How to Lose and Find a 17th-Century Town:
The Cultural Landscape of Herrington
By John E. Kille

Archaeologists with Anne Arundel County’s Lost Towns Project have grown accustomed to fielding the question: is it really possible to lose a town? Usually, this query arises at Historic London Town and Gardens, the site of London Town (1683), a legislated tobacco port town where two well-known landmarks, the William Brown House and historic Scott Street, have survived for several centuries. Given the remnants of this period landscape and the living history interpretation taking place within a reconstructed historic area, it is understandable that visitors would ponder the meaning of “lost” and how it applies to a town that is also in the process of being rediscovered.

In fact, neighboring Herrington probably better illustrates how a town can disappear almost entirely over a long period of time. One of several ports established by the Maryland Assembly in a 1669 ordinance designed to control imported and exported goods, Herrington, along with London Town, was also included in the 1683 “An Act for Advancing the Trade of Tobacco.” Only six occupied lots dating to the final years of Herrington can be pieced together from available historical documents, and no physical traces of the town’s built environment are visible on the landscape. By 1705 all of the known lots in the town appear to have been consolidated and converted to farmland (Figure 1). As such, many residents living in proximity to the original town near present-day Deale are not even aware that Herrington ever existed.

Obviously, the ephemeral experience of Herrington is much different than that of London Town, which eventually grew into Maryland’s premiere tobacco port. The site of the County Courthouse, London Town became a center of international trade and transportation, as well as an important link when traveling overland between Philadelphia and Williamsburg. Yet, while Herrington never achieved the longevity, nor the success that London Town enjoyed, it did function for a relatively short period as an active tobacco port for surrounding plantations in Herring Creek. Assigned one of three tobacco inspection officers in the county in 1686, Herrington was also the site of a 1668 burgess election. Further, several individuals associated with the town were politically influential and active religiously.

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Launched the Search

How then does one set about finding a lost town like Herrington that has by all accounts disappeared from the contemporary landscape and modern memory? Some may recall that Lost Towns Project historians Joseph B. Thomas and Anthony D. Lindauer presented preliminary research on Herrington in the July 1998, Anne Arundel County History Notes. Their work established a chain of ownership for occupied town lots and set the stage for an ambitious attempt to locate the town. During 2001-2004, the Lost Towns Project, a team of archaeologists, historians, and volunteers led by Dr. Al Luckenbach, took on this challenge with financial backing from the Maryland Historical Trust.

The project's initial fieldwork focused on placing 600 shovel test pits (STPs) on private property in the Leitch community which delineated a portion of the town's 17th-century occupation, as well as five additional areas of cultural occupation from prehistoric times through the 19th century. Later, more targeted excavations within the town revealed an intact 17th-century trash pit with period artifacts, as well as a hearth and posthole features indicating the presence of two separate earthfast or post-in-ground buildings.

Theories Dispelled

The project's broad investigation provided an opportunity to test the validity of several theories concerning the location of the town. One theory, based more on speculation than any specific evidence, held that Herrington was located in proximity to the present-day Highview neighborhood, near Marshes Seat, north of Trott's Branch leading to Herring Bay. However, archival evidence indicates that the 20 acres formally set aside for the town in 1669 must be situated somewhere within the boundaries of William Parker's original 200-acre property, which lies south of Trott's Branch. Specifically, a 1705 warrant to resurvey following the consolidation of Parker's property, including occupied town lots, references "The Town Land or Parkers Land."2A

Another theory suggested that the town was built near a small cove located even farther south of Trott's Branch. Identified as The Cove on period maps, this shallow inlet probably could not have provided the type of defensive position necessary for a frontier tobacco port town, nor safe harbor for ships in the event of storms. In fact, a 1776 map by Anthony Smith shows water depth of only three-five feet in this area. Not surprisingly, the project did not find 17th-century artifacts near this relic cove.

Finally, a suggestion that the town would have been located in relatively close proximity to Herring Bay does not fit a model established with the Providence Settlement (1649) in the Broadneck Area of Anne Arundel County. Sites in Providence are found on flat areas, less than 1,000 feet from navigable waterways, and usually have a potable water source, either a fresh water springhead or creek, in the immediate vicinity. In fact, Herrington's position near Herring Bay can be seen on a circa 1670 map by Augustine Herrman; a town symbol in the form of a large building appears exactly where archaeological evidence indicates the town is located (Figure 2).

Evidence Found

Archaeological evidence of the town of Herrington was discovered on a high, flat area overlooking a large cove on Herring Bay, in proximity to fresh water springs and aligned with a roadway that may date to the 17th century. Posthole features for two separate earthfast buildings were discovered on either side of the roadway, and an assemblage of excavated architectural materials includes brick, wrought nail, and clay daub indicating the presence of a hearth (Figure 3).
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Figure 4-Ceramic shards excavated at the site of Herrington. Photo by author.

A wide range of 17th-century personal effects were also recovered from the site, demonstrating that the town’s inhabitants participated in an extensive international trading network. The inhabitants of Herrington had access to imported European ceramics from England, Germany, Italy, and possibly Holland, as well as Venetian glass. Decorated ceramics and glass provide the best examples of stylistic influences discovered in these excavations (Figure 4).

The presence of a town period oyster midden provides direct evidence that settlers harvested shellfish from the nearby Chesapeake Bay waters, while faunal remains, along with gun flint and lead shot, indicate that various animals were also part of their diet. Further, shards of olive green wine bottle glass and pipe fragments reflect the importance of alcohol and tobacco in the daily existence of Herrington settlers.

Even with the challenge of digging through nearly three feet of silt in some areas, the project and dedicated volunteers ultimately found evidence of this mysterious town that had been buried and forgotten for three centuries. In the process, more was also learned about the people who inhabited the town, as well as its relationship to the larger world of Herring Creek.

Surrounding Herring Creek

In the second half of the 17th century, the Herring Creek community was at the center of important religious and political forces and events. The earliest manifestation of what is commonly referred to as Herring Creek are the mid-17th century properties constituting Herring Creek Hundred. It is here that some of the earliest Puritans from England and Virginia settled, surveying large plantations that established a community served by the old Herring Creek Parish, which was founded probably about 1660. The Act of Establishment passed by the Maryland Assembly established the new St. James Parish and its boundaries within Herring Creek.

The Herring Creek area also played a role in the events leading up to the Battle of the Severn. A first-hand account of these events is found in a 1655 pamphlet entitled Babylon’s Fall, by Puritan settler Leonard Strong. According to Strong, “Capt. Stone and his Company still drew nearer to Providence, into a place called Herring Creek, where they apprehended one of the commissioners, and forced another man of quality to flee for his life, having threatened to hang him up at his own door, and not finding the man, affrighted his wife, and plundered the house of Ammunition and Provision, threatening still what they would do to the people of Providence, and that they would force the rebellious factious Roundheads to submit.”

Further, Thomas Marsh, a Puritan merchant and planter from Herring Creek, died in 1656 of

Figure 5-Stereoview photograph showing Marshes Scat looking toward the Chesapeake Bay, late-19th century. (Courtesy, Calvert Marine Museum)
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wounds received in the Battle of the Severn. Marsh, born in England in 1615/16, surveyed 585 acres of a 600-acre grant called "Marshes Seat" in 1651.5 An extraordinary view of Marshes Seat looking toward the Chesapeake Bay is shown in a rare photograph reportedly taken from a windmill no longer on the landscape (Figure 5). This windmill is probably depicted in another rare photograph (Figure 6), which like the Marshes Seat image belongs to the Weems family collection donated to the Calvert Marine Museum.

People of Means

In addition to conducting archaeological fieldwork, the project also compiled biographical research for lot holders and property owners associated with Herrington. It is not surprising that many individuals owned large tracts of land within Herrington Creek, and also held high positions within various levels of government. Identifying the properties they owned outside of the town helps in assessing and comparing relative wealth and status over time, as well as establishing various geographical interrelationships between the town, the larger community, and lot owners. The following biographical overview brings these individuals into clearer focus:

Christopher Birckhead-A planter, mariner, merchant, and Quaker, Birckhead was an early lot owner with ties to Herrington predating the 1683 town act. In 1670, he sold "two hogggesheads of bread and one hogggeshead of malt" to John England.6 He also owned several parcels in Herring Creek Hundred, including Birckhead's Parcell, a 500-acre property surveyed in 1661, near land surveyed for John Burrage; Birckhead's Lott, a 434-acre property surveyed in 1663; and Birckhead's Meadows, a 50-acre parcel surveyed in 1663, near Birckhead's Parcell. Birckhead died in 1676.7

Nehemiah Birckhead-A planter, merchant, and Quaker, Birckhead inherited a one-acre town lot from his father Christopher Birckhead, and also received portions of his father's adjoining properties, Birckhead's Meadow and Birckhead's Parcell. In addition, Nehemiah owned several other properties in conjunction with Samuel Chew, Jr., including the 600-acre Wells, 100-acre Little Wells, and 350-acre West Wells properties, all located between Fishing Cr and Herring Bay, just south of town land.8

Samuel Chew, Sr.-A planter, merchant, and prominent Quaker, Chew was one of the most accomplished leaders among the known Herrington lot owners. (Figure 7). He attained the rank of colonel in the military and served with distinction in various legislative, provincial, and local offices. His service included the Lower House of the legislature in 1661 and Upper House from 1671-1674; the Provincial Council and Court as a Justice from 1669-1676/77; Anne Arundel County Sheriff, 1663-1664; and Anne Arundel County Justice, 1665-1669.9

Born in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1634, Chew inherited 500 and 700 acres of adjoining land in York County, Virginia, from his father, which he sold in 1668. In 1659, Chew obtained a warrant for 400 acres in Maryland.10 He also appears in the Herring Creek Hundred Rent Rolls owning a 600-acre parcel called "Ayres," property originally surveyed in 1651 for his father-in-law, William Ayres, which Chew and his wife, Ann Ayres, inherited. In addition, Chew owned a 450-acre property called "Sanetley," surveyed in 1663 and located on the west side of Ayres, and Chews Rest or Right, a 300-acres property "at the Miles end of the land called Ayres," which was surveyed in 1665.11 He also bought from Henry Parrot a parcel called Poppinjay, a 500-acre parcel in Calvert County.12

Figure 6-Stereoview photograph of windmill, late-19th century. (Courtesy, Calvert Marine Museum).

Figure 7-Chew Family Coat-of-Arms

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Chew's second marriage to Anne Richardson in 1704, he acquired another 150 acres. By the time he died in 1727/8, he had also acquired another 677 acres by patent and purchased 1,367 more acres. Maxwell provided the land that is now the site of Joppa, Maryland.  

James Maxwell, Sr.-A planter and merchant, Maxwell immigrated to Anne Arundel County in 1658. He purchased 230 acres from William Parker in 1667. At his death in 1669/70, he owned 22,087 pounds of tobacco, as well as 200 acres, which he transferred to his son James Maxwell, Jr.

William Parker-Parker was a planter, merchant, and part-owner of two ships of the Hansbury Mercantile Co. of England. He was born in Stepney, England, and emigrated as a free adult. Parker held several public offices in Patuxent (Calvert County). He represented Calvert County in a number of legislative capacities, including the Assembly in 1654, the Parliamentary Commission from 1654-1657/58, and the Lower House from 1659/60. He also was a Justice of the Provincial Court from 1654-1657/58. The 200 acres of town land Parker surveyed in 1651 was just one of several parcels he owned in Anne Arundel County and Calvert County. In 1658, Parker was granted “600 acres at the Cliffs in Chesapeake Bay” to the south in Calvert County. In 1661, he is recorded as patenting 500 acres called St. Edmunds, “lying on the west side of Chesapeake Bay and next adjoining to the land of Richard Bennett, Esq.” Parker died in 1673/74.

Thomas Tench-A prominent planter and merchant, Tench operated as a London merchant as early as 1675, exporting at least 81 servants to the Maryland Colony. He was probably born in England in the 1650s, and immigrated in 1684 as a free adult. He owned a one-acre town lot, and held a long list of public offices in Anne Arundel County and Provincial government. These include the Protestant Association's Convention from 1690-1692 and the Upper House from 1692-1704. He also served in several provincial offices, including Council, 1691-1708; Senior Councilor from 1700-1708; Justice of the Provincial Court from 1691-1694 and Chancery Court in 1699; Acting Chancellor from 1702-1704; and Acting Chief Executive from 1702-1704. On the local level, Tench was also a Justice of the Anne Arundel County Court from 1685-1692 and Coroner from 1689-1692.

In addition to the one-acre lot he owned in Herrington, Tench held 1,500 acres of land in Anne Arundel County, as well as one servant and six slaves. Tench appears in the Herring Creek Hundred Rent Rolls as owning the Ham, a 100-acre...
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parcel in the main Branch of Lyons Creek. He also owned 100 acres of the Jericho tract between the branches of Herring Creek and 100 acres of the Burragge, Burrage Blossom, and Burrage End parcels west of Herring Creek in the name of his step-grandson, Nathan Rigby, orphan of James Rigby. Finally, Lord Baltimore’s Rent Rolls list him owning 2,000 acres of land in Baltimore County (now Harford). He was paying the annual quit rent as late as 1707, the year before he died.32

Christopher Vernon—Two separate references to Vernon serving as a clerk of the Anne Arundel County Court appear in the 1694 and 1696/7 Proceedings of the Council of Maryland.33 He and his wife, Luce Evans, the widow of Lewis Evans, are recorded as owning not only 200 acres of town land, but also several other properties in the Herring Creek area. Vernon consolidated the remaining five town lots by 1705. He also owned the 100-acre Jericho property located between the branches of Herring Creek Bay on behalf of his wife. Vernon acquired a portion of Pascalls Purchase, located on the west side of Herring Creek44 and Marshes Seat.

John Wilson—Wilson owned a one-acre town lot, as well as 100 acres of land he purchased from John Burrage in 1665. This tract was called Burrage, Burrage’s Blossom, and Burrage’s End. It adjoined 100 acres of the Herring Creek church glebe to the northwest and 318 acres to the northeast owned by Samuel Chew, Jr. John Wilson’s grandson, William, later inherited his grandfather’s tract.35

While several of these individuals held influence and political connections, their public service varied greatly, particularly in terms of the level, location, time period, and length of representation. Interestingly, the pinnacle of Samuel Chew’s career, as Councilor and Upper House legislator, coincided with the passage of the 1669 ordinance establishing the port of Herrington, and lasted up until his death in 1676/77. Conversely, Thomas Tench attained the positions of Councilor and Upper House member about the same time James Maxwell, Jr. set in motion the eventual consolidation of town lots by selling his 200-acre town land property to Luce Evans, executrix of Lewis Evans, in 1691.

The Role of Religion

It is important to recognize the centrality of religion in the lives of Herring Creek residents to fully understand the existence of the Herrington Settlement. The inhabitants of Herring Creek were derived from English Puritans, many of whom emigrated from England and Virginia by the mid-17th century. Surviving records of St. James Parish, along with accounts of Herring Creek meetings and visits by Quaker missionaries, serve to document the religious convictions of Herring Creek Hundred residents.

As early as 1655, Elizabeth Harris reportedly traveled along the Western shoreline seeking Quaker converts. Her Maryland visits were followed by several other ministering Friends, including Thomas Thurston, Christopher Holder, Robert Hodgson, William Robinson in 1659, and Josiah Coale, Richard Pinder, and George Roffe in 1660.36 By 1672, George Fox made his own journey through Maryland, even stopping at the house of Herrington lot holder William Cole, who was a Quaker minister.37 Fox’s journal records the visit, stating that “...on the Twenty fifth Day had a large and precious Meeting at William Coale’s, where the Speaker of the Assembly, with his wife, and a Justice of Peace, and several other People of Quality were present. Next day we had a Meeting, six or seven Miles further, at Abraham Birkhead’s, where many of the Magistrates and upper sort of People were.”38

Friends Meetings were held on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and annual basis, with many of the weekly meetings being small gatherings held in private homes. Several of the property owners associated with Herrington were of the Quaker faith. Samuel Chew, Sr., a Herrington lot owner, was recognized as an important leader of the Herring Creek Quakers. The homes of Samuel Chew, Sr. and Jr. were regularly used for Herring Creek meetings, and the Herrington Meeting House was built before 1706 on land transferred by Samuel Chew, Jr.” Even a century after the death of Samuel Chew, Sr., his house, as well as the house of his son Samuel, Jr., remained visible on the local landscape.

Figure 8 - Map by Anthony Smith showing the homes of Samuel Chew, Sr. and Jr., 1778.
Both houses appear as landing marks on the Herring Bay Map inset made by Anthony Smith in 1776 (Figure 8). Herring Creek was also the location for the Quarterly Meeting for the Western Shore from 1682 to 1750.62 Several other Herrington lot owners were also practicing Quakers, including Christopher Birckhead, who was a founder of the Herring Creek Meeting and an English Quaker who had immigrated prior to 1661.43 His son, Nehemiah, had a reputation as a staunch Quaker, and owned the land bordering the St. James churchyard. He “bitterly opposed the 1702 Act of Assembly establishing the church of England as the state church.”44 In a twist of irony, the gravestones of Christopher Birckhead and his wife Anne were moved from the Birckhead plantation graveyard at Birckhead’s Meadow to the St. James Church churchyard. While the couple’s human remains were not relocated, their gravestones represent the oldest dated markers in Maryland; the date 1665 appears on Anne Birckhead’s gravestone. Her husband died in in 1676 (Figure 9).

![Figure 9-Photograph of gravestones of Anne and Christopher Birckhead (left and right) moved to St. James Cemetery. Anne Birckhead’s marker is dated 1665. Photo by author.](image)

Herrington lot holder Thomas Tench actively participated in establishing the new St. James Parish in accordance with the 1692 Act of Establishment. He was one of the six vestrymen elected by freeholders at the house of John Wilson, Sr., another Herrington lot owner.45 Tench was also one of the councilors who presided at a court held at London Town, another legislated town to the north, to notify freeholders of the approved boundaries of the four parishes laid out in Anne Arundel County. In 1695, Tench is recorded in the church’s vestry minutes as donating a half-acre of land for the church, as well as providing timber for the church construction. He even provided the bell for the church in 1706.46 However, Tench’s first wife, Margaret Barrage Smith, was a Quaker.47 Christopher Vernon, who purchased several occupied one-acre lots in order to consolidate the 200 acres of town land owned by his wife, Luce Evans, also served St. James Church as a vestryman in 1701, 1702, 1704, 1705, and later was Church Warden for several years.48

By 1696, Herring Creek (St. James) was the largest of the four Anne Arundel County parishes as measured by its 507 taxables. South River (All Hallows) followed with 460, Middle Neck (St. Anne’s) with 374, and Broad Neck (St. Margaret’s) with 223.49

### Table 1. Occupations and Religious Affiliations of Individuals Associated with Herrington

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation*</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birckhead, Christopher</td>
<td>Planter/Merchant/Mariner</td>
<td>Quaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birckhead, Nehemiah</td>
<td>Planter/Merchant</td>
<td>Quaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chew, Samuel Sr.</td>
<td>Planter/Merchant</td>
<td>Quaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cole, William</td>
<td>Planter/Minister</td>
<td>Quaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knighton, Thomas</td>
<td>Planter/Inspection Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maxwell, James Sr.</td>
<td>Planter/Merchant</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxwell, James Jr.</td>
<td>Planter/Merchant</td>
<td>Probably Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker, William</td>
<td>Planter/Merchant/Mariner</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tench, Thomas</td>
<td>Planter/Merchant</td>
<td>St. James Parish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilson, John</td>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>St. James Parish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernon, Christopher</td>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>St. James Parish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Owners of large tracts of land are classified as planter

In conclusion, the search for the lost town of Herrington tells us that it is relatively easy for a town to be lost, yet much more difficult to be discovered and fully understood. The broad investigation carried out by the Lost Towns Project has helped to narrow the perimeters of the town occupation, from the perspectives of both geography and documentary evidence.

Archival research reveals that Herrington’s lot holders were planters, merchants, and mariners, many of whom owned extensive landholdings in Anne Arundel County and outlying areas. This information provides a better understanding of the function of town lots and their relationship to trade and commerce. Also, valuable information was retrieved on the political and religious backgrounds of the people.
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associated with the Herrington settlement.

This research confirmed that a number of people associated with the town held high positions in the legislature, courts, and local offices that may relate in some way to viability of the town. Further, Herring Creek settlers were not just worshippers, they were active participants in their religion, helping to establish and construct the St. James Parish church, as well as the Quaker meeting house on property owned by the Chew family.

All of this evidence helps to provide a richer context and better understanding of this tobacco port town and its relationship to the larger Herring Creek community.

31 Anne Arundel County Rent Rolls, 1707.
34 Anne Arundel County Rent Rolls, 1707.
35 Archives of Maryland 37:574.
36 Dallam 1976, 43.
37 Carroll, Kenneth, Three Hundred Years and More of Third Haven Quakerism. The Queen Anne Press, 1984, 19.
38 Russell 1999, 33.
39 Hall 1910, 399.
41 Kelly 1963, 64.
42 Jacobsen 1966, 6.
43 Kelly 1963, 65.
44 Dallam 1976, 24.
45 Dallam 1976, 42.
46 Dallam 1976, 87.
47 Papenfuse 1985, 806.
49 Ibid., 80.

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31 Anne Arundel County Rent Rolls, 1707.
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39 Hall 1910, 399.
41 Kelly 1963, 64.
42 Jacobsen 1966, 6.
43 Kelly 1963, 65.
44 Dallam 1976, 24.
45 Dallam 1976, 42.
46 Dallam 1976, 87.
47 Papenfuse 1985, 806.
49 Ibid., 80.

Not Even Wal-Mart Can Match These Prices!!!

A shopping list for Adam Giltz's blacksmith shop in Harmans, Md. c. 1914. Giltz's establishment was the equivalent of a present day auto repair and hardware store.

1 new hatchet handle .10
Sharpening & setting saw .25
New bolt in tree clippers .10
Front axle in platform wagon 10.00
Tightening up wagon 15.00
Cleaning & painting wagon 15.00
New ax handle .25
New fork handle .50
New shovel handle .50
4 new buggy wheels 20.00
4 new bolts in buggy 5th wheel .40
Sharpening lawn mower 25
Cutting 4 buggy tires 3.00
Repairing mowing machine .50
1 bolt in buggy .10
Repairing buggy top .50
Sawing 4 loads wood 1.60
New set screws in marker hut .25
2" rubber blocks .50
New tailgate rail & bolts
New staple in single tree .25

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