

“God Feeds the Ravens”

Part I: Discovering the British Origins of Francis Corbin

By Mike Marshall and Don Jordan

Editor's note: For an enlarged view of figures, simply zoom in on your computer.

Introduction

The iconic Cupola House that stands today in Edenton was built for Francis Corbin between 1757 and 1760. In the book, *The Cupola House Carver*, the authors demonstrated that the man who carved the house's elaborate decorative woodwork was a carver and cabinetmaker named Samuel Black who arrived in Edenton from Great Britain in 1758 or early 1759.¹ They also determined that furniture Corbin commissioned for his use in the Cupola House, including a set of eight elaborately carved mahogany arm chairs for the dining room and an elegant tea table with ball and claw feet that evidence points to likely being a part of the same commission, was also constructed by Black and that its decidedly Scottish or Irish flavor was suggestive of his likely country of origin. In a paper by the same authors and also published on this website (Cupola House Tea Table), they pointed out the unusual construction of the feet on the tea table attributed to Black that is likely the "Round Mahogany Tea Table" listed at Corbin's death in the Cupola House dining room. More specifically they noted that “the lower portion of the rear of the tea table ball was removed to allow the sharp talon to be created and emphasized, just as the roundness of the rear of each armchair ball was removed to create and emphasize each sharp rear talon.” Of interest in

the context of this paper is the following observation by the authors:

“These indented, sharp rear talons are incorporated into Black's earliest work in Edenton, which was his work for Corbin. They are so unusual, if not unique, that the design must have been done at least with Corbin's acquiescence, and perhaps at Corbin's instruction.”

Francis Corbin, Granville Land Agent

The Lords Proprietors was the title given to a group of eight English noblemen to whom King Charles II granted by the Carolina charters of 1663 and 1665 the joint ownership of an enormous tract of land in the New World he called "Carolina," a name derived from "Carolus," the Latin form of Charles. One of the Proprietors was Sir George Carteret. Upon the death of his father, George Carteret, 1st Baron Carteret whose wife was Lady Grace Granville, John Carteret, 2nd Baron Carteret, 2nd Earl Granville, inherited his great-grandfather's one-eighth undivided share of Carolina. In 1728-1729, when seven of the then-Proprietors decided to sell their shares of Carolina back to the English Crown, the 2nd Earl Granville refused to sell. Instead, he offered to give up his interest in the other seven shares in return for a part of the Carolina tract that would become his absolutely. It took years to settle all the legal, political and other issues and to survey out Granville's share, and it was not until September 17, 1744 that he perfected his proprietary claim to a large tract of land that consisted of what is now the northern half of North Carolina. Two months later Granville sent Francis Corbin to the Carolinas as his land agent and with a new charter for the colony. Before

leaving England, Corbin was also given a directive titled “Instructions for Mr. Corbin going to North Carolina,” that provided detailed guidance as to how he should act on Granville’s behalf after arriving in the colony.² The document was dated November 14, 1744 and signed by Granville himself at his Arlington Street address in London. Not surprisingly, Granville’s real interest in his land in North Carolina was in the money that could be made from the fees associated with selling tracts of his land and the quit rents that would also be paid by purchasers.

The Corbins in England

Much has been written about Francis Corbin’s life after his arrival in the Colony of North Carolina, and this is not surprising given the fact that he was one of the most prominent and controversial figures in North Carolina in the middle years of the eighteenth century. He was a member of the Governor’s Council, a Judge of the Court of Admiralty, an Associate Justice of the General Court and a Colonel in the militia (*Cupola House Carver*). It is regrettable that nothing of substance has heretofore been documented about his English roots as there is circumstantial evidence that will be discussed later that indicates he was from the Greater London area.

The history of the Corbins in England is a long one stretching back to the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066, when William the Conqueror

defeated the Britons at the battle of Hastings and was made King of England the following year. This monumental event precipitated the emigration of many important Norman families into England, where they became the leading families of the land. A book published in London in 1889 by Wilhelmina, Duchess of Cleveland, called *The Battle Abbey Roll With Some Account of the Norman Lineages* offers the following information on the Corbins.³ Four men of that name are entered in the Domesday Book, a manuscript record of a survey of England and parts of Wales ordered by King William and completed in 1086. At that time, they were settled as under-tenants in the English counties of Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Warwick and Kent. The *Hundred Rolls* about 1272 record the Corbin name in the counties of Somerset, Oxford and Kent. The book then makes the following observation: “Yet, widely spread and ancient as was the name, the records that remain of it are comparatively few.” This seems to be borne out by Marshall’s monumental work, *The Genealogist’s Guide to Printed Pedigrees*, as it lists Corbin pedigrees in only two counties, Staffordshire and Worcestershire.⁴ According to *The Battle Abbey Roll*, the Staffordshire line that will be of particular interest here had its earliest seat at Corbin Hall (also Corbyn’s Hall) in Swineford, now Kingswinford parish, where most of them had their residences. They had held the manor there from the time of Henry II, when it was first possessed by Robert of Normandy. Nicholas Corbin from the Staffordshire Corbin Hall line acquired a manor called Hall End in Polesworth Parish, Warwickshire, in the time of King Richard III through his marriage to Joan, daughter

and heiress of John Sturmy. Thomas Corbin was the last male heir of the line. His arms were “argent on a chief or, three ravens proper” Three ravens “proper” in Heraldry means three ravens shown in the natural color, which is black. He died in 1688 leaving his daughter Margaret as sole heiress. She married William Lygon or Ligon of Madresfield. William Dugdale, in his 1730 account called *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, has the pedigree of the Hall End Corbins beginning with the previously mentioned Nicholas Corbin that married Joan Sturmy (Fig. 1).⁵

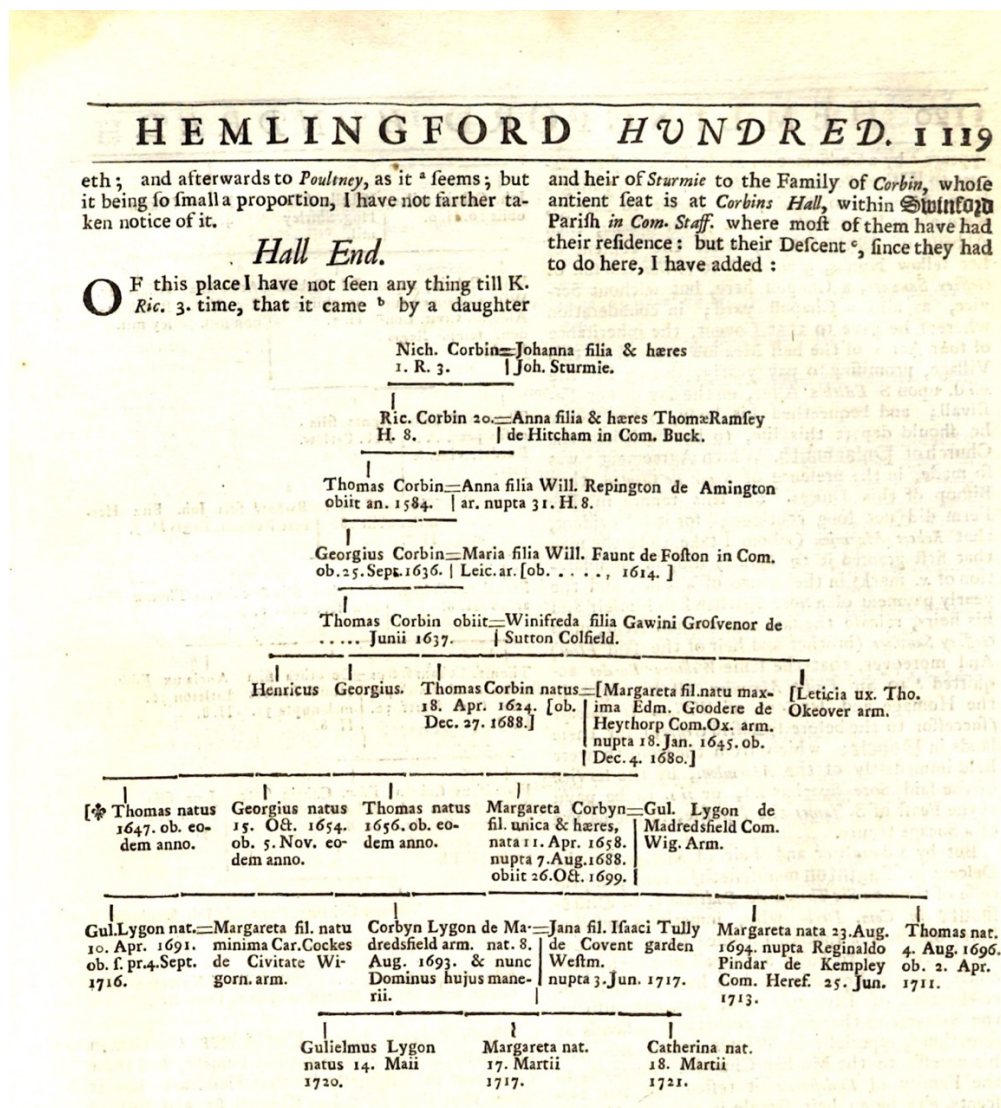


Figure 1. 1730 Pedigree of Hall End Corbin line.

His great-grandson George Corbin married Maria, the daughter of William Faunt of Foston in the county of Leicestershire. According to Burke's *The General Armory*, about 1600 the following coat-of-arms was confirmed to this George Corbin, Esq., of Hall End by the College of Heraldry of London: "sable on a chief or, three ravens proper."⁶ So, the older branch of the Staffordshire Corbins bore the same coat-of-arms, except that the lower part of the shield was silver instead of black. Baker provides an informative look at the Staffordshire line of Kingswinford manor and parish and Kingswinford families, and the following is taken from his work.⁷ The name Corbyn is French and in the earliest days was written as Corbin or de Corbin. The earliest members of this line were based around the parishes of Kingswinford and Sedgley, and their marriages were primarily in the local community of gentry/minor aristocracy. Perhaps the most significant early marriage was that of William (1332-1360) to Felicia de Sutton who was probably the daughter of John de Sutton II, the first Baron Sutton of Dudley and the Lord of a number of manors in the area, including Kingswinford. He may have been William's feudal Lord. It was probably about this time that the family settled in what became the Corbin Hall estate in Kingswinford, perhaps given as Felicia's dowry. Baker also gives the early history of the manor and parish noting that in the Domesday Book Kingswinford is shown as a royal manor. Around 1205 it passed into the hands of the de Somery family when "Ralph de Somery of Dudley Castle swapped some of his lands in Wolverhampton with various

manors of King John, including that of Kingswinford.” The subsequent line of succession is not wholly clear but eventually the de Somery possessions passed to the de Sutton family by marriage and then into the hands of William Corbin through his marriage to Felicia. The arms of George Corbyn (1543-1636) with the three ravens can be seen on his memorial in Kingswinford church.

From Whence Cometh This Man, Francis Corbin?

There is little doubt that Francis Corbin was from England so the question is, are there any clues that might help identify the English Corbin line from which he most likely descended? The short answer is yes, there are two items that are helpful in this regard. The first involves an interesting and many talented Englishman named Corbyn Morris. He was a man with political influence, an economist, writer, mercantilist and holder of a number of British government positions during the eighteenth century. The second clue involves bookplates from Francis Corbin’s library originally housed at the Cupola House. The first clue is found in a letter that North Carolina governor William Tryon wrote to the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, a body formed by the Crown in 1696, whose primary purpose was to promote and improve trade with the plantations of the British colonies.⁸ It carried out its work through various means including correspondence with colonial governors like Tryon, conducting inquiries, hearing complaints as well as interviewing merchants and colonial agents. The letter in question was dated February 1, 1766 and dealt with a variety of topics. One of

them involved the fact that the Chief Justice of the Province, Charles Berry, had died in Wilmington of a self-inflicted gunshot on December 29, 1765. As there was a need to find a replacement, Tryon offered several suggestions in the letter: “I send your Lordships the names of the three following Gentlemen for His Majesty’s nomination of a Counsellor in the Room of Mr. Berry, Vidt. Mr. Samuel Strudwick, Mr. Francis Corbyn, and Col. Lloyd.” He then followed up with a short description of each. As to Corbyn, he wrote, “Mr. Francis Corbyn was in the Council till suspended by the late Governor: He is a near Relation of Mr. Corbyn Morris’s, one of the Commissioners of His Majesty’s Customs.” The term “near relation” suggests a family connection between the two men, most likely through the Corbin/Corbyn line. If this is correct the task becomes one of determining the line of descent of Corbyn Morris.

Research revealed that Corbyn Morris was a foundation scholar at the famous Charterhouse School, originally located in London but moved to Surrey, England, in the late 1800s. The school was founded in 1611 by Thomas Sutton on the site of a mid-14th century Carthusian monastery.⁹ An informative biographical entry for Morris was found in a record of the school’s foundation scholars.¹⁰ It revealed that he was born at Bishop’s Castle in the county of Salop, i.e., Shropshire, the son of Edmond Morris by his wife Margaret, and that he was admitted to the Charterhouse school on June 29, 1725 on the nomination of the Duke of Chandos. The entry further noted that Morris matriculated at Cambridge University, was Secretary of the Customs in Scotland, a Fellow of the

Royal Society in 1757 and Commissioner of Customs for England. Another biographical entry for Morris was found in the *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, an extensive list of Cambridge University alumni.¹¹ It called him the son and heir of Edmund Morris of Bishop's Castle, Salop, and added further information and details to his biography: he was admitted at the Inner Temple, one of the Inns of Court in London, June 17, 1743; was Secretary of Customs in Scotland, 1751-1763; and Commissioner of Customs, 1763-1778. He died December 22, 1779, at Wimbledon and was buried there.

Research utilizing available parish records of England quickly revealed that Edmund Morris married Margaret Corbyn in the parish of Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire, England, on October 16, 1709.¹² The actual parish register entry calls Edmund Morris "of Bishops Castle in the Diocese of Hertford Gent." and Margaret "of Eymore in the parish of Kidderminster Foreign." Margaret was the daughter of Joseph Corbyn and his wife Elizabeth and was baptized April 5, 1688 in the parish of Over Arley (also called Upper Arley) Staffordshire.¹³ The actual entry calls Margaret the daughter of "Mr. Joseph Corbyn of Aimer (sic, Eymore) & Elizabeth his wife." Joseph's wife was an Elizabeth Rogers and there is a record of their marriage at Kidderminster, Worcestershire, on July 23, 1678.¹⁴ Joseph and Elizabeth Corbyn had other children besides Margaret including son William baptized October 1, 1686 and son Joseph baptized July 28, 1689.¹⁵ The record for William calls him the son of "Mr. Joseph Corbin of Aimer

privately baptized.” The use of the term “Mr.” as applied to the father Joseph Corbyn most likely indicates he was of the landed gentry and a gentleman entitled to bear a coat of arms. A counterpart lease found in the archives of Worcester Cathedral gave Joseph a life estate in certain properties detailed in the document with the measuring lives being those of his children William, Joseph and Margaret.¹⁶ The *Victoria County History of Worcestershire* has a short description of the manor of Eymore tracing it back to ca. 1312, when Edward Burnell gave a 160 acre part of the manor of Kidderminster to the Prior and convent of Worcester.¹⁷ “When the endowment of the priory was bestowed upon the Dean and chapter in January 1541-42, the land in Eymore and Kidderminster were included. After the abolition of the chapter by the Long Parliament, Eymore was purchased (1649) by John Corbyn, the dean’s lessee, for over £3,000. The dean and chapter recovered their lands at the Restoration, and Eymore remained in their possession until 1861, when it was purchased by Mr. Edward Crane of Broom, who bequeathed it to his nephew, Mr. Arnold Crane Rogers of Trimpley House.” Eymore, the house and its surrounding woodland, Eymore Park, was leased to the Corbyn family from the Dean and chapter of Worcester Cathedral. Although it was within the parish of Kidderminster Foreign, Eymore was much closer to the church of St. Peter in Over Arley than to St. Mary in Kidderminster, so the family tended to worship at the nearer church. The Over Arley register begins in 1564 and contains many entries for the Corbyn family of Eymore, the earliest being a record of the baptism of Mary Corbyne (sic), daughter of Mr.

William Corbyne on November 28, 1575.¹⁸ This William's son and heir was Samuell (sic) Corbyn, baptized November 30, 1576.¹⁹ The records also reveal that a William Corbyn, gentleman, was buried June 23, 1616 and his wife "Mrs. Anne Corbyn widdowe late wife of William Corbyn, gent," was buried on February 25, 1616/17.²⁰ Both left wills that were probated in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) in 1617.²¹ This was a church court under the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury and was responsible for the probate and trials of testamentary causes where the value of goods involved was more than £5 and the probate property was located in two or more dioceses. William's son Samuell made his will April 1, 1622, and it too was probated in the PCC on February 14, 1623/24.²² This will names all of his children and makes his wife Mary and son John his executors. John Corbyn, as the oldest son, succeeded his father as lord of the manor of Eymore. There is a Parliamentary Survey of the lands and possessions of the Dean and chapter of Worcester and it includes the Manor of Eymore taken in February 1649 and provides a detailed description of the manor.²³ It noted that "John Corbyn, gent." was in possession of a mansion house, thatched and built with timber, with a barn, stable, foldyard, garden and orchard called the Keeper's House. Elsewhere in the description, it was stated that the manor was held by lease as a life estate with the measuring lives being John Corbyn, Gent., aged 44, in possession, Anne his wife, aged 42, and John their son, aged 20, in reversion. The Over Arley register lists the baptisms of John and Anne's children, including son Joseph Corbyn, December 7, 1642, who married Elizabeth Rogers in

1678 and had Margaret Corbyn, who married Edmund Morris.²⁴ A map of Staffordshire drawn ca. 1610 by English cartographer John Speed illustrates the proximity of the parish of Over Arley (just to the north of Arley on this map) to Brome(Broome) (where Joseph Corbyn was baptized in 1642) and to the parish of Kingswinford Parish (the seat of the Corbins of Corbin Hall) (Fig. 2, for locations, see lower left underlined in red).²⁵



Figure 2. John Speed, Map of Staffordshire, 1610 (zoom in for details).

Considering this geographic proximity there can be no doubt that the Corbyns of Eymore Manor are a previously undocumented branch of the

Corbin Hall line. It should be added that the name “Francis” did not appear in any of the records of the Eymore branch of the Corbins examined. However, it does occur in the Corbin Hall line in a grant made by Thomas Corbyn of Hall End on May 30, 1564 to Francis Corbyn, John Corbyn and others in trust for George Corbyn, son and heir of Thomas.²⁶ Francis and John were probably brothers of Thomas. The name also appears in entries in the register of Brewood parish in Staffordshire. They include the burial on February 19, 1564/65 of a “Frauncis Corbin,” and the baptism of a “Fraunces Corbin,” on February 24, 1625/26.²⁷ This latter name appears in a section of the Brewood register under a notice of “Certaine Children Baptized at Codshall,” Codshall being another parish adjacent to Brewood. Considering that Granville’s land agent Francis Corbin was a near relation to Corbyn Morris as alluded to in the previously mentioned February 1, 1766 letter from Governor Tryon to the Lords Commissioners through the Corbyn family of Eymore, then he would be descended from an armorial family with a coat of arms that would certainly contain the three ravens.

Francis Corbin of Stepney, Middlesex

It has already been stated that Francis Corbin, who became Granville’s land agent, might have come from the Greater London area. Before arguing the case that he did it should be stated that what follows does not provide unquestionable proof that a Francis Corbin of Stepney, Middlesex, England, is the same man. However, that being said, there is

intriguing circumstantial evidence that strongly supports the view that he is the same man.

The Francis Corbin of Stepney, Middlesex, was a merchant whose name appeared in five London business directories in 1738, 1740 (2), 1741 and 1745.²⁸ The Francis who was Granville's land agent departed for Carolina late in 1744, so the fact that his name appeared in a 1745 directory is not surprising as he would likely have had to pay for the notice in 1744, before he departed England. In each of these directories his address is listed as "Stepney Causeway." There is a large map of London drawn in the 1790s by the English surveyor and cartographer Richard Horwood, and after his death, his plates were updated and published by William Faden in 1819.²⁹ A detail from Faden's map showing Stepney Causeway is shown in Figure 3.

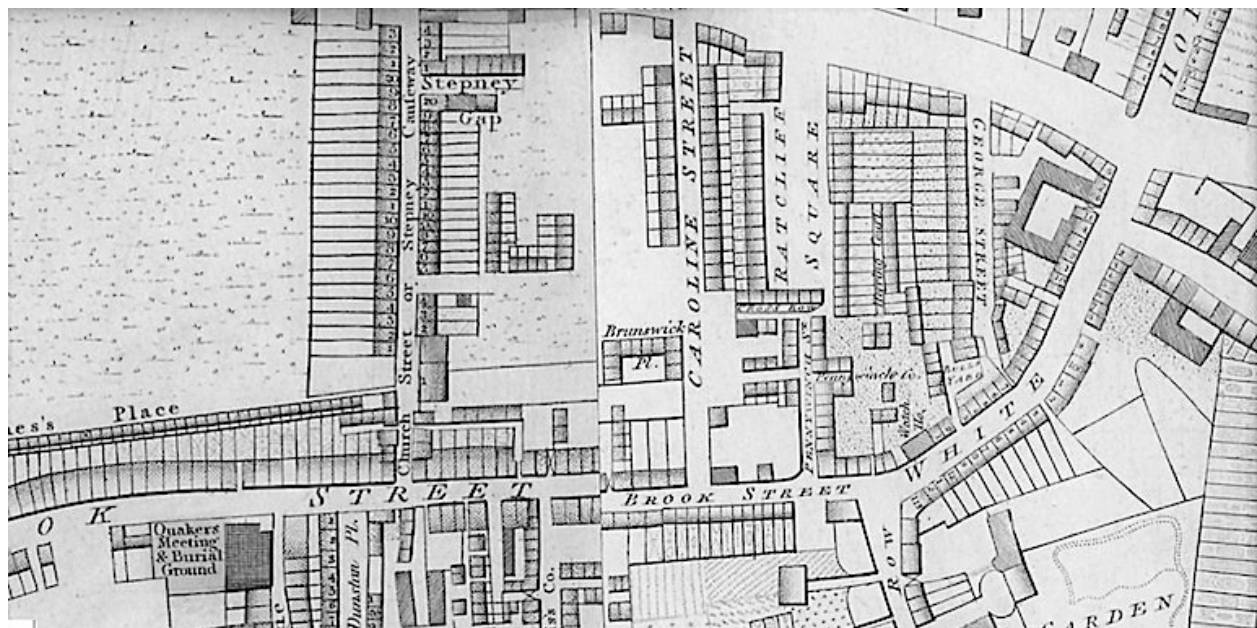


Figure 3. *Detail of Church Street or Stepney Causeway in William Faden, Map of London, 1819 (zoom in for details).*

It is located in Ratcliffe in the London borough of Tower Hamlets on the north bank of the River Thames and lies between Limehouse to the east and Shadwell to the west. Ratcliffe was once the heart of London's Thames River trade, so much so that it was known as "sailor town." It was a hamlet when shipbuilders, ship-owners, captains, merchants and crew began to arrive during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, building wharves to anchor vessels at what was the closest practical landing spot to the City of London, so the area had a strong maritime tradition. Examination of the Faden map detail also reveals that Stepney Causeway was also known as Church Street. The original name was Church Street, the intention being to extend it to Stepney Church as an alternative to White Horse Street, which was the only road from Ratcliffe. This short narrow street was once a fashionable place where merchants and other well-to-do people had their dwellings. An examination of parish registers in this area of Middlesex provided a single candidate for the merchant listed in Middlesex in the five London directories between 1738 and 1745, Francis Corbin. His name appeared in a christening recorded in the register of Saint Dunstan, Stepney.³⁰ It showed that he was christened September 24, 1710 when he was twenty days old and was the son of Capt. Francis and Mary Corbin of Ratcliffe, mariner. A marriage allegation for the intended marriage of his father and mother was also located among the Stepney parish records.³¹ The allegation is dated April 24, 1697 and is signed "Fran: Corbin," and summarized in part as follows: This day appeared personally Francis

Corbin of Ratcliffe in ye parish of Stepney in ye county of Middlesex mariner a bachelor aged 28 years (? or thereabouts) and alleged that he intended to marry with Mary Peak of the same place spinster aged 21 years by and with the consent of her mother, &c. Besides their son, Francis and Mary Corbin had only one other known child, a daughter named Sarah. She was christened in the church of St. Dunstan and All Saints, Stepney, Tower Hamlets, on August 20, 1699 when she was only seven days old.³² The register calls her Sarah daughter of Francis Corban (sic) of Stepney Causeway, mariner, and Mary his wife. Sadly, the record shows that Sarah died not long after and was buried August 31, 1699.³³ Francis Corbin's father, Francis, died not long after his son was born, and he was buried in the parish church on March 11, 1710/11.³⁴ He left a will dated March 1, 1710/11 that was probated in the PCC on June 5, 1711.³⁵ In it, he is called "Francis Corbin of Ratcliffe in the parish of Stepney in the County of Middlesex, mariner." By its terms, he leaves to his "honoured mother Frances" an annuity as well as money for mourning. He bequeaths the sum of £100 to his son Francis and clothes to his "brother" Jonathan Heard (? brother-in-law). He then makes the following noteworthy bequest to his son: "I give and bequeath unto my said son Francis Corbin all my silver plate that is marked with my coat of arms." (emphasis added) In addition, he gives and bequeaths "unto my well-beloved wife Mary Corbin all and singular the residue and remainder of my monies debts good chattel and estate whatsoever," and following her death to son Francis. His wife Mary was made sole executrix. From this, it is clear that the testator Francis Corbin was

descended from an armorial family with a right to bear heraldic arms. Also, from this it is learned that the testator's mother was named Frances, and this clue allowed the identification of his parents. A key record was an entry in the Stepney parish register of the christening of a Francis Corbin on December 29, 1667.³⁶ The actual entry calls him "Frauncis (sic) son of Symon Corbin of Ratcliffe, waterman, and Frances his wife," and stated that he was fourteen days old when he was christened. Additional research revealed other children for Simon and Frances: "Sarah daughter of Simon Corbin of Ratcliffe, waterman, and Frances his wife" christened July 20, 1673; "Simon son of Simon Corbin of Ratcliffe, waterman, and Frances his wife" christened January 20, 1675/76; and "Philip son of Simon Corbin of Ratcliffe, mariner, and Frances his wife" christened January 22, 1677/78.³⁷ Being the oldest son, Francis would have been Simon's heir. Simon himself died in St. Michael, Barbados, and was buried in the church there June 22, 1691, where the register entry calls him "Capt. Simon Corbin."³⁸ On June 20, 1691, shortly before his death, he wrote a will that was probated in the PCC on January 7, 1691/92.³⁹ It begins: "In the name of God I Symon Corbin Commander of the good ship *Elizabeth and Katherine* now riding at anchor in Carlile (sic) Bay before the town of St. Michael in the Island of Barbados." In the will, he asks friends, Mr. John Pilgrim, Capt. Dobbins and Mr. Walter Coppinger, to settle his affairs in Barbados and return the ship to the Port of London, if possible. The only bequest is to his "well beloved wife Frances," to whom he leaves all his real and personal property. She is also named as his sole executrix. His wife

Frances lived for more than twenty-five years after his death as the record shows that “Frances Corbin of Ratcliffe, widow” was buried in the Stepney church on December 19, 1717.⁴⁰ This Simon Corbin may be the son of another man of the same name whose intended marriage to a Jone Stoute is noted in a marriage allegation at the church of St. Dunstan and All Saints dated September 17, 1654 that calls him “Symon Corbin of Lymehouse, mariner, aged forty years.”⁴¹

The Francis Corbin christened in 1710 would have been about six months old when his father died, so it is assumed he remained with his mother Mary until he was about the age of fourteen when he was apprenticed as a Merchant Taylor to learn the ways of commerce prevalent at the time, especially those involving the intricacies of the Atlantic trade between Britain and her colonies. This is verified by an entry in a register of duties paid for apprentices’ indentures for Britain.⁴² This document identified him as Francis son of Francis Corbin, deceased, and is dated November 7, 1726. It shows that he was apprenticed for seven years to a Benjamin Bradley, Citizen and Merchant Taylor of London. The premiums paid to the master included a considerable first payment of £50 and a second payment of £1.5. A search of a database of London land tax records disclosed more about the whereabouts of Mary and Francis Corbin in the 1730s, and the following information is taken from that source.⁴³ Mary Corbin was living on Church Street in Stepney, Middlesex, and as noted on the Faden map discussed earlier, Church Street was also known as Stepney

Causeway. Her first appearance at that address occurred in 1730, where she was listed as “Mrs. Corbin.” She was also listed at that address in 1732 and 1734, but not thereafter. In fact, she died in 1734 as the register of Stepney parish noted the burial of Mary Corbin of Ratcliffe, widow, on December 22, 1734.⁴⁴ Also in 1734, the tax records show that Francis Corbin was living on Church Street and his name also appeared at that address for the years 1735, 1736, 1738 and 1739. He was also taxed for the years 1736 and 1739 on rented stables at an address in Whitehorse Street (White Horse on the Faden map). This tax database is incomplete which could account for some of the missing years, and for the years 1740 through 1745, as his address in the London business directories mentioned earlier is given as Stepney Causeway. Francis Corbin appears in no other known London records after the 1745 directory listing. Only two further records of this Francis Corbin have thus far been found prior to November 1744, when he left England bound for Carolina, but they are quite interesting as they suggest some of his probable business connections in the 1730s and early 1740s. The first, dated September 11, 1741, is a letter from the Commissioners of Customs to “Newcastle,” which mentioned that Francis Corbin was a surety for “Messrs. Bradley and Griffin,” who owed money to the Crown for tobacco duties.⁴⁵ From this record, it seems Corbin could not be located, and the letter requested a warrant to be given to the Postmaster General “to detain letters to or from him so they may be inspected.” The second record mentioning him was dated September 17, 1741, and simply noted that the warrant had been issued.⁴⁶ The man

referred to as “Newcastle” was Thomas Pelham-Holles, Duke of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and of Newcastle-Under-Lyme, of whom more will be said later in connection with Corbyn Morris. The “Messrs. Bradley and Griffin” of London were major importers of tobacco from the Chesapeake region of America during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴⁷ Its principals included brothers Benjamin and James Bradley and Richard Griffin. This Benjamin Bradley is likely the man of the same name, who was admitted in 1678 to the Freedom of the City of London in the Merchant Taylor’s Company.⁴⁸ He is also very likely the “Mr. Benjamin Bradley” mentioned in a history of the Merchant Taylors’ School in London in a list of “Members of the Court,” for the years 1714-1715, 1715-1716 and 1721-1722.⁴⁹ It has already been seen that Francis Corbin of Stepney, Middlesex, was apprenticed to a Benjamin Bradley, Citizen and Merchant Taylor of London, to learn that trade and his master was almost certainly also the same man. James Bradley dealt with some of the major planters in Virginia including Robert “King” Carter of Corotoman with whom Bradley did business from at least 1723 until Carter’s death in 1732. In a letter to him dated May 17, 1727, Carter mentioned the arrival of Bradley’s ship, the *Welcome*, and reminded him that he wished to find a place for his son Landon as an apprentice to learn the Virginia trade and hoped Bradley would change his mind about taking him.⁵⁰ The firm of Bradley and Griffin is also referred to among the letters of William Byrd II of Westover.⁵¹ Although they did not participate in the slave trade themselves, Benjamin and James Bradley were among the financiers of

the Royal African Company, an English mercantile company set up in 1660 by the royal Stuart family and City of London merchants to engage in this trade along the west coast of Africa.⁵² Benjamin Bradley died testate in 1731, and his will proved in the PCC mentioned his wife, sons Benjamin, James and William and several daughters.⁵³ His brother James died in 1733, leaving a PCC will that named his sons James and Daniel and three daughters.⁵⁴ His son James and Richard Griffin were appointed as his executors. By July 1741, the firm of Bradley and Griffin was experiencing financial difficulty, and George Arnold, an alderman of the City of London, was allowed to take possession of a ship called the *Hannah* arriving from Virginia, which was threatened to be seized by the Customs on account of a debt to the Crown of her owners Benjamin Bradley and Richard Griffin, London merchants, for whom Arnold was surety.⁵⁵ This Benjamin Bradley would be the son of the Benjamin who died in 1733. Arnold was allowed to take possession of the *Hannah* on the condition that he would pay the Crown's debt out of the proceeds of the ship. It has already been seen that Francis Corbin was being sought in September 1741 as a consequence of his also being a surety to Bradley and Griffin, but what became of that cannot be determined on the basis of available evidence. What can be said is that the Francis Corbin of Stepney, Middlesex, was apprenticed to and trained to become a Merchant Taylor with one of the major mercantile houses in London, one that had dealings with some of the most important planters in the Chesapeake region. This would doubtless have benefitted him greatly during his formative years, allowing him to hone

his business acumen and to make the acquaintance of many important men and become the sort of business man that might have appealed to Granville as a potential land agent for his Carolina lands.

The Pelhams, Corbyn Morris and John Carteret, 2nd Earl Granville

It has already been seen that Francis Corbin departed England for Carolina soon after John Carteret, the 2nd Earl Granville, gave him his “Instructions for Mr. Corbin going to Carolina,” dated November 14, 1744. Corbin was to make the voyage on a British Man-of-war and sail first to South Carolina to deliver a packet from the Duke of Newcastle and other documents to Governor Glenn, and then proceed to North Carolina, where he was to deliver to its governor a similar packet. In North Carolina, Corbin was also instructed to meet with Edward Moseley, who had been the Earl’s agent in North Carolina since 1740, and deliver to Moseley Granville’s personal instructions for the conduct of his now greatly enlarged proprietary affairs. These instructions also had this to say about Corbin personally: “Mr. Corbin, who is sent with These (sic) to Mr. Moseley, is one I have a value for, whom I recommend to Mr. Moseley.” (Emphasis added) Despite considerable effort nothing was found that directly ties Corbin to Carteret prior to Carteret’s mentioning him in these written instructions. However, it appears from the wording that Carteret must have thought Corbin was well qualified “for setting off to me in Severalty my Eighth Part of the

Carolinas,” and to conduct the other efforts he was tasked with in the instructions he carried. It is also considered a distinct possibility that Francis Corbin’s “near relation” Corbyn Morris might have wielded political influence on his behalf to place him as Carteret’s land agent in Carolina. That influence stemmed in part from Morris’ connections with other important British political players of the mid-eighteenth century.

Thomas Pelham-Holles, the Duke of Newcastle, was often referred to by his contemporaries simply as “Newcastle,” and his younger brother Henry, as “Pelham.” *The Dictionary of National Biography*, a twenty-two-volume tome containing biographical information on prominent British and Irish figures, provides details on the careers of both of these men and is the source of the following.⁵⁶ Both were statesmen and served in important positions in the British government including that of Prime Minister: Pelham served from 1743 until 1754, and Newcastle from 1754 until 1756, and again from 1757 until 1762. Newcastle was also a long-time protégé of Sir Robert Walpole, British statesman, Whig politician and Prime Minister from 1721 until 1742, and served under him for more than twenty years until Walpole stepped down as Prime Minister. This same reference also contains an extensive biographical sketch of Corbyn Morris, and among other things, it notes that in 1751 he was dispatched by Pelham to Edinburgh, Scotland, as Secretary of the Customs and Salt Duty, where he worked to introduce greater efficiency into revenue collection north of the border and to combat fraud in imports of tobacco and French wines.⁵⁷ Morris held this position for a

dozen years until March 15, 1763, when he was appointed to the important position of Commissioner of the Customs in London. Based on the record it is clear that both Newcastle and Pelham thought well of Morris' ability and during their respective administrations employed him "in conciliating opponents," and for other political tasks. During the years that Morris served in Scotland, he proved himself an administrator of great ability and claimed that during his first five years there "more money had been remitted from the customs in Scotland to the receiver-general in England than in all the preceding years since the union." As a result of his experience Morris submitted to Newcastle in 1752 and 1758 several suggestions for the better regulation of the customs and salt duty. Corbyn Morris was also a supporter of Walpole's policies and in 1741 wrote a pamphlet called *A Letter from a Bystander to a Member of Parliament* that concluded with a eulogy of the Walpole administration.

Another player on the political scene during the Walpole and Pelham administrations was John Carteret, 2nd Earl Granville. The following discussion of Granville is also from *The Dictionary of National Biography*.⁵⁸ He was educated at Westminster School, which both Pelham and Newcastle also attended, and then at Christ Church, Oxford, and was later created Doctor of Civil Law on July 12, 1756. On March 5, 1721, he was appointed Secretary of State for affairs of the Southern Province in the Walpole administration and sworn a member of the Privy Council on the same day. At that time, the Southern Province included Ireland, the Channel Islands, France, Switzerland, Spain,

Portugal and the State of Italy as well as the Ottoman Empire and the American colonies. It quickly proved impossible for two men such as Walpole and Carteret, “neither of whom could brook any rivals,” to act together in the same cabinet for any length of time. Carteret became jealous of Walpole’s superior authority and endeavored to mitigate this by ingratiating himself to the first Hanoverian king, George I. He succeeded in this as the king could speak no English and Carteret was the only minister who could speak German. Even so, the political struggle between Walpole and Carteret continued for many years until 1741, when Carteret attempted a resolution in the House of Lords to have Walpole dismissed as Prime Minister. This effort failed both in the Lords and in the Commons, but the Parliament was dissolved as a result and Walpole met the new House of Commons with a diminished majority. This loss of power led in the following year to his resignation. Spencer Compton, the 1st Earl of Wilmington, succeeded Walpole as Prime Minister and appointed Carteret Secretary of State for the Northern Province. However, Compton did not serve long as he died in July 1743. He was succeeded by Henry Pelham and after a protracted struggle in the cabinet, Carteret, unable to withstand the combined opposition against him, resigned the seals of his office, which were accepted by the king on November 24, 1744, the same year and month Carteret dispatched Francis Corbin to Carolina as his agent.

Granville’s instructions for Corbin, perhaps speaking from experience and the wisdom of age, specifically directed that “Mr. Corbin will avoid

concerning himself in any disputes among the Gentlemen in North Carolina, by whom I desire to be look'd upon as a Gentleman, who having a considerable Estate in that Country, is desirous to be a good & useful Neighbor to them." This direction seems a bit hypocritical on Granville's part considering his own inability to avoid disputes. In any case, this instruction Corbin failed to heed as he quickly fell into disagreement with Edward Moseley over the nature of his own responsibilities. Moseley simply ignored Granville's instructions and shared his duties with another North Carolinian, Robert Halton.⁵⁹ The record of what Corbin did during his initial three-year stay in North Carolina is rather meager, although it seems he resided in the Cape Fear region, where he associated with several of the important men there, including Moseley, Roger Moore, James Moore, Matthew Rowan and John Swann.⁶⁰

Prior to Corbin's arrival in North Carolina, there had been a gradual emergence of northern and southern interests in the province wherein economic and political differences pitted residents in the Albemarle region against settlers located in the Cape Fear valley.⁶¹ This regional friction coupled with legislative efforts by Gabriel Johnston, who had come to North Carolina in 1734 as its royal governor, plunged the province into a protracted political struggle beginning in 1746.⁶² Most of Corbin's early Cape Fear associates were political opponents of the governor, and this likely influenced his own subsequent opposition to Johnston that began almost immediately after he returned to London

after his unsuccessful stay in North Carolina.⁶³ Back in London Corbin established a mercantile business for trade with North Carolina and “soon became one of the leading figures in the London-based anti-Johnstonian forces seeking the governor’s removal.”⁶⁴ In 1748, Corbin had written a letter to the Duke of Bedford, who was Secretary of State for the Southern Provinces, in which he represented himself as someone interested in the province of North Carolina and in it he attacked Johnston’s performance as governor.⁶⁵ Early on in this regional struggle members of the Albemarle faction had asked Granville himself for help, but he refused to take any action until the matter reached him as a member of the Privy Council. It may have been that Granville chose instead to exert his influence through Corbin so as to curry favor with his North Carolina tenants.⁶⁶ Whatever the case may have been, Corbin’s support was especially significant because of his relationship with Corbyn Morris who, as seen earlier, had a close political relationship with the Duke of Newcastle. Indeed, it was probably because of Morris’ efforts that the Duke of Bedford, the newly appointed secretary of state for the colonies, urged the Board of Trade in January 1749 to hear the complaints lodged against Johnston by these latest adversaries.⁶⁷ The details of this can be found in the *Journal of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations*: “Read a letter from his Grace the Duke of Bedford, dated the 23rd of January, 1748-9, signifying to the Board that complaints were made by several persons against Gabriel Johnston, Esquire, Governor of North Carolina, and that it is his Majesty’s pleasure that the Board do require the attendance of the said persons, and

report to him a state of the case, with their opinions thereupon. Ordered that the Secretary do write to Messrs. Corbyn Morris, Daubuz and Child, as also to Mr. Abercromby, agent for the province of North Carolina, whose names are mentioned in the above letter, to desire their attendance at the Board tomorrow morning, at eleven o'clock.”⁶⁸ As directed, Corbyn Morris, Thomas Child, then serving as North Carolina’s Attorney General, and James Abercromby attended the board of commissioners that met on January 24, 1748/49, during which Morris was asked to state what he had to offer regarding the alleged misconduct by Johnston, and he did so under three heads: “1st, his contempt and disobedience of the Crown’s orders, particularly in neglecting to correspond with the government; 2ndly, his passing Acts for issuing Bills of Credit without suspending clauses; and 3rdly, appointing suspected persons to offices of trust.”⁶⁹ Regarding the last point Morris claimed that Johnston had granted militia offices and commissions of the peace to Scottish Jacobites and that the governor had received the news of the rebel defeat in 1745 at the Battle of Culloden “very coldly” and “expressed concern” that many of his former Scottish “acquaintance[s] and schoolfellows” had suffered.⁷⁰ There were other accusations as well, but in the end the charges by Corbin and others came to naught after Johnston was able to put on his own defense. Following this episode, Granville once more became Corbin’s employer in October 1749. It is telling that Corbin and Thomas Child, both known to and in the orbit of Corbyn Morris and all three opposed to Governor Johnston, were commissioned as his proprietary agents following the deaths of Moseley

and Halton. Both Corbin and Child returned to the colony in 1750 armed with powers of attorney for North Carolina and instructions from Granville to set his proprietary affairs in order and open a land office in Edenton.⁷¹

Francis Corbin in Edenton

Upon their arrival there, Corbin leased a 4000-acre plantation known as Moseley Point that had belonged to Edward Moseley. When this land was conveyed to Samuel Johnston in 1763, the deed noted that the land was “late in the occupation of Francis Corbin.”⁷² Both agents worked quickly and by October had opened a land office as instructed, a feat acknowledged by Governor Johnston himself in a November 1750 letter to Granville in which he wrote that Corbin had been “very industrious all summer in placing the office in order and settling accounts,” adding that Corbin “seems to have a head very well qualified for this sort of business,” undoubtedly traits learned during his apprenticeship with Bradley.⁷³ By early 1751, Thomas Child was planning his return to London, a situation that would leave Corbin as the Earl’s sole resident agent. This was of some concern to Johnston, who wrote to Granville in March of that year expressing unease over Corbin’s financial situation: “What that Gentleman’s Fortune or Credit may be at Home I don’t pretend to know, but unless both are tolerably good I am afraid he will be pretty much puzzled to make regular remittances” of the monies due Granville from the land office proceeds.⁷⁴ Despite these apprehensions Johnston wrote further on in this letter that Corbin “has brought your

Lordships Office into most excellent order. He has sorted all the papers and brought up the books and settled all the accounts in a most clear and diligent manner.” Child finally departed North Carolina for London in June 1751, leaving Corbin in full control of the Earl’s affairs in the province, and although he was later joined by a succession of co-agents, he remained the principal proprietary agent residing in the colony during the following decade.⁷⁵

Granville had reserved to himself all the ownership rights to his one-eighth share of North Carolina when the other Lords Proprietors sold their interests in the colony back to the crown, and he hoped to utilize this vast land holding as a source of revenue by “renting small tracts of it to various tenants, charging them a fee for the surveying and issuing of the land grant and then a quit rent for the purpose of occupying the land for cultivation.”⁷⁶ If things had gone as the Earl had planned this income stream would have been considerable and would have contributed substantially to his fortune but they did not as history has shown. During Corbin’s time as sole agent, he established three other “frontier” land offices in areas remote from Edenton. These were at Enfield, “Corbinton” (now Hillsborough) and Salisbury, and to staff these offices, Corbin hired agents to issue warrants, survey the tracts and register the grants once completed. Although Corbin himself made annual trips across the Granville District finalizing land grants and collecting outstanding fees, it became increasingly difficult for him to monitor all that transpired in these frontier land offices, especially

considering that more than sixty thousand settlers had moved into the North Carolina Piedmont during the 1750s.⁷⁷ Moreover, Corbin had his own personal business interests, and this certainly contributed to his lack of proper attention to proprietary business. As the Granville land agency grew in size, the monies involved increased, and this attracted unscrupulous men to oversee its affairs, men more interested in lining their own pockets than those of Earl Granville.⁷⁸ Among the allegations against Corbin and his co-agents that began to accumulate was that they had condoned false surveys, charged excessive fees for services rendered and had purposefully granted the same tracts of land to more than one grantee. Consequently, by the late 1750s the agency had become rife with corruption, and Corbin as the Earl's principal resident agent naturally became the main target of complaints by those who had settled in the Granville district. This situation eventually led to, among other things, the "Enfield Riot" of January 1759, wherein a group of about two dozen men traveled some seventy miles to Edenton where they took Corbin hostage and hauled him back to Halifax County. There he was held in Enfield along with his co-agent Joshua Bodley for several days until they agreed to the demands by the rioters that they be more transparent in their official operations.⁷⁹ This episode led to disastrous results for Corbin as he was stripped by Governor Dobbs of all the Crown offices he held except his seat on the governor's council, and after Granville removed his protection and stripped Corbin of his power of attorney in April 1759, Dobbs also removed him from the council as well. Interestingly, these events did not seem to affect his personal

standing in his home county among those who knew him as he afterwards stood for election and was immediately returned a member of the General Assembly where he represented Chowan County from April 1760 through May 1765.

These events and other charges against Corbin of malfeasance in the conduct of the Earl's land office affairs have painted a rather dark picture of him that has not endeared him to posterity. That being said, there is arguably another side to Corbin that is only infrequently mentioned. One biographer described him this way: "He was probably honest enough in his way, for, as far as we know, no charges of a dishonorable nature were ever made except in connection with his fees as Granville's agent, and in this particular, we are not sure that he did anything strictly illegal; but at the same time, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he was deficient in some of the qualities that make for moral uprightness and political stability."⁸⁰ In 1752, a group of men that belonged to the Protestant religious sect known as the Moravian Brethren or Unitus Fratrum journeyed from Pennsylvania to Edenton where they hoped to purchase a large tract of land somewhere on Granville's property where their members could settle. The tract of almost 100,000 acres they eventually purchased is known today as Wachovia and lies in Forsyth County. One of the leaders of the group that visited Edenton, Bishop Spangenberg, wrote to Count Zinzendorf, a spiritual leader of the Moravians, about their experience with Corbin while there.⁸¹ This letter, dated Edenton, September 16, 1752, reads in

part as follows: “Mr. Francis Corbin, My Lord Granville’s Agent, welcomed us the same evening (of their arrival), and talked pleasantly and instructively, giving us all the information about the Colony that we could wish. He had been informed of our coming, and had already made arrangements for our speedy departure, having a Surveyor in town of whose honesty he professed himself to be assured. At the same time, he begged us not to hurry, but to rest a while in Edenton, for our own sakes and on account of our horses, which indeed we found desirable, not only because we had already traveled 450 miles, but also because heavy rains made the roads almost impassable. He sent our horses to his farm where there is good pasture, such as we have not found since leaving Philadelphia . . . I have had opportunity to spend several hours conversing with Mr. Corbin. He is very busy, being not only My Lord Granville’s Agent, but also Judge of the Court of Admiralty and of the Supreme Court, not to speak of other employments; however, almost every day I have spent some hours with him, which was to my advantage. He is a walking encyclopedia concerning North Carolina affairs, is capable, polite, and very obliging. I have also spoken with him on religious matters and find that while he is not of our faith he yet wishes, according to his lights, to do something to help the people of this land, and so each Sunday he has a sermon read, and something from the *Book of Common Prayer* . . . In short I think My Lord Granville has in him a capable Agent, the Governor a wise Councilor, and the land a just Judge. Our humble Respects to My Lord Granville for his

Recommendations to this man, who, so far as I can judge, is an honor to him."

Francis Corbin was also a well-respected communicant of St. Paul's Anglican Parish and served on its vestry from 1752-1754. The parish was founded in 1701, and the first church, likely a simple, earthfast structure, was completed the following year. The present St. Paul's church in Edenton, a lovely brick colonial structure, was commenced in 1736, but it was still largely incomplete when the Reverend Clement Hall came to St. Paul's in 1744 as its rector. During his tenure, the Reverend Hall was a frequent correspondent with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) in London, a group that conducted the foreign mission work of the Anglican Church in the American colonies and other overseas English possessions. In several of his letters to the SPG, Hall spoke of Corbin as someone interested in seeing the church building completed. For example, in 1749 he reported that Francis Corbin "will do his true endeavour to have it finished."⁸² Corbin's interest in seeing the church completed is reflected in the St. Paul's vestry minutes for June 5, 1750: "Resolved that Mr. Francis Corbine, Mr. James Craven and Mr. John Halsey be and they are appointed And impower'd to agree with such person or persons who are willing to Undertake the said worke and to See the same finished and performed In such workman like manner as they Shall contract for and So Soon as the Same Shall be completed they are hereby impowered to draw on the Sheriff or Church Wardens for the paying and Discharging

their Contracts and agreements as afore Said.”⁸³ On December 31, 1751, Hall again wrote to the SPG mentioning that “Several Gentlemen, (particularly Mr. Corbin) are taking proper Methods for finishing our Church the next Summer.”⁸⁴ The following year, Hall again apprised the SPG of progress on the church: “Our Church at Edenton stands as before, but the Honorable Francis Corbin Esqr, and some other Publick Spirited Gentlemen being Chosen Members of our Vestry, have now laid a Levy pretty large, which, with what they have in Bank, and Gentlemen’s Subscriptions, we hope will finish it this year.”⁸⁵ Finally, on October 20, 1755, Hall wrote to the SPG that “The Workmen are at last enclosing the Church and Colonel Corbin and some other worthy Gentlemen say it shall be finished as soon as possible.”⁸⁶ When the Reverend Hall died in 1759, the church remained unfinished, and it was not used for worship until more than a year after his death.⁸⁷ Although Corbin was no longer a member of St. Paul’s vestry when Hall died, he took it upon himself to write to the SPG in a letter dated Edenton, July 20, 1759, “recommending the Widow and six young Children of the Reverend Mr. Hall, the Society’s late worthy Missionary, to their charitable consideration and hoping they will be so good to allow the whole year’s Salary, which would have been due had he lived to the 24th of June last.”⁸⁸

James Innes and Francis Corbin’s Other Scots Connections

It is of some interest to consider that Corbin’s circle of friends and associates included several Scots that had immigrated to the province of

North Carolina, where they subsequently joined the ranks of some of its most important men prior to the Revolutionary War. Their number included North Carolina Governor Gabriel Johnston, James Murray, John Rutherford and James Innes. In the year 1751, Innes, Murray and Rutherford sat on Governor Johnston's council along with Corbin. A good deal is known as to how they stood to each other in terms of their varying degrees of interaction and intimacy from a journal kept by a Miss Jean Schaw of Edinburgh, Scotland, who traveled to the Cape Fear in 1775 to visit her brother Robert, who lived on a plantation called "Schawfield," a few miles above Wilmington.⁸⁹ In fact, John Rutherford's three children, Frances or "Fanny" Rutherford (1756-1809), John Rutherford, Jr. (1762-1813) and William Gordon Rutherford (1764-1818) accompanied Miss Schaw on the voyage that took her from Scotland to the Cape Fear as there were connections between these two families. An annotated version of her journal was published in 1921, and unless otherwise indicated, the discussion here is derived from that source.

Despite the fact that Johnston and Corbin were political antagonists all five men belonged to a common group bound together in various ways, including kinship. Murray was related to Rutherford whom he called "cousin," and had left him in charge of his business in London before coming to America. More particularly, both men descended in the third generation and in different lines from a common great grandfather, Sir John Murray of Philiphaugh. The common ancestor of the Murrays and

Rutherfords was John Schaw, minister at Selkirk in Scotland, who married Anne, daughter of Sir John Murray of Philiphaugh; she was the great-aunt of the three Rutherford children. The father of Miss Janet Schaw who kept the journal was Gideon Schaw whose wife was Anne Rutherford. Getting back to James Murray, he first arrived in Charles Town, South Carolina, in November of 1735, but by the beginning of 1736 he was in Brunswick town in the Cape Fear. There he rented a house from Roger Moore, but after a falling out with Moore, he removed to Wilmington, bought a house and lot there and entered into the business and social life of the town and province. Murray traveled back to England in 1738, but returned the following year bringing young John Rutherford with him. Rutherford was not twenty years old when he came to the colony and for a while lived with Murray at his house in Wilmington. In 1750, Rutherford was appointed receiver-general of quit-rents, a position for which he was not well suited. However, he prospered even if only modestly and in 1754 married Frances, the widow of Governor Gabriel Johnston, who had died two years earlier. Frances was still a young widow when she married Rutherford and subsequently became the mother of his three children mentioned earlier, Fanny, John Jr. and William Gordon.

David Dobson in his *Directory of Scottish Settlers in North America* says that James Innes was born ca. 1700 and that he came to America from Canisbay in Caithness in the extreme northern part of Scotland.⁹⁰ The suggestion of his place of origin comes from language in Innes' will

by which he directed a remittance to be made to Edinburgh “Sufficient to pay for a Church Bell for the Parish Church of Cannesby, in Caithness, agreeable to my Letter to Mr. Jams. Broadee Minister thereof.”⁹¹ A search of the volumes of the *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, a list of ministers of the Church of Scotland, revealed that a James Innes (1638-1704) was minister at Canisbay from 1667 until his death on December 24, 1704.⁹² His wife was Jean Munro and they had three children: Theodore, James and Barbara. This same volume also lists a minister at Canisbay named James Brodie (1708-1779), certainly the “Mr. Jams. Broadee” also mentioned in Innes’ will. It seems likely that Reverend James Innes’ son, James, was born well before 1700, so he may be the father of the man that came to the Cape Fear. James Innes’ entry in *NCpedia* entry states that he came to North Carolina in 1733, about the same time that Governor Gabriel Johnston arrived, and the fact that Johnston shortly thereafter appointed him as a justice for New Hanover Precinct suggests a prior acquaintance in Scotland.⁹³ Innes was one of the most important residents of North Carolina in his time and held many offices of trust, both civil and military, and won the esteem of his contemporaries as an honorable man and efficient personal servant. However, his aptitudes were military rather than civil, and he never became a political leader or aspired to public office. Governor Johnston recommended him for the council, and he sat at the board under Johnston for nearly ten years. Corbin’s own relations with Innes began around 1750 when the former, as Granville’s land agent, made him a co-agent, a position he held until 1754, when he was dismissed by

Granville. Innes arrived in the colony with a wife named Jean, whom he called in his will “the companion of my life.”⁹⁴ Innes and Corbin were in constant touch personally and officially over the years. James Innes died September 5, 1759, and two years later, his widow, Jean Innes, and Francis Corbin were married. According to the Schaw journal, Mrs. Corbin was the “great friend” of Rutherford and named one of her slaves “Rutherford,” and by the terms of her will left her property to the Rutherford children. The other member of Corbin’s circle of Scottish friends and associates was Gabriel Johnston. His brother was Samuel Johnston (1702-1757), who came to North Carolina from Dundee, Scotland, in 1735, after having been appointed surveyor-general of the colony.⁹⁵ Prior to leaving Dundee he married Helen Scrymsoure and with her had several children including Jean, who married a wealthy Scottish immigrant merchant of Edenton named George Blair and Samuel (1733-1816) of whom more will be said later in Part Two of this article.⁹⁶

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