

# JAMES HONEY: A WRIGHT FROM PERTH IN COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG<sup>1</sup>

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When a young fellow finds he has a genius for his trade or business, and has any thing of spirit, he generally lays hold of the first occasion to remove to England, or some other country, where he hopes for better encouragement.<sup>2</sup>

Edward Burt recognised the talents of wrights from the Highlands of Scotland,<sup>3</sup> but noted, even in the early eighteenth century, that many of the country's cleverest wrights were prone to emigrate. Burt, perhaps before his time, was astute to acknowledge the skill and potential influence of Scottish craftsmen who left the land of their birth seeking, if not a better life, greater encouragement in order to practise their trades. James Honey, (c. 1750–87) a wright trained in Perth could be viewed as such a craftsman who declined his right to enter the Wright Incorporation of Perth as a freeman in favour of booking passage to Williamsburg, Virginia.

Hundreds of apprentices indentured to freemen of the Wright Incorporation of Perth between 1700 and 1840 did not remain in Perth to become freemen, which means that they were not entitled to practise the art of the wright within the royalty of the Scottish Royal Burgh in their own right. Those men who had completed their indentures could become freemen upon the payment of dues if their essay pieces were approved.<sup>4</sup> In effect, the greatest obstacle to overcome in order to trade as a furniture maker in Perth had been surpassed by apprentices such as Honey upon the completion of their training.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, a great number of Perth's apprentices did not apply for their freedom. Trained wrights and furniture makers such as James Honey circumvented the ancient privileges and strict trade practices of trade incorporations in Scottish Royal Burghs by seeking a different freedom in Britain's eighteenth-century colonies. The names of Perth's apprentices who did not become freemen were cross-referenced with available lists of wrights and cabinet makers within Britain, namely Francis Bamford's *Dictionary of Edinburgh Furniture Makers* and Geoffrey Beard and the late Christopher Gilbert's *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers 1660–1840*. A few names were found to correspond with contemporary dates, but insufficient evidence was offered to confirm that the persons in these lists were from Perth. James Honey, therefore, serves as the sole representative of a large group of apprentice wrights trained by the Wright Incorporation but who did not become freemen.

In light of the great emigrations from Scotland and from the rest of the United Kingdom, particularly after c. 1770, many American furniture studies were consulted to trace Perth apprentices to British Colonial America.<sup>6</sup> Again names such as James Honey appeared, but locating a man with the same name and corresponding dates was inadequate proof. James Honey was first linked to Williamsburg, Virginia by consulting the *Williamsburg People File*, a computer generated file that identifies eighteenth-century inhabitants with Scottish origins at Colonial Williamsburg.<sup>7</sup> Confirmation of

Honey's Perth origins was discovered upon consulting David Jones's *Scottish Furniture Makers Record* at the University of St Andrews. David Dobson, a genealogist and historian specialising in Scots in the Colonies, had submitted evidence of James Honey's death notice in the 11 April 1787 edition of the *Virginia Gazette* which states clearly that he was a cabinet maker in Williamsburg, Virginia from Perth.<sup>8</sup>

Few documents record James Honey whilst he was in Perth, but his relationship with the Wright Incorporation appears to have followed the standard course. On 16 October 1764 James Honey commenced an apprenticeship with John Blair. Blair became a freeman wright on 3 June 1751, held extensive property in Perth and was from a well established Perth wright family.<sup>9</sup> According to the acts and statutes of the Incorporation, Blair was bound to instruct Honey in the art and science of the wright's trade, to maintain him in his own house in Perth and to pay him wages. All this appears to have been satisfied. Nevertheless, Honey made no application to enter the Incorporation as a freeman wright as he was entitled to do after seven years since the commencement of his indenture. Hence, by 1771 Honey could have become a freeman wright upon the payment of entrance dues and upon successfully completing an essay piece, but Honey made no effort to gain his freedom of the Wright Incorporation.

Perth's Burgh Records document James Honey's family and his career after his apprenticeship and before embarking for Virginia. The 1773 List of Perth Inhabitants records that Honey's father Samuel was a shoemaker originally from Methven parish, and that his mother's name was Rebecca Donaldson.<sup>10</sup> The census also records that Samuel Honey was a tenant of 'the Revd Mr John Buist in Greenock' and lists the occupations of his children: 'James aged 23 Journeyman Wright, John aged 20 Apprentice with Andrew Eadie Cooper, Thomas aged 18 Apprentice with Jo. Blair. Wright.'<sup>11</sup> The List of Inhabitants confirms that Honey had not earned his freedom by 1773. This source also illustrates a fairly common occurrence that brothers would serve their indentures with the same master, and if not that, they would be bound as apprentices to other freemen of the Wright Incorporation.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, as James Honey became a journeyman after his apprenticeship, other Perth apprentices may have utilised their training in the same manner. If so, this would explain, in part, why so many apprentices disappeared from extant records, because journeymen held no official function and were given little credit for the work they produced.<sup>13</sup> Other men trained as apprentices who did not become freemen of the Wright Incorporation of Perth may have ventured abroad as Honey did.

By 14 June 1776, Honey had settled in Williamsburg and had entered into a carpentry and cabinet making partnership with Richard Harrocks. On that date, their advertisement appeared in the Purdie edition of the *Virginia Gazette*:

*HONEY & HARROCKS, cabinet-makers, Williamsburg, beg leave to acquaint the publick, that they carry on the said bufinefs in all its branches; they likewise make FLAX WHEELS and CHECK REELS, and also STOCK GUNS in the neateft manner. As materials cannot be procured at this time upon credit, they expect ready money for their work. \* \* \* Good encouragement will be given to a couple of JOURNEYMEN, who will be liked the better if they are acquainted with TURNING. An APPRENTICE is alfo wanted.*<sup>14</sup>

They continued to seek journeymen skilled in cabinet-making and in making flax wheels in August 1776, when they advertised the following:

*Wanted immediately, two Journeymen Cabinet-Makers; likewise three or four Journeymen who are acquainted with making Flax Wheels. Such Perfons will meet with good encouragement by appying [sic] to the Subscribers, in Williamfburg.*

*James Honey & Richard Harrocks*<sup>15</sup>.

Harrocks was recorded as a carpenter and cabinet maker 'Opposite Capitol on Waller St' in 1776, a location shared by Honey at least by 1786.<sup>16</sup> According to Johannes Heuvel, master cabinet maker in Colonial Williamsburg, Honey 'was briefly in the cabinet making business with Richard Harrocks'.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, Heuvel was not more precise. Nevertheless, the following receipt (dated less than a year after the above newspaper advertisement) indicates the type of work produced by their firm and provides an example of their patrons:

*Public claims allowed . . . June 26, 1777 To Richard Harrocks, for a dozen mahogany chairs with hair bottoms for the use of the Senate, at 50 s each, ----- £30.0.0.*<sup>18</sup>

Williamsburg, like Perth, was a centre of government. Where Perth's Town Council offered commissions almost exclusively to Perth's freemen, Williamsburg, then 'capitol' of the Virginia colony, served as source of patronage for Williamsburg's tradesmen (until 1780 when the capital moved to Richmond).<sup>19</sup> The Senate commissioned Harrocks for a dozen chairs, and Honey is recorded repairing chairs at the Governor's Palace.<sup>20</sup> Honey's career in Williamsburg mirrors that of his Perth contemporaries in common training and similar sources of patronage, but his settlement in Williamsburg brought many differences. A notable distinction was that in Virginia, he was not required to enter a Royal Burgh Incorporation as a freeman nor pay entrance dues as there was no such organisation in Virginia. Unlike freemen wrights in Perth whose privileges dictated that competition for commissions was limited to its members, Honey was not protected from competition.<sup>21</sup> His newspaper advertisements are a sign of the open trade in Williamsburg; it was in his best interest to advertise, a practise rarely seen in the exclusive and privileged furniture trade in Perth. It may have been Harrocks's influence to advertise as it appears that Honey made no announcement of his arrival which was customary for other immigrant craftsmen to Williamsburg.<sup>22</sup>

Although Honey came to Williamsburg at a significant period of severing political ties with Britain (c. 1773-76), Williamsburg remained to be strongly influenced by Britain in social and cultural terms. Its eighteenth-century inhabitants were mainly of English or Scottish birth,<sup>23</sup> and it is no surprise that Williamsburg's inhabitants retained some familiar traditions or practices. One such tradition or institution that remained intact in Britain's former colony was that of Freemasonry. Whilst Honey was an apprentice in Perth, three Masonic lodges met there.<sup>24</sup> The Masonic Lodge of Scoon and Perth, No. 3 had very strong ties with the Wright Incorporation; The Lodge held their meetings in the Wrights Hall in the Watergate from 1725 to 1826. Furthermore, some prominent freemen wrights such as Deacon Patrick Conqueror<sup>25</sup> and George Sandeman<sup>26</sup> were also freemasons whose masonic connections extended commissions to them from fellow freemasons. Honey may have recognised the benefits offered to freemason cabinet makers in Perth or noted the career and commissions of the notable Williamsburg cabinet maker and freemason Benjamin Bucktrout (d. 1813), and joined the Williamsburg Lodge of Masons, No. 6 as a result.<sup>27</sup> From a partial list of members,

Honey is recorded as a freemason from July to October 1779.<sup>28</sup> No commissions resulting from his membership to the lodge have been found, but that aspect of his career should not be discounted as an influential source of patronage.

Another notable distinction with regard to Honey's career in Williamsburg versus that of his contemporaries in Scotland was his use of slave labour. In 'A List of Taxable Articles in the City of Williamsburg Taken by Robert Nicolson for the Year 1783 Under the Revenue Act', Honey owned six tithable slaves over sixteen years old, namely Ben, Gabriel, Peter, Kate, Cloe and Dinah.<sup>29</sup> Honey's slaves number on a par with other inhabitants of Williamsburg, but unlike most of his neighbours, he listed no slaves under the age of sixteen, who would not have been as useful in his workshop as adults. Likewise, Humphrey Harwood, as fellow Scot and freemason, was a bricklayer and builder in Williamsburg from 1768 until his death in 1788/89.<sup>30</sup> Harwood was registered at Lot 33 York Road, in 1782,<sup>31</sup> and in the 1783 tax record, Harwood listed seven slaves in his household, five of whom were adults.<sup>32</sup>

The *roup*, which was and remains to be a popular means to transfer the ownership of property and goods in Scotland, was conveyed to Britain's former colony and maintained as a method for selling property;

*To be SOLD to the higheft bidder, for ready money, on Tuefday the 4th of April, at the fubscriber's, oppofite the capitol, A tenement in Waller's freet, whereon is a houfe fite for the reception of a fmall family, and fome houfehold and kitchen furniture. Likewife a complete cheft of joiner's tools. The fale to begin at 10 o'clock, and continue till all are fold.*

JAMES HONEY.<sup>33</sup>

The sale of Honey's joiner's tools in 1780 falsely implies that he ceased operating as a joiner or cabinet maker in Williamsburg. Indeed, Honey continued his business in Williamsburg until his death in April 1787. His death notice records that his executrix, presumably his wife, was Lucy Honey and his executor was David Morton. Honey and Morton announced the sale of James Honey's '[household furniture], wagon, set of cabinet maker's tools and carpenter's tools, and stock of timber on hand (including mahogany, black walnut, pine plank, etc.)' in the 17 May 1787 edition of the *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*.<sup>34</sup> Hence, Honey continued to possess cabinet-making timbers and tools until his death.

Honey's career as a wright trained in Perth was varied. He is known to have worked as a joiner at the Kings Mill for Henry Martin in 1784.<sup>35</sup> Although Johannes Heuvel stated that Honey 'was a house joiner rather than a cabinetmaker', other evidence proves the contrary.<sup>36</sup> Honey exercised many sides of a wright's trade which indicates the pervasive apprenticeship system in Perth, whereby apprentices were trained in all aspects of woodwork, except that of the cooper.<sup>37</sup> Honey repaired chairs at the Governor's Palace, advertised with Harrocks for journeymen and apprentices in the cabinet making trade and possessed cabinet maker's tools and cabinet making timbers. Whether or not Scottish furniture types or methods of construction were transported with him from Perth to Williamsburg remains to be seen. Although no articles of furniture have been traced to indicate the style of his furniture, Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown describe Honey as an artisan who provided 'relatively plain neo-classical wares to local residents'.<sup>38</sup>

## REFERENCES

1. James Honey serves as a case study in the 1999 doctoral thesis *The Wright Incorporation of Perth 1700 to 1840* by the author for the University of St Andrews. The author extends her gratitude to Jonathan Prown, formerly of the Collections and Museums Department at Colonial Williamsburg now Executive Director of the Chipstone Foundation Museum, who was extremely generous in providing records of Honey in Williamsburg. Sources furnished by Prown are noted as follows: (J.P.).
2. *Beyond the Highland Line: Three Journals of Travel in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, Burt, Pennant, Thornton, Youngson, A. J. (ed.), London: Collins, 1974, p. 57. From Burt's Letter V.
3. 'I sent one day for a wright (they have no such distinction as joiner) to make me an engine to chop straw . . . he made me the machine, which was more like the work of one of your cabinet-makers in London, than that of an Inverness carpenter.' Burt, Letter V, p. 56.
4. Having obtained a burgess ticket and having served an apprenticeship, the apprentice was entitled to apply for entrance to the Incorporation but not until seven years had passed since his Indenture began. (30 June 1724 — *Trans.*, p. 49 and Acts and Statutes, Act 76).
5. Other means of entering the Incorporation as a freeman were more desirable and less expensive, but unless apprentice wrights married a freeman's daughter his entrance dues were considerably higher than those for sons and sons-in-law of freemen. The only other method of attaining the right to trade as a wright in Perth was as a stranger.
6. The following were searched for Perth apprentices: Petznick 1993, Watson 1948, Whitley 1969, Beasley 1971, Beasley 1971, Bejerkoe 1957, Fairbanks 1981, Hurst 1997, Jobe 1993, Ketchum 1994, New Hampshire Historical Society 1979 and Williams 1988.
7. Petznick, L. W. S., *Williamsburg People File*. A computer file of Williamsburg's eighteenth-century Scottish residents in the Collections and Museums Department of Colonial Williamsburg (1993).
8. Honey died 'Sunday Se'nnight night, 1787'. See also McGhan, Judith, *Virginia Vital Records*, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1984, p. 150 (J.P.).
9. A transcription of the Minute Books of the Wright Incorporation from 1700 to 1840 was submitted as a separately bound appendix to the doctoral thesis mentioned in reference 1. Blair's freedom is recorded in the transcription, p. 126.
10. B59/24/1/40.34. 1773.
11. B59/24/1/40.34. 1773. Thomas Honey's apprenticeship is dated 14 Feb 1768 and recorded in Indenture Book 27 held by the Perth Museum and Art Gallery.
12. The Wright Incorporation of Perth protected and governed the trades of the wright, mason, plasterer, slater, glazier, barber and bookbinder within the royalty of the Royal Burgh.
13. The Wright Incorporation did not record the names of journeymen in Perth after 1755, unless the journeymen were accused of encroachments (i.e. producing wrightwork in Perth without being bound to a freeman of the Incorporation).
14. *Virginia Gazette*, Purdie Edition, 14 June 1776, p3c2 (J.P.).
15. *Virginia Gazette*, Dixon Edition, 24 Aug 1776, p7c2 (J.P.).
16. Petznick, L. W. S., *ibid.*, pp. 104 and 106.
17. *The Cabinetmaker in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg: Giving Attention to the City's chief Craftsmen in the Furniture Way; and to their Tool & Methods of Working as interpreted by Johannes Heuvel Master Cabinetmaker of Colonial Williamsburg*, Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, 1966, p. 37 (J.P.).
18. Petznick, L. W. S., *ibid.*, p. 106.
19. See Hurst, Ronald L. and Jonathan Prown. *Southern Furniture, 1680-1830: The Colonial Williamsburg Collection*, Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1997, p. 183.
20. P.C.J. of Va, IX 125 Palace notes IV 260. Petznick, L. W. S., *ibid.*, p. 104.
21. Freemen wrights of the Wright Incorporation held intact their monopoly over producing or selling wright work in Perth at least from 1538 until the end of the eighteenth century. (Act and Statutes Book, Act 1, 25 March 1538. This book is held by the current Clerk of the Incorporation, Mr Alex Lamond, at his Miller Hendry Offices in Perth). Unfreemen sought to work in Perth and its newly created suburbs at the end of the eighteenth and increasingly in the nineteenth century, thereby creating competition for Perth's freemen.
22. For example, once Benjamin Bucktrout had left Anthony Hay's workshop, he quickly advised potential customers that he had commenced business. *Virginia Gazette*. Purdie and Dixon edition, 25 July 1766 and Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown. *Southern Furniture 1680-1830: The Colonial Williamsburg Collection*, Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1997, p. 196.
23. See Petznick, L. W. S., *ibid.*
24. The Perth Lodges were the Masonic Lodge of Scoon and Perth, No. 3, the Lodge of St Andrew Perth now No. 74 (Minutes to this lodge from 1758 to 1806 are lost) and the Lodge Royal Arch of Perth now No. 122,

- which was instituted in 1770. (Minutes were stolen.) See Smith, D. Crawford. *The History of the Ancient Masonic Lodge of Scoon and Perth*. Perth?: Cowan and Co., 1898, pp. 144-45.
25. On 12 November 1740 Patrick Conqueror was entered Apprentice at the Lodge and later passed to Fellowcraft. Smith, D. Crawford. *The History of the Ancient Masonic Lodge of Scoon and Perth*. Perth: Cowan and Co., 1898, p. 96.
26. Although there is no record of Sandeman's admittance to a Masonic Lodge, his masonic seal is preserved on a letter dated Dunkeld 2d Decr. 1769 to the Third Duke of Atholl from whom Sandeman received many commissions, both for furniture and construction. Blair Castle Archives [49-8-162]. This seal is illustrated as Fig. 64 in the doctoral thesis cited in reference 1.
27. *William and Mary Quarterly: Historical Papers*, Tyler, Lyon G. (ed.), Williamsburg: William and Mary College, 1893 (and New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1966), Vol. 1. The Williamsburg Lodge possesses a 'finely carved chair, which tradition says, was presented to the Lodge by Lord Botetourt, Governor from 1768 to 1770' (note 2, p. 8), the Lodge was granted a charter on 6 November 1773, p. 4 (J.P.). See also Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown. *Southern Furniture 1680-1830: The Colonial Williamsburg Collection*, Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1997, pp. 192-99.
28. *William and Mary Quarterly: Historical Papers*, Tyler, Lyon G. (ed.), Williamsburg: William and Mary College, 1893 (and New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1966), Vol. 1, p. 21 (J.P.).
29. This record names John Miller and James Johnson as free males above twenty-one years of age in his household. He also possessed three horses and three cows or bulls. Parks, Gary. *Virginia Tax Records*, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1983, p. 373 (J.P.).
30. Petznick, L. W. S., *ibid.*, p. 95. Harwood is recorded as a member of the Williamsburg Lodge from January 1774 to October 1780. Tyler, Lyon G. *William and Mary Quarterly: Historical Papers*, Williamsburg: William and Mary College, 1893, p. 21 (J.P.).
31. Petznick, L. W. S., *ibid.*, p. 95.
32. Parks, Gary, *Virginia Tax Records*, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1983, p. 373 (J.P.).
33. *Virginia Gazette*, Dixon Edition, 1 Apr 1780, p2c3 (J.P.).
34. Headley, Robert K., Jr, *Genealogical Abstracts from 18th-Century Virginia Newspapers*, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1987, p. 168 (J.P.).
35. Petznick, L. W. S., *ibid.*, p. 104.
36. *The Cabinetmaker in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg: Giving Attention to the City's chief Craftsmen in the Furniture Way: and to their Tool & Methods of Working as interpreted by Johannes Hewel Master Cabinetmaker of Colonial Williamsburg*, Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, 1966, p. 37 (J.P.).
37. Even as late as 1849, Perth's wrights applied their woodworking skills to both furniture production and construction. For example, J. & H Ballingal's of Perth produced an extensive range of furniture and interior fittings such as chimney cans and window blinds for Sir J. A. B. MacGregor at Edenchip House, Balquhiddier. NRA(S) 1256, Bundle 153 (1847-49). Wrights in Perth were not allowed to practise the cooper trade which was protected by the Wright Incorporation.
38. Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown. *Southern Furniture 1680-1830: The Colonial Williamsburg Collection*, Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1997, p. 204.