

480 COCKE, WILLIAM

Bookbinder

Surry County

Bookbinder in Surry County in 1720.

William Cocke has a passing association with the Virginia print trade as a result of a bequest made in his will in 1720. Therein he directed that all of his blacksmithing and bookbinding tools were to be passed down to his eldest son, Nicholas, along with the bulk of his landholdings in Surry County adjacent to the portion of the Blackwater River that serves today as Surry's border with Sussex County.

Other colonial era records indicate that Cocke arrived in Virginia between 1690 and 1692, and that he took several land patents from 1699 to 1706 based on headrights he claimed for transporting more than two dozen individuals to the colony. Those holdings amounted to at least 1500 acres when he died (and likely more), making him one of the larger planters in the county at that time. He also invested in the coastal trade, leaving his quarter-share in the sloop he owned with unnamed others to his youngest son, who was then a hand on that vessel. Cocke's resulting social prominence led to his being named as a justice of the Surry County Court by 1699, a post he apparently still held at the time of his death.

These circumstances indicate that Cocke maintained a smithing complex on his plantation, just as did other large planters in Stuart-era Virginia. The absence of towns in an economy built on the water-borne commerce of the tidewater meant that many urban trades, like blacksmithing, were practiced on larger plantations out of necessity and/or convenience. Cocke's will reveals that his smithy also served as a bindery, as did many such operations in the colonial period. The presence of this secondary function in early Virginia's blacksmith shops can best be seen in the colony's militia registers, which record several blacksmith-bookbinders serving in the county militias from the beginning of the colony; the earliest of these tradesmen now known was John Hill (493), who worked in the original Norfolk County between 1622 and 1648. Cocke followed this example with his blacksmith shop. Yet it also seems that he was a blacksmith and bookbinder as much as he was a planter, a trader, or a justice, given his description of the willed tools as being "his." Hence, Cocke's inclusion in this Index as a bookbinder.

NB: This William Cocke should not be confused with the like-named physician (1672-1720) who served as the colony's secretary of state from 1712 to 1720, and who was interred under the sanctuary floor of the Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg.

Personal Data

Born: ca. 1670 In England.

Died: October 1720 Surry County, Virginia.

Children: Nicholas, Richard, William, Thomas, and Mary (per his will).

Sources: MEDSA entry no. 8275; "The Cockes of Surry and Princess Anne," *VMHB* (1897).