

### William Puckle

William Puckle, born in 1620, was the first member of his family to live abroad for any length of time, although his relatives in previous generations, especially Robert, had made short trips abroad on business. William was Samuel Puckle's eldest son by his second wife Mary Halbeck, and, as outlined in the last chapter, was apprenticed to his father, receiving the freedom of the Hosiers' Company of Norwich on 20 January 1641. In Samuel Puckle's Chancery case against Andrew Parmenter in 1639 William appears as a witness for his father confirming the amount of the bills of exchange and that a large part of the money was paid in farthings.

By 1649 William was probably living in London, as in the Chancery case involving Walter Benings, he appears to have taken over the role of William Corbet after the latter's death and to be acting as his father's factor in London. In evidence given in court he describes how William Corbet's account books came into his hands as his father's agent. Like William Corbet and Gregory Booty, Samuel Puckle's earlier factors, William lived in the parish of St Benet Fink. The London merchant David Clarke mentions in his will of 1650 that he owns a house in Benet Fink "now in the occupation of William Puckle". From other sources it appears the house was in Broad Street.

A letter survives in the British Library written in London in 1650 by William Puckle to the Mayor of Norwich, John Rawley. He mentions that Alderman Allen and Mr John Knight "have left the mayor's business wholly to my despatch". It appears from this letter that as someone who travelled frequently between Norwich and London William was entrusted with business transactions by Norwich Corporation. Among the errands involved was the payment of the Corporation's rents to the Pipe Office, which collected revenue for the Crown (or during this period the Commonwealth). Although still only thirty William was showing himself reliable and trustworthy to those in power and it wasn't long before these qualities were recognised and rewarded. On 27 August 1651 the Calendar of State Papers records a request that Major Puckle be supplied with 10 barrels of bullet for the Regiment of Volunteers under Major Fleetwood and on 25 March 1656 Major William Puckle was appointed to be Commissioner for Securing Peace in the City of London.

On 16 February 1655/6 Major William Puckle and Captain Nathaniel Manton were appointed Excise Commissioners. In November of the same year Nathaniel Manton, Richard Bury and William Puckle set out in a letter to Parliament the rates at which excise should be charged. This was part of the Report of the Excise to Parliament. Some years later in 1663 in the reign of Charles II, William was among those called to give evidence before a committee at York investigating George Gill, one of the sub-commissioners for customs in York during the Commonwealth. In an attempt to discredit an official of Cromwell's time witnesses were asked if the sub-commissioner was corrupt and what he was paid. This document only survives in fragmentary form but most of the witnesses confirmed that the sub-Commissioners were paid about £10 a quarter and that "George Gill was very labouring and diligent and the Receipte of the Excise very much advanced by his government".

On 14 November 1652 William Puckle had married Mary Hutchinson, the daughter of Richard Hutchinson, a wealthy Ironmonger in Cheapside who owned property in Lincolnshire, Norfolk, New England and Ireland. Richard had acquired the land in Ireland as a reward for serving with Cromwell in that country. He had spent some time in Boston, Massachusetts as several of his siblings were early settlers in the New World. William and Mary had six children but only Samuel, William, Mary and Susannah survived infancy. In Richard Hutchinson's will of 1670 William Puckle is mentioned among his sons in law but it is not clear whether his daughter Mary is still alive. By August 1659 William had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and was sent money for drums, halberds and colours for the ten companies of Major General Skippon's regiment. Major General Philip Skippon had recently been appointed commander of the London Militia by the restored Long Parliament. The references to William Puckle in the Calendar of State Papers suggest that his chief responsibility as an army officer was to furnish the London-based companies of soldiers with supplies and that he probably never saw active service.

With the restoration of Charles II in 1660 the political climate changed. William returned to life solely as a merchant and not a soldier, at least for the next dozen years or so. In the acrimonious dispute with his brother James over his father's will in 1662, James is supposed to have said he would make his brother spend as much in lawsuits as the land was worth and this must have embittered relations between the two families. William Burton, James's father in law, was one of the people William had supplied with funds from Parliament during the 1650s. His grandson John Burton, son of John Burton and Ann Desborough, married William's grand-daughter, Susanna Bathurst in 1712 at Aske's Hospital, Hoxton. William's daughter Susanna having married Edward Bathurst in 1690. Perhaps this marriage put an end to any ill-feeling between James's and William's relations and descendants. William's son and heir, Samuel, was enrolled in Middle Temple in 1674, but nothing further is known of him. William's daughter Mary married Thomas Lane in 1679 but the couple had no children.

In the late 1660s William was involved in a long-running case which concerned his brother in law Samuel Hutchinson, who owed William £1,000. He was part-owner of a ship called the "Lark" of London which in 1661 had set out on a voyage to Guinea in Africa and Buenos Aires in Rio della Plata, the Spanish colony in South America. Having acquired "gold and other rich commodities" in Guinea the ship was unable to anchor at Buenos Aires and was forced to put in at the Portuguese port of Rio de Janeiro for provisions. Here both cargo and vessel were seized by Portuguese officials as a prize of the King of Portugal because Rio was a closed port and only Portuguese ships could use it. Somehow or other Edward Diball, the first mate, did a deal with Portuguese officials and after money had changed hands, claimed the ship and cargo were now his and had been given him by the King as a reward for some services he had rendered. When Edward came to London in 1663 "he was suddenly arrested at the suit of Samuel Hutchinson one of the former owners of the said ship "Lark" upon an action of £20,000 and carried into the doleful gaol in Southwark called the Clink". He needed £400 bail and persuaded two merchant friends to stand bail for him on the understanding that the ship and its cargo would be theirs. He then returned to Portugal and reneged on the agreement. On arriving in England again he was arrested in Bristol at the suit of James

Taswell who had stood bail for him. Edward Diball died intestate and James Taswell, one of these merchants, and William Puckle on behalf of the now bankrupt Samuel Hutchinson and the other owners, were now disputing ownership of the "Lark" and her cargo. William had already been out to Portugal and taken possession of the ship in return for Edward Diball's bail which, as representative of the original owners, it appears he had every right to do. Edward Diball's claim that he had been given the ship seems very far-fetched and he seems to have double-crossed most of the people he dealt with, so it is to be hoped the court found in William's favour.

William may have kept a house in Norwich for use when he was visiting on business because in 1669 it is recorded that he received a dispensation from being Sheriff of Norwich for two years. But in 1675 he left England altogether on an important mission for the East India Company. His younger brother Thomas was a member of both the East India and Levant Companies so it was probably through him that William got his commission. As Major Puckle he left England on 10 January 1674/5 bound for the Coast of Coromandel and the Bay of Bengal on what was in essence a tour of inspection. His commission and instructions survive in the British Library. As far as trade was concerned the company particularly wished to promote taffeta and to find out whether it was possible to find black and green taffeta. They were also anxious to acquire raw silk. But his main duty was to find out the state of the company's affairs and he was to have: "freedom to peruse books and papers and examine witnesses for finding out abuses and miscarriages [so that] the unjust may be discharged and the faithful and painful [painstaking] and deserving ....be encouraged". He was instructed to keep a diary as a record of his findings so that he could compile a full report on his return. He was also to travel around the coast and report on the condition of the buildings and healthiness of situation of the various towns as well as the opportunities they presented for trade.

At this time the Dutch were the only rivals to the English East India Company in this area of South East India, the French "Compagnie des Indes Orientales" having only been founded 10 years previously. William visited St Thomas and other places but reported mainly on the two "factories" (warehouses) at Machilipatnam and Fort St George. Machilipatnam was famous for its fabrics and Indian printed cottons were among the principal exports of the East India Company to Europe, along with spices, precious stones and gold and silver. Fort St George, which became Madras, was built on the first land to be owned by the British in India and was the main English trading port on the Coromandel Coast. It was heavily fortified and garrisoned with East India Company soldiers. William Puckle considered the garrison to be well-run. As far as the running of the company's "factories" were concerned he did, of course, come across abuses and also people with grievances against the company. There were problems with the local Muslim Governor who frequently seized East India Company goods or personnel and arbitrarily demanded money. The main problem was the young men: no women were allowed in the East India Company factories at this time so there was little social life and the young men tended to get drunk and lose money at cards. On 7 October 1675, for instance, William Puckle wrote in his diary: "several young men drink bowls of punch in their chambers, blaspheme and say they are not obliged to obey anyone". Various people were accused of running "punch houses" without licences and promoting rowdy behaviour, "gaming" and late hours. William Puckle proposed a system of fines for drinking, swearing, fighting, being absent from the factory after 9

o'clock and "drubbing any servants of the Honourable Company". In fact he also intervened when he discovered one official was forcing the "poons" (Indian servants) to buy poor quality rice from the company at an inflated price – this he said was "a blot on his escutcheon and a reproach to the Company". He proposed that none of the poons be beaten unless an official complaint had been lodged against them. The attitude of some employees to the local people is illustrated by the response of Samuel Walls whom several witnesses had seen throwing a brickbat at a Commissioner's lodgings. He claimed "they were black men and their testimonies were not to be taken". However this did not help him. William also proposed that the young men, who were too idle, be required to learn Portuguese, and the "moors' language" that is the language of the Muslim ruling class. In January 1676 the Company received a visit from the King of Golconda. During this visit a tent was erected "beyond the Bar" - that is outside the town - "where the young men are to stay until the King leaves". The problem really was, as the Company's chaplain wrote to the directors in 1676, that there should "be more inspection taken of what persons you send into these places". He claimed that many had reasons to leave England as they were murderers, thieves or adulterers who still had wives in England. Many were heavy drinkers. This view is somewhat born out by William's account of the Company's Dr Morris at Machilipatnam who revealed on his deathbed that his real name was Woodward.

Another serious problem facing the Company was the health of its employees in a tropical climate, for which their clothing and diet were ill-adapted. William's suggested that the Company appointed a physician rather than a surgeon at Machilipatnam and that some lodgings in the factory which were damp because they were below ground level, be abandoned and new chambers built "over the godown" [warehouse] – this was the usual arrangement in the Company's factories. On several occasions he reports on the death of an someone not a member of the Honourable Company who was often buried in his garden, as it appears there was no graveyard for such persons. William completed his diary on 1 February 1675/6, but he had already had a bout of illness himself in the previous September and his will (which he had made in December 1674 before setting out on his journey) was proved in London on 17 August 1677, he having died in the "East Indies".

He left all his property in Norfolk to his eldest son Samuel. This included land in Stalham some of which was probably James Puckle's six acres. His brothers Martin and Thomas were among the executors. There is no mention of James, but he may have been dead by then. William's "goods and chattels" in the East Indies were valued at £82. 9s. 8d when an inventory was made of them in 1678. As a merchant he had been chiefly a draper and most of the goods, apart from furniture, came into that category, being curtains, bedding, table linen and clothes. There were 2 "palampores" (bedcovers of painted or dyed cotton) which had probably been bought locally but some items such as children's clothes, childbed linen, mantles, petticoats and a cloth of silver vest (waistcoat) William may have hoped to sell to the families of English merchants resident in India. The most valuable items were books, valued at £22, unfortunately the titles are not given but some are likely to have been prayer-books, bibles or sermons.

## **Daniel Puckle**

William's youngest brother Daniel who was born in about 1642 was apprenticed to his brother Thomas of the Ironmongers' Livery Company on 10 Dec 1660. He did not marry and nothing more is known of him until his death in Faro, Portugal in 1711. The chief export of Portugal to England was, of course, port wine. This trade was now dominated by British merchants and companies, based mainly in Oporto. Into Lisbon came all the gold mined in Brazil's mines, the richest of which, the "Minas Gerias", had only been discovered in the 1690s. After the Methuen Treaty of 1703 England won the exclusive right to supply Portugal with woollen textiles which were largely paid for with Brazilian gold. Portugal declared its neutrality in the War of the Spanish Succession and opened its ports to English ships. It is most likely therefore that Daniel came to Portugal in or after 1703 but he mentions friends in Spain and Lisbon in his will so he may not initially have settled in Faro.

From Daniel's will it seems that he dealt in jewellery as he mentions pearls and rings, as well as some bracelets which had been lent to Mr Thomas Pearce of Cadiz for his daughter's wedding. He had been in partnership with Richard Wright (his close friend, who died in 1708 and beside whom he wishes to be buried) and John Maskall but he refers to the business as "the house" so it was an established organisation with a number of partners, employees and correspondents who would report on trade conditions in different places. When John Maskall died in Lisbon in 1722 he lamented the fact that "I have had diversities of fortunes in worldly goods these long wars, as appears in my books". He was the last representative of the merchant house to which Daniel Puckle belonged and requests that "all accounts are adjusted and paid to the friends and correspondents of this house as mentioned in the deceased Daniel Puckle's will" so it appears the business is being wound up. Like his two partners John Maskall did not marry.

## **Nathaniel Puckle**

Since Richard Puckle's son Nathaniel settled in London, it is likely that his son, also called Nathaniel, was born in the parish of St Christopher le Stocks in the 1660s, like his other children, but no baptism is recorded. Nothing is heard of this son until June 1703 when he bought a tract of 450 acres of land near the present-day Limerick in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. This land was believed to be rich in copper ore but it changed hands many times after Nathaniel's death in 1706 and significant amounts of copper were never found. In 1704 he bought 630 acres of land on the other side of the Delaware River from William Penn, the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania. Nathaniel was described as a mariner in 1704 but he soon established himself as a merchant. He did not live on the land he had bought which was on the outskirts of modern Philadelphia then open country. He lived in the City of Philadelphia itself which had been laid out by Penn on a grid pattern which became the model for urban planning in most later American cities.

He was in partnership with Thomas Murray and their "waste-book" survives in the Philadelphia State Archives. It records the goods sold and received from vessels entering the port of Philadelphia, the name of the merchant and the cost. It appears that

they chiefly sold cloth, as “rich silk crape”, kersey, “blue duffels” “satinetts” and other textiles regularly appear in their book. They also dealt, however, in more mundane items such as nails, thimbles and buttons, as well as spices such as nutmeg and cloves, and more surprisingly claret, anchors, barrels of gunpowder and shot. Most of their suppliers were London merchants, among whom Nathaniel had relations of his own, although none of them is mentioned in the book, which starts in October 1702. Nathaniel must therefore have been settled in America before this date and was well established by the time of the land speculation. It has to be said that the partnership does not seem to have done a large amount of business in the six years covered by the book, but compared to a London merchant house, no doubt the number of potential customers was small and they may have sold many other items which were bought locally.

The only relative in England mentioned in Nathaniel’s will (proved on 6 November 1706) is his aunt Deborah who was born in 1633 so was now very old by the standards of the day. Other relatives are his wife Anne’s sister and her children. Nathaniel and Anne had only one child, a daughter Deborah who is joint executrix with her mother. Deborah is left the land in Pennsylvania as her portion. It seems that Nathaniel’s affairs were not in very good order for in 1723 the land of the supposed copper-mine was seized by the sheriff in order to satisfy certain debts and damages owed by Nathaniel to Hannah Penn, William Penn’s widow. Perhaps he had never finished paying for the land.

### **William Puckle**

William Puckle’s second surviving son born in 1659 and named after his father, was apprenticed to the Haberdashers’ Livery Company. By November 1693 he was in Port Royal, Jamaica as he was one of the assessors of the inventory of Richard Bennett, a mariner of Port Royal. William, however must have retained his links with the City of London because he voted (Whig) in the 1713 election in London. In 1704 a number of Port Royal merchants complained to the House of Commons about the conduct of Vice Admiral Greydon who, while being in command of four English Men of War, had failed to attack four French Men of War whom he encountered in the West Indies and also pressed at night-time “great numbers of seamen and inhabitants of Jamaica”. At this time England was at war with France but the merchants felt that his actions exposed “the Country [Jamaica] to great and manifest dangers and to the interruption and discouragement of trade”. Vice Admiral Grey’s defence included evidence from Captain Thomas Lyel who said he was “ashore at Port Royal the evening after the press was made ...in company with Mr Chaplin, Mr Hutchinson and Mr Puckle and they only complained of the pressing their men and not of any irregular proceedings or of breaking any houses”.

Jamaica had been captured from the Spanish in 1654 by General Venables and Admiral Penn (the father of William Penn of Pennsylvania). Port Royal was the largest town and most important port in the Caribbean. It grew rich on trade in sugar and slaves and on Spanish treasure looted by its many pirates. In 1692 it had a population of about 7,000 and consisted mainly of brick-built buildings, some several storeys tall. In the seventeenth century the town was largely controlled by its merchant class, as the plantation owners were not yet sufficiently powerful. There was a freedom of religious

expression: Jews, Quakers and Anglicans lived side by side, as did merchants, sailors and even pirates. On 7 June 1692 a powerful earthquake caused more than half the town to sink into Kingston Harbour and 2,000 people were killed.

The town rapidly recovered but in 1703 it was ravaged by fire. Following a severe storm, a hurricane and two earthquakes by 1722 the town was a shadow of its former self and eventually declined into a poor fishing village. It is perhaps therefore surprising to find William Puckle living there until his death in 1724, especially as he still apparently had links with London. He never married and so left his estate to be divided between his two sisters Mary Lane and Susanna Bathurst, both of Bethnal Green, but made small bequests to his niece's husband, John Burton, and friends in Port Royal.