by Deede of gift."<sup>10</sup> Two 1660s marriages of a second-generation Robins brother and sister to Littleton siblings followed the Plymouth pattern, served similar purposes, and effectively underlined the successes of Obedience Robins's colonial career.

John Robins followed his father's example of public service, filling both civil and military offices. Captain and major, justice, vestryman and burgess, John Robins's career spanned four decades.<sup>11</sup> His 1709 will left 4108 acres of Virginia and Maryland land and two parcels on Chincoteague Island to be divided among five sons. He distributed one white and thirteen Negro servants among his sons and three daughters. Two servants, "my man and woman George Blake and Hannah," cared for stock at "Jingoteage Island," and their future is not specified. Hannah, probably a

<sup>9</sup> Anne Yentsch, "Understanding Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Colonial Families: An Experiment in Historical Ethnography" (M. A. thesis, Brown University, 1975), cited in James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York, 1977), 127.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 64; Littleton, "a gentleman of the Earl of Southampton's Company in the Low Countries, 1625," was a son of Sir Edward Littleton, chief justice of North Wales. Ames II:xi; Kingsbury I:575, 584; Nora Miller Turman and Mark C. Lewis, "The Will of Ann Littleton of Northampton County, Virginia, 1656," *VMHB*, 75 (1967), 11-21; Marshall, 48.

<sup>11</sup> "Public Officers in Virginia, 1680, Northampton County," *VMHB* 1 (1894), 230, 251; "Public Officers in Virginia, 1702, 1714," *Ibid.*, (1894), 370; Thomas B. Robertson, "Hungars Church, Northampton County, Virginia," *VMHB* 4 (1905), 316-17.

Negro, had at least two children, "mallatto girl Sarrah" and Mallatto boy Charles," given to Obedience and Edward. John Robins's legacies include 46 pounds of pewter, a silver bowl and salt, eighteen silver spoons, twelve of them marked "JER," silver toothpicks, a pearl necklace, linens, grandmother Ann Littleton's cedar box, and "12 caine chairs that came from Mr Wise Marchant in London." From her mother, Heaster Littleton Robins inherited "one silver beaker & sixe silver spoones (with my name on them)." Heaster and John Robins had eight children. Their eldest son, also John, willed a silver beaker and twelve silver spoons in 1740. Each of John and Heaster's sons inherited land and servants or slaves, and daughters and grandchildren received servants and family heirlooms.<sup>12</sup> John Robins increased his inheritance through marriage, public office, and further acquisition of lands.

Edward Littleton died three years after his marriage to Francis Robins, leaving her with an infant, Grace, and an unborn child. There is no evidence that either child survived, or that Frances retained any rights to Littleton properties. Frances then married Francis Pigott, but she was dead when his will referred to brothers-in law John Robins and William Waters in 1684/5. Captain Pigott, Gent., "about to take a long and tedious voyage," left 750 acres, a plantation and eight Negroes, including one yet to be born, to four children by two wives. He left books, "except Greek and Latin," to three sons. Pigott served as a court commissioner, bought land from John Robins, and referred to "my friend and loving countryman" William Waters in his will.<sup>13</sup>

Obedience was still alive when Francis married Edward Littleton. Heaster Littleton, only fourteen when her brother married, probably married John Robins later. Three of Obedience's children married landed Virginia gentry whose claims to gentle status rested firmly in English soil. Mountjoy Evelyn and Edward Littleton were sons of younger sons who emigrated to Virginia. They, Savage and William Andrews were all second-generation Virginians. The Andrews and Savage families owned land near Robins holdings. Immigrants Obedience Robins, Edward (I) Littleton and William (I)

<sup>12</sup> Turman, 20; Marshall, 306-7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-4; "Virginia Council Journals 1726-1753," *VMHB*, 32 (1924), 64. "The Randolph Manuscript," *VMHB*, 18 (1910), 21-22.

Andrews served together on the county court, and all three were elected burgesses. Their children followed similar courses. Ensign or carpenter Thomas Savage's son inherited his father's large land holdings and progressed from plain John, to captain and gentleman.

Like his Robins half-siblings, William Waters prospered. He inherited his father's Virginia lands, and a third of "all goods &c in England, Virginia, Ireland or elsewhere," to be sold with the advice of John Waters. In the early 1640s, when Waters incurred a debt to his cousins Pemell and James Neale, he was in London and purportedly, Yorkshire, where his uncle John Waters may still have lived at Middleham.<sup>14</sup> As early as 1643, court notes termed deponent Waters "gentleman." In 1645 he swore an affidavit on Wilkins and Weede's shipping, and witnessed that Weede's tobacco brought £12 2*s* 8*d* in Hamburg. He also acted for the estate of Luke Stubbing. Sometime after 1650, Waters married widow Margarett Clark. March 30, 1650, Waters received a license to keep an ordinary or victualing house at Nussawattocks." The court required that he maintain good order, particularly during court meetings. In 1652, Northampton County elected Waters high sheriff, and Obedience Robins stood surety for his performance. In 1656, the council appointed him major of militia and a county commissioner of the quorum. Waters served as Burgess for Northampton in the assembly of November, 1654, and again in the March, 1659-60 session, when his stepfather Obedience Robins was a member of the council. Waters witnessed the agreement between Robins and Dutch merchant Aries Topp, and represented John Wilkins, Argoll Yardley and Robins on a trading journey to the West Indies and Europe.<sup>15</sup> Waters owned Eastern Shore land and held office, but merchant interests apparently dominated his early career, and remained important throughout his life. Robins maintained a supportive relationship with his step-son, and Waters's relationships with his half-siblings remained one of trust and mutual esteem throughout their lives.

<sup>14</sup> Perry suggests that Waters may have spent his childhood in England. 156.

<sup>15</sup> Ames II:270, 433, 435; Marshall, 24; Perry, 85; Stanard, ed., "Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents," *VMHB* 1 (1894), 179n.; Ames II, 28; "Northampton County Records in the Seventeenth Century," *VMHB* 5 (July, 1899), 34-35. Perry, 157-8.

That Obedience Robins failed to write a will counters the cumulative evidence of a lifetime of conscientious attention to detail in finances, business contracts and deeds, and administration of others' wills. In his seventh decade, an achievement in itself, and with the additional warning of a serious illness, Robins's failure to direct the disposition of an extensive estate, painstakingly crafted and increased by a final patent for 1500 acres as late as 1660, is inexplicable. An inventory survives, labeled "of the Estate of Coll. Obedience Robins and left by Mrs Grace Robins lately deceased and appraised the 19th March 1682[3]." Endorsed 31 May, when Captain John Robins presented it in open court, the inventory lists kitchen equipment, bedding, assorted household items, and furniture. Twenty years after Obedience Robins's death, the comparative paucity of goods suggests that Grace Robins had already disposed of most of her widow's share and any heirlooms. The appraisers arrived at an evaluation of 17,379 pounds of tobacco. Livestock—cows, heifers, a bull, "twelve olde sheepe & three lambe"—totaled 7,280 pounds. "One Negro called Tony," at 2500 pounds, was the most valuable single item in the inventory. The absence of any farm equipment, buildings or boats belies the heading, and represents a fraction of the estate of Obedience Robins.<sup>16</sup>

December 30, 1662, William Waters and William Andrews filed a non-cupative will for Colonel Obedience Robins. Major Waters, Robins's stepson, and Captain Andrews, husband of Robins's eldest daughter, stated that "some years since the testator was very sick, his wish was that his estate should be divided by his wife and children. And that his wife, the mother of this deponent, was to have the use of his estate for life, and that her younger son Obedience Robins was to have the 900 acres on the south part of his dividend at the seaboard side, part of which John Daniell now dwells on. Also he desired that this deponent and his brother-in-law William Andrews would assist our mother to see his will performed." Waters, 39, and Andrews, 30, witnessed. There is no mention of the elder son, John, but neither is there indication that Waters and Andrews incurred any resentment among family members by what could have been seen as usurpation of John Robins's rightful role in administering the estate. On the contrary, the surviving public records demonstrate enduring bonds of esteem and

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<sup>16</sup> Northampton County Court Records. (Wills) Order Book 12, 1683-1689, Rcd 27, 7-8.

concern between Grace Robins's two children by Edward Waters and five by Obedience Robins continuing into third and fourth generations. In June of 1663, John Robins, "ye apparent heire of Coll. Robins, Esq.," with his mother, acknowledged consent to the 1659 sale of 300 acres of the plantation called Buckby to John Daniell.<sup>17</sup> Robins children and grandchildren incorporated in-laws from second and third marriages, stepchildren, half-siblings and nieces and nephews into a densely-woven, sometimes impenetrable family fabric spreading over the Eastern Shore and beyond. When Frances Robins's second husband, Francis Pigott, wrote his will, he left a substantial estate to four young children. He also mentioned brothers-in-law John Robins, in conjunction with the transfer of land, and William Waters, overseer of the will and recipient of "my pacing horse called Doctor." The 1673 will of Major William Andrews, second husband of Dorothy Robins, provided for her son George Eveling, and his daughter Elizabeth Reverdy, by Elizabeth Traveller. Brothers-in-law William Waters and John Robins are named overseers of the estate left to William and Dorothy's young children, William, Obedience, John, Robert, Grace and Susanna. Together "Lt. Col. Waters & Mr Robins" owned 4000 acres "surveyed and entred in the Office of Virginia and Pattedented that now fall in Maryland." John Robins was godfather to William (II) Waters's daughter Margaret, and William (II) Waters and John Savage witnessed John Robins's will.<sup>18</sup>

There is no record of a marriage or any offspring of Obedience Robins's younger son, Obedience. This son received nine hundred acres by his father's non-cupative will, and did not take an active role in county government. John, the elder son, named the second of his five sons Obedience, and the provisions written into John's 1707 will suggest that this son was in some way incapacitated. Land and Negroes are intended solely for his maintenance during his natural life. A 1709 codicil, when

<sup>17</sup> At least three generations of Robins heirs refer to three-hundred acres "formcrly leased to John Daniel," and later leased to others. None identifies any land as "the plantation called Buckby." Marshall, 184; 222; 306.

<sup>18</sup> Marshall, 70; The 1659 "sale" to John Daniell was actually a long-term lease. For a description of seventeenth-century Virginia land and inheritance practices, particularly primogeniture and entailment, see Holly Brewer, "Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia: 'Ancient Feudal Restraints' and Revolutionary Reform," *WMQ* 3d ser., 54 (1997), 307-346. Thomas Robins, typescript, n.p.; Marshall, 124; Archives of Maryland V, *Proceedings of the Council of Maryland, 1667-75*, ed. William Hand Browne (Baltimore, 1887), 43; Marshall, 87-88, 184-5.

John Robins, senior and junior were both ill, assigns Obedience's land to the younger Robins's wife Katherine, "she performing the conditions given my son John." In 1718, Littleton Robins willed one-fourth of his Accomack land "to my brother Obedience during his natural life and then to my three brothers." In 1739, John, junior, willed "to my brother Obedience a reasonable maintenance during his life to take care of him." No one expected this third-generation Obedience to survive, but he outlived four brothers and at least one sister. He wrote a will in 1731, leaving "my indulgent and loving brother John his land," and nieces and nephews livestock. A note on the document states that the will and a codicil were read to Robins. Blindness could account for his dependence. Both brothers died within a few months of each other in 1740, ending the sojourn of any Obedience Robins in Northampton County for at least the remainder of the eighteenth century. The persistence of the name Obedience among collateral families attests to the enduring reputation of the Northamptonshire native.<sup>19</sup>

The 1678 death of Richard (III) Robins in Northamptonshire effectively canceled Richard (I) Robins's century-old enjoiner that his lands "remain to kindred and the calling of the Robince for ever." Richard (III) wrote his own lengthy will. He included an unusually long preamble, detailed distribution of funds for the poor, continuing his father's annual £5 to the poor of Long Buckby, and mentioned previous division of his properties among four surviving daughters. His wife, Alice, two daughters, and his only son died before him, Dorothy and Mary in 1658, and Richard (IV) in 1663, the latter evidently without issue. For one hundred and fifty years, Richard Robins prospered in Long Buckby, but at the death of Richard (III), Robins was reduced to a given name among his descendants. When the antiquarian John Bridges collected Northamptonshire parish histories in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, no trace remained of four generations of Richard Robinses "decentlie buried in our usual place of burial in the p'ish church of Longe buckbye."<sup>20</sup> In Virginia, five sons and three

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 184-5, 222; 306; 307; Oldest daughter Dorothy and stepson William Waters named sons Obedience. Besides the original and the two Obedience Robinses who died without known issue, Marshall lists six other Obediences, 589.

<sup>20</sup> Greenall, 77; John Bridges recorded monumental inscriptions in Long Buckby parish church, including that of Robins son-in-law "Babington Bradley Gent. died Sept 1698 aged 55," and "Ann Bradley, wife of Mr. Robins Bradley died Dec 10, 1700," . . . "on common gravestones at the upper end of the north ile." II, 548.



daughters survived John Robins and Heaster Littleton—Obedience, Edward, Littleton, John, and Thomas, and Esther, Grace, and Elizabeth.

Although William Waters and Grace Robins filed Obedience Robins's non-cupative will December 30, 1662, the court record for a meeting in January, 1662/3 begins, "At a Court held for Northampton County the 26th of January 1662[3] Col. Ob: Robins, Esq." In an entry four pages earlier, also for January, the date is illegible, but again, "Col Obedience Robins, Esq." heads the list of commissioners in attendance. Robins headed the list of October 29, 1662 and that for the next meeting. Again the date is illegible, but it was probably the 30th. On the 29th, the court ordered "that Col Obedience Robins be paid 350# t," from the estate of William Davis.<sup>21</sup>

Obedience Robins is not included among commissioners listed December 31, 1662, the day after his wife and stepson filed a non-cupative will, but his name on two January courts is mystifying. Clerical error is possible, and instances have been cited, but the mistaken inclusion of a dead commissioner twice on session headings seems unlikely. Following monthly court meetings, clerks recorded depositions, contracts and other business, as it occurred, or time permitted. Court meeting notes begin where former business leaves off. It is the date and list of commissioners that herald a new session. Weather, illness, and duration made commissioners' attendance uncertain, so that clerks could not prepare headings in advance. Given the importance of precedence, and evidence of careful corrections to titles and ranks, it is unlikely that a successor would tolerate second billing. Robins's parentage, place of birth, and dates of birth and arrival in Virginia have long been confused, and none of the dates is yet fixed with precision. 1662 has long been accepted as the year of death; in Robins's case, another question mark adds consistency.

Many factors contributed to Obedience Robins's successes in Virginia. Although skills and education acquired in his rural Northamptonshire youth and a probable London apprenticeship served him well, ultimately good health and hard work enabled him to thrive in an unfamiliar and often hostile environment. Robins remained an Englishman, imposing Stuart order and institutions on the inherent

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<sup>21</sup> Northampton County Wills & Decds, 1657-1666, 133; Marshall, 70; Northampton, *Ibid.*, n.p.

disorder of colonial society. During his tenure, Accomacke became Northampton, and a portion of Eastern Shore flatlands became Buckby. Separated by the Chesapeake Bay from Jamestown and the royal governors, their councils and assemblies, peninsula commissioners enjoyed greater autonomy than their counterparts to the west, and greater security in their persons and property. Robins was not always in agreement with his peers, but his protests fell within acceptable parameters: clerks recorded no censure of his actions. Whether he patented land, refused to sign warrants for tithes, or served on the parish vestry, his actions paralleled those of his father and brother. In the process of establishing a familiar, deferential society, each English *émigré* struggled to place himself in the most advantageous position. Obedience Robins's strategic combination of agriculture, trade and public office places him among tidewater progenitors of an enduring social and economic structure.

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