

# Archaeology of the Edward Porteus Plantation of New Bottle Plantation



1673 Augustine Herman Map

Many of the colonial records for Gloucester County were destroyed in 1820 in a fire in the office of the clerk, and later during the Civil War. During 1962 a number of excavations in the county revealed the Jenkins home which was originally named New Bottle which was built by Robert Porteus at the beginning of the 18th century.

However, the only conceivable shred of evidence found was a handsome 17th-century latten spoon bearing a thistle as its touchmark, suggesting, perhaps, that it was made by a Scots craftsman. As the family of Edward Porteus, the emigrant and father of Robert Porteus, came from New Bottle in Scotland, it might be argued that the spoon was among the possession of Edward when he arrived in Virginia. The distinguished Gloucester County historian, Dr. William Carter Stubbs undertook considerable research into the history of the Porteus family, the results of which may be summarized as follows: "Edward Porteus was living in Gloucester County by 1681 in which year he married the widow of Robert Lee. He died in 1694 leaving a widow and one son, Capt. Robert Porteus who became heir to "New Bottle" plantation.

Robert married the daughter of John Smith of Purton and after her death he married a daughter of Governor Edmund Jennings of Rippon Hall in York County. His two wives bore him 19 children, the best known of whom was Beilby Porteus who was born in 1731 after Robert had returned to England (in about 1727) to live at York. Beilby Porteus became Bishop of Chester and then of London, and died in 1808. Robert lived on in York until his death in 1758." The location of New Bottle has been the subject of dispute for many years. Perhaps the fact that the the Vestry Book of Petsworth Parish places Robert Porteus in the Second Precinct which extended from Bennits Creek up the York River to Jones Creek. The excavation at Clay Bank Creek clarified that the First Precinct reached Bennits Creek. One has to note name changes.

Clay Bank Creek was known as Bennits Creek, and Clay Bank Creek is now Aberdeen Creek, while Jones Creek remains the same. The Augustine Herman Map (above) published in 1673 shows Bennits Creek as long as the present-day Jones Creek without Jones Creek being shown. However, as the parish records delineating the bounds of the precincts in 1709 refer to both Bennits Creek and Jones Creek there cannot have been any confusion between them. The Porteus property lay between those creeks, which

would place it north of the modern community of Clay Bank and south of Jones Creek. Although it has not been proved that the Porteus land included the York River frontage, it is reasonable to suppose that it did. The Porteus family owned this land as well as other land in the Second Precinct until about 1763. The bounds of that precinct were ordered to be processioned in 1751, 1755, 1759 and 1763 beginning "on the Land of Robt Porteus Esqr." This is why church vestry books are so valuable to the genealogist, as one can follow the waterways and other landmarks during the processioning and compare them to the tax records of the county.

"Peyton son of Joseph and Dorothy Wyatt born Nov 15, 1763, The Wyatt arms are: Party per fesse, azure and gules, a barnacle argent. The Hawte arms are: Or a cross engrailed gules. The name of the Wiatt family variously spelled in our records, but the spelling of the Gloucester branch seems now to be "Wiatt." "Violet Banks" is the modern name of the house of Edward Porteus, the emigrant. It is an old square brick building, two stories and a half, with four rooms to a floor. Though abandoned, it still retains the fine panelling and interior carving of the long past. It fronts York River and on the west is Poropotank Creek. Robert Porteus, his son lived at "New Bottle," subsequently called "Concord."

In 1693 Edward Porteus was recommended by the Governor of Virginia for appointment to the Council (Sainsbury MSS.), vestry man of Petsworth Parish in 1681 (vestry book). He married "the Relict of Robert Lee," who left in his will seven pounds to the poor of Petsworth (ibid). His only son, Robert Porteus, Esq. was vestryman in 1704, member of the Council and removed to York, England; and in the Cathedral at Rippon is an inscription on the walls to his memory. He had nineteen children, the youngest of whom but one, Beilby Porteus, was born at York, May 8, 1731, and died May 14, 1808.

He became bishop of Chester and of London, Robert Porteus married the daughter of Edmund Jennings, Esq., son of Sir Edmund of Rippon, England.

One of his places in Gloucester county was called "New Bottle," after a

place of similar name in Scotland owned by him. The Bishop, his son, had "a singular picture which though not in the best style of coloring was yet thought valuable by Sir Joshua Reynolds as a specimen of the extent to which the art of painting had at that time reached in America, and he himself very highly prized it as exhibiting a faithful and interesting representation of (the residence of) his father. The neighborhood of the Porteuses in Virginia was about a mile alongside the York River and consisted of well built brick houses. Going down the river from the Porteus Mansion, one passed successively the lands of the Smiths of Purton, the family of Capt. John Stubbs, the Burwells of Carters Creek, the Warners, of Warner Hall, the Pages of Rosewell, the Manns of Timberneck, the Perrins of Sarahs Creek, etc. On the opposite shore were the respectable homes of Edmund Jenings, Nathaniel Bacon, Dudley Digges, the Ballards, the Reades, the Smiths, etc.

Sources: St. Peters Parish Register; Chalmers Biographical Dictionary; Spotswood's Letter, II, 54; Contributions From the Museum of History and Technology Papers 52-54 on Archeology by Ivor Noel Hume and C. Malcolm Watkins.