

## Reverend William Cotton, 1609–1640

Minister of God's Word, Hungar's Parish, Accawmack County, Virginia

by William R. Gann, MS

This biographical sketch of a colonial minister presents newly found family material in original records at the Cheshire County Record Office, Chester, England. It is hoped that this column can continue to present information on colonial ministers from our members who have found new information in their research. Please

**William Cotton** was b. 18 March 1609/10 in Bunbury parish,<sup>1</sup> Cheshire, England. His parents were Jeffray and Joane Cotton. William had five known siblings, four of whom survived: **Peter**, b. 31 May 1607; **John**, b. 28 Mar 1613; **Elizabeth**, b. 3 Jun 1615, died 11 Mar 1615/16; **Elizabeth**, b. 15 Feb 1616/17; and **Richard**, b. 24 Nov 1622.

**William** must have lived in Bunbury as a child, but no records of his schooling have been found. His father, Jeffray Cotton, was buried on 28 Dec 1622, in Bunbury and the record reads "a poor man of the parish." William's mother, Joane, was buried on 23 March 1642/43 in Bunbury as "a poor woman of the parish." The maiden name of Joane is unknown as are any details of Jeffray's parents.

The Reverend William Cotton arrived in Virginia in the early 1630s, settling on the Eastern Shore in Accawmack County where he became the rector for Hungar's parish. While most ministers of that period were educated at Cambridge or Oxford, no record for this William Cotton is found at either university. Since William's father was "a poor man," William would have had a sponsor for his education, as was the case for young students who showed intellectual promise.

"Anglicanism may have been the official religion on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, and for the better part of a century, the established faith spent a good deal of its time combatting 'dissenters.' And since it was hard to obtain proper Anglican rectors for the distant Eastern Shore, a succession of local ministers came from the ranks of the Puritan dissenters, much to the dismay of the Anglican authorities in Jamestowne. Wm. Cotton, the first known successor to the original rector, Francis Bolton, conformed outwardly to the beliefs and practices of the established church, but his was the character 'of a stern Puritan'.<sup>2</sup>

Upon Rev. Cotton's death in 1640, he was succeeded by Rev. Nathaniel Easton, who arrived on the Shore after having been expelled as head-master of the school that later became Harvard. Two rectors later, Rev. Francis Doughty, a non-conformist, left England because he refused to recognize the divine right of the King. Gov. Berkeley stopped this Puritan

and Quaker infiltration of the Eastern Shore churches in 1676. So the question remains, was Rev. William Cotton a non-conformist with Puritan leanings?

Here follows some of the history from court records of the Rev. William Cotton in Hungar's parish: 19 Feb 1633, a court at Acchawmacke, Mr. Wm. Cotton, minister, complains that he had often desired the churchwardens to levy his tythes from his parishioners but they did not.

19 May 1634, upon the suit of Mr. William Cotton, Minister of Gods word, Thomas Allen fined one shilling for swearing.

23 Oct 1634, Rev. Cotton complains against administrators of Capt. John Stone estate for tythes due him.

March 1634/5, John Waltham, Randoll Revell, and John Ford, swore that they heard Henry Chareleton say that if he had had Mr. Cotton without the Church yard he would have kicked him over the Pallyzados calling of him black cotted raskell.

14 Sep 1635, at this Court Mr. Wm. Cotton, minister, presented a Court order from James City for the building of a parsonage house upon the Glybe land and that a Vestry be appointed whose names are underwitten: Wm. Cotton, Minister, Capt. Thos Graves, Mr. Obedyence Robins, Mr. John How, Mr. Wm. Stone, Mr. Wm. Burdett, Mr. John Wilkins, Mr. Wm. Andrews, Mr. Alexander Mountney, Mr. Edward Drew, Mr. Wm. Berriman, Mr. Stephen Chareleton; and the first meeting will be on 29 Sept.

4 Jan 1635/6, Mr. Cotton, minister, complains that parishioners are backward in paying tythes.

20 May 1636, a Vestry meeting at Acchawmack: Mr. Wm. Cotton, minister, Wm. Stone, Wm. Burdett, John Wilkins, John Neale, Stephen Charleton, Henry Bagwell. And at this Vesty meeting it was ordered that the minister have one peck of corn and 2 lbs. tobacco for every tythable.

5 Sep 1636, the will of John Symons gave Mr. Cotton, minister, 40 lbs. tobacco.

28 Nov 1636, the will of Wm. Smith, planter, asked that Mr. Cotton make a funeral sermon and to have 100 lbs. for it.

11 Jan 1636/7, at Court in Acchawmack, Mr. Wm. Cotton, minister of Gods word, commenced a suit agst the churchwardens for his tythes according to an act of assembly which upon examination it is ordered that Mr. Cotton shall have an execution upon the estate of the churchwardens. And Richard Cooke

<sup>1</sup> Parish Register, 1559–1653, Bunbury parish, Cheshire, England.

<sup>2</sup> Kirk Mariner, *Revival's Children, a Religious History of Virginia's Eastern Shore*, Peninsula Press, 1979. p. 4.

ordered to pay Mr. Cotton, minister of Gods words, 100 lbs tobacco due him.

12 Feb 1637/8, Court ordered that Mr. Wm. Cotton, minister, shall forthwith be paid and satisfied out of the estate of Capt John Howe for his funeral service and grave in the Chauncell.

26 Nov 1638, The Court moved that Mr. Wm. Cotton was due 300 acres land for the transportation of himself and 5 servants, the land lying at Hungars abutting west upon Mr. Wm. Andrews, easterly with the breadth Northerly with the length, and southerly upon the Mayne Creeke of Hungars.

6 May 1639, the will of Nicholas Harwood desires that Mr. Cotton make a sermon at funeral.

In summary, Rev. Cotton felt keenly that he should be paid by tythes; others must have liked him since they asked him to preach at their funerals.

Rev. William Cotton married Anne Graves, daughter of Capt. Thomas Graves and his wife, Katherine Croshaw/Crosher. Anne was born in Accomack County, VA, probably in 1620.

Rev. Cotton wrote his will on 20 Aug 1640, naming his wife, Anne, and his mother Joane Cotton of Bunbury, Cheshire. He also stated that two children had died earlier and that Anne was pregnant. A daughter, Verlinda, was born in late 1640 or early 1641, possibly before the death of Rev. Cotton.

Anne (Graves) Cotton married secondly to Nathaniel Eaton in 1641/42. She married thirdly Francis Doughty 10 Jun 1657 in Accomack Co., VA. With son Samuel, they moved to Charles Co., MD where Anne died 2 Mar 1682/83.

Verlinda Cotton married Thomas Burdett on 1 Sep 1658 in Northampton Co., VA. They had at least three children: Parthenia; Elizabeth, b. c. 1659; and Sarah Burdett, b.c. 1666 in Charles Co., MD. Thomas died before 2 Mar 1667/68; Verlinda married secondly Richard Broughton on 24 June 1668. Verlina (Cotton) (Burdett) Broughton died in 1683 in Charles Co., MD.

### Last Will & Testament<sup>3</sup>

In the name of God Amen I **William Cotton** of Achomacke cler. [*Cler. = minister*] beinge in p[er]fect sense & memory but weake in body doe this present xxth [20th] of August 1640 make this my Last will & Testament wherein I bequeath my Soule to god beseechinge him in & through the merritte of his wellbeloved Sonne oure Lord & Savioure Jesus Christ to bee mercifull unto mee, my bodye to the grounde to bee buried by my towe Little children And my goods as followeth

First I desyre my debtes to bee timly & honestly paid & satisfied. All which I have expressed under my owne hand in a Booke. And if any other can bee ===== to bee in the like kinde satisfied

Secondly after my Debts beinge thus satisfied I give & bequeath unto my child /nowe unborne/ sonn or Daught'r my plantacion of Bunbury, my Negro

Domingo & one younge heyffer beinge with a ffouer de Luce in the right eare only with her cowe calfe But If my child shall dye in his infancye then I give & bequeath the one halfe of those goods to my Mother Joane Cotton in Bunbery in Chesheir & the other to my wellbeloved wife Ann Cotton, they beinge prayed by towe honest men upon oath And my wife to have the refusall for the rest of my goods chattels or estate moveable or unmoveable I give & bequeath to my dearely beloved wife Anne Cotton making her sole Executixe

And desire my beloved ffreinds & Brother in Lawe Capt. William Stone & Capt. William Roper to bee overseere hereunto

Witnes my hand this present xxth [20th] daye of August 1640.

*W. Cotton*

It appearth unto this court by the testimony of Marke Hamon & others that this within specified will of Mr. William Cotton decd was the real Acte and Deed of M<sup>r</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Cotton And his Last will and testament.  
Edwyn Connaway clk.

<sup>3</sup>Orders, Deeds, Wills #3, 1645-1651, Northampton County, Virginia. p. 55.

### Registrar's Report

For the past year, it has been my privilege to serve the Society as Registrar General. I am pleased to report that new member applications as well as those for supplementals continue to arrive. In most instances, the research has been completed and typed as required. In a few places, small errors occurred in typing the second copy.

In browsing through some applications of the past fifteen years, it was gratifying to see that applicants were diligent in their efforts. I am pleased to see original research conducted by new members. In fact, a recent 10-year research project in the U. S. and England on one colonial minister—Rev. Richard Bucke of Jamestowne—has proven that with the early death of his one, young great-granddaughter, there are no lineal descendants as had previously been thought. This finding is the result of modern-day research in original records, which is expanding and improving our knowledge of the colonial ministers and their descendants.

Such new knowledge is made possible largely through using materials which were unavailable or inaccessible to the average researcher 10 or 20 years ago. As family researchers, we must be continually aware of new and important information being found. It is important that we share this new information on these colonial families and those new sources.

—William R. Gann