

Hunter McKelva Cole's Research on William Hunter, our immigrant's Origin in the UK

Both articles from the *Jacob Hunter Trust Newsletter*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2025

The Hunters' Seventeenth-century Origins in Yorkshire, England

By Hunter McKelva Cole

Seeking the seventeenth-century English origin of their ancestor William Hunter, members of the Hunter Research Group and the *Jacob Hunter Trust* have concluded that he is the William Hunter who was born in 1653 in Ingleby Greenhow, a village in the North Riding of Yorkshire. Additionally, Hunter Cole provides further evidence in his article *Virginia Immigrants Who Migrated Together from Three Linked Yorkshire Villages*, this issue.

Thirty-two years later, in 1685, the governor of Virginia awarded one Charles Rountree 350 acres for transporting himself and six other immigrants into Nansemond County, including William Hunter, Joan Hunter, Nicholas Hunter, Rebekah Hunter, Robert Rountree, and John Sayer. William was a weaver, whose prized skills, like those of others in the working class, were essential to the prosperity of Virginia. Before 1700 William would rise in status, becoming a Clerk of the Court and thereafter a judge (Justice of the Quorum) until his death, ca. 1728.

Research of the English origins of these seven individuals that Rountree brought to Virginia indicates that the Hunters, the Rountrees, and Sayer were not strangers to one another. Evidently, they arrived in Virginia together, and all came out of established families recorded in the Cleveland District of North Riding (Ingleby Greenhow, Battersby, and Hutton Rudby). These sites are clustered fewer than five miles apart around the market town of Stokesly. The pinpointed home site of these seven linked immigrants is convincing documentation that one of them, the weaver/judge of Nansemond, had been the child baptized in the parish church of Ingleby Greenhow.

The cluster of Hunters mentioned in the land patent implies that they are a family. William's parents, Nicholas Hunter of Battersby and Ellen Wood, had been married in 1637 at Ingleby Greenhow. Birthdates of their children appear in the Ingleby church register. Four miles west of Stokesley is Hutton Rudby, birthplace, in 1652, of Charles Sayer, another of the headrights. The Rountree family also has ties to Stokesley and can be dated there as early as 1593. One Robert Rountree, a name mentioned in the patent, was residing in Marske-in-Cleveland, Yorkshire, in 1654. His daughter Mary's birth is recorded in the parish register there on 10 April. Since Marske is situated close to the North Sea, it can be speculated that Rountree's residence might be near to the port where the Hunters, the Rountrees, and Sayer began their sea voyage to Virginia.

In the 1600s Sir David Foulis was Lord of the Manor of Ingleby Greenhow, and Foulis's manorial and court papers of both Ingleby Greenhow and Battersby are held by Lord De L'Isle of Penshurst Place in Maidstone, Kent.

At the behest of the *Jacob Hunter Trust* Julia Henderson, a professional genealogist of Acorn Family History Services in the United Kingdom, gained permission to research the Foulis papers for clues about William Hunter and his family. The manorial rolls proved inconclusive, but from the manorial court records Henderson cites a tidbit about Nicholas: From 1647 to 1651 Nicholas Hunter (presumed to be the Nicholas Hunter of Battersby whose son William was baptized in 1653 at Ingleby Greenhow) was fined, along with a number of others, for selling ale illegally (Hunter, Richard (2024). UK Research on William Hunter Family, *Jacob Hunter Trust Newsletter*, Vol. 33(1): 1-2).

Virginia Immigrants Who Migrated Together from Three Linked Yorkshire Villages

By Hunter McKelva Cole

On 4 November 1685 an immigrant named Charles Rountree was granted a tract in Nansemond County, Virginia, for having transported seven persons into the colony. These were Charles himself, Robert Rountree, William Hunter, Nicholas Hunter, Joane Hunter, Rebekah Hunter, and John Sayer (pronounced Sawyer). The governor thereafter issued Rountree a patent (a deed) that described the size and location of the allotment with the affixed names of these seven individuals who were termed his “headrights.” Rountree received 350 acres, that is, fifty acres per headright (Virginia Patent Book Seven, p. 487). The headrights were indentured to him for five or for seven years.

Descendants of the said William Hunter have sought to identify who he was and where he came from. This much is known: He was a weaver, and he brought his skills to the New World, where a “mechanic,” as his profession was generically classified in seventeenth-century America, was highly respected and essential to the burgeoning economy. Unlike mechanics, the landed gentry had few specialized occupational skills. There was high demand for weavers and other makers of essential goods such as locks, hinges, nails, firearms, and kettles, which, like clothing, were formerly imported from England at great cost. An accomplished weaver or a skilled blacksmith, though a poor man in England, could rise socially in Virginia. However, life in the colony was not easy. Restive aboriginal tribes, driven westward, occasionally attacked English settlements that were ever advancing from the coast. Skirmishes, burnings, and massacres occurred, but immigration was unceasing and common men were rising in rank. Within a decade of arriving in Virginia, William Hunter the weaver had become a clerk of the Nansemond court and soon afterward rose to prominence as a justice of the quorum, a judge.

On 25 April 1695 he was granted a patent comprising 200 acres in Nansemond County for having transported four African slaves into the colony (Virginia Patent Book Eight, p. 431). In ten years after immigrating, he had become a freeholder of a small plantation and master of a toiling workforce. In 1701 he was granted a second patent, 250 acres for transporting a kinsman, also named William Hunter, William’s wife, their daughter Alice, their son Nicholas, and a woman named Mary Cahone (Virginia Patent Book Nine, p. 309). Thus, Judge William Hunter’s land holdings were increased to 450

acres. In his late forties or early fifties, he had become a person of standing in Virginia.

But what English site was this noteworthy William Hunter's original home? Where did he come from? The years-long search for his origins had focused on three northern English counties: Northumberland, Durham, and Yorkshire, but after scouring these shires, Hunter genealogists reached no conclusions. In the seventeenth century and earlier, all three counties were teeming with Hunters whose forebears had drifted southward from Scotland, many of whom were named William and Nicholas, which are names of Hunter men in the Virginia family.

Among so many Hunters, how does one pinpoint the actual ancestor? A lengthy search of records in Northumberland and Durham proved inconclusive, but in Yorkshire, England's largest county, one William Hunter looked especially promising.

The parish register of Ingleby Greenhow (The Register Book of Inglebye justa Grenhow as much as is extant in the old booke for Christenings, Weddings and Burials since the year of our Lord 1539 by me John Blackburne, Curate, Canterbury: Cross & Jackman, 'The Canterbury Press,' 1889, p. 20), seemed to provide an answer. It reveals that Nicholas Hunter of Battersby and Ellen Wood of Ingleby Greenhow were parents of eight children—Ann (b. 1637), Mary (b. 1639), Elizabeth (b. 1642), Henry (b. 1644), Sara (b. 1646), Rebecca (b. 1648), Dinah (b. 1651), and the youngest, William (b. 1653). But how does a researcher prove that this last-born child in the humble home of Nicholas and Ellen became William Hunter of Nansemond? If he is the immigrant ancestor, he arrived in Virginia when he was about thirty-two. Moreover, was Nicholas and Ellen's daughter Rebecca the Rebekah Hunter who is listed as one of Rountree's headrights? If so, she would have been a spinster aged thirty-seven upon arrival in Virginia and likely an accomplished spinner. And how significant is it that the name Nicholas recurs in the next generation of the Virginia Hunter family? The vital

question must be asked: Is William Hunter of Ingleby Greenhow the immigrant ancestor?

A half-circle of linked towns mapped in the Cleveland district of Yorkshire offers the answer. They are Stokesley, Ingleby Greenhow, Battersby, and Hutton Rudby. In North Riding they are shown close



together near the present-day A-172 road. The Hunters' home in Ingleby Greenhow, where Nicholas and Ellen were married in the parish church, is adjacent to Battersby and four and a half miles southeast of Stokesley, the market town. Battersby, the father Nicholas's home, had no church register and thus no birth records, but the register of the church in Stokesley, near Ingleby Greenhow, lists numerous Rountrees and a few Hunters. Rountrees hailed from three towns: Stokesley, Ingleby Greenhow, and Hutton Rudby and can be documented continuously in Stokesley back to the 1400s.

The last headright mentioned on Charles Rountree's land patent clinches the search. John Sayer, the singular name among the seven names on the patent, is recorded in the parish register of Hutton Rudby, a village four miles west of Stokesley. Many Hunters also are documented in Hutton Rudby. Thus, in these three close-knit Yorkshire communities is the beginning trail of the seven individuals mentioned on the Rountree patent of 1685. In time and place they can be connected as Yorkshire neighbors and fellow travelers. It's natural therefore to conclude that they arrived in Virginia together, thanks to their sponsor Charles Rountree, and that William Hunter is the Nansemond Hunter family's immigrant ancestor.