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Edward Wynne's *The Brittish India or A Compendious Discourse tending to Advancement* (circa 1630-1631)

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INTRODUCTION

IN 1620, SIR GEORGE CALVERT (later, the first Lord Baltimore) purchased a tract of land on Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula. This newly acquired property, on which he hoped to establish a permanent English settlement, was formerly owned by Sir William Vaughan. It spanned from Aquafort in the south to Caplin Bay (present-day Calvert) in the north. Ferryland was the site chosen and the first 11 settlers arrived at the fledgling colony on 4 August 1621. For unknown reasons, the colony's first leader, Welsh Captain Edward Wynne, was replaced as governor of Ferryland in 1625. He presumably returned to England or Wales. Several years later, Wynne composed *The Brittish India or A Compendious Discourse tending to Advancement*, a treatise encouraging Britain's colonization efforts in Newfoundland.¹ Internal evidence suggests Wynne wrote it in 1630 or 1631, making it the last in a series

of early promotional literature on Newfoundland first started in the 1620s. As such, it shares much with these works and with earlier writings promoting North American colonization in general.² Greater wealth for the nation, the promise of boundless natural resources, a disburdening of the poor, and the spread of Christianity to natives are among just a few of the benefits expounded upon. These promotional commonalities may partly explain why *The British India* has only been summarily studied by many researching the early history of this province. The fact that the discourse was never published and thus did not reach a wide audience has also contributed to its obscurity.

This document is, none the less, important to our understanding of early British settlement in Newfoundland, and in particular the history and development of the Ferryland colony. It is only the second early discourse that sets out a plan (albeit brief) to colonize the English Shore, and it is the sole treatise on Newfoundland written from the perspective of an individual with an extensive military background. Wynne's perceptions of Newfoundland and of the conflicts that could arise from rival European nations and pirates were coloured by his experiences as a soldier. His proposal for the colonization of Newfoundland was likewise influenced by his knowledge of fortifications and the defensive advantages of certain harbours. The archaeology conducted at Ferryland clearly shows that the colony was heavily fortified during Wynne's tenure there.³ *The British India* also informs readers about the life of Edward Wynne both before and after his time in Newfoundland. Considering that Wynne appears to have been the one who chose the location for Calvert's colony, developed a plan for the town, and oversaw the construction of most of its early structures, understanding his past helps us to interpret the choices he made when building the settlement.

Almost nothing is known about the early life of Edward Wynne. His date and place of birth, his educational background, where he served while in the military, and why George Calvert chose him to oversee the Ferryland colony all remain obscure. The first documented reference to Wynne appears after his arrival at Ferryland in 1621, and much of what is known about him comes from four letters written to Calvert between 1621 and 1622.⁴ William Vaughan made a brief mention of Wynne's Welsh heritage and his industrious nature in *The Golden Fleece* (1626): "*Captaine Winne a Cambro-Britan* was much noted in this Assembly for his personal abode and painfull care in settling the Plantation at *Feriland* in the South part of this Coast, where for the space of 4 yeares hee did more good for my *Lord Baltimore*, then others had done in double the time."⁵ *The British India* provides suggestive evidence for his birthplace in the form of a reference to the snow-capped mountains of Snowdonia (in North Wales) and the harbour of Milford (in Southwest Wales). The surname Wynne and its variants are common to both areas, and each was home to prominent and influential individuals involved in trade, industry, and matters of court.⁶ Wynne's comment about Milford harbour as being the best in Christendom suggests a familiarity with this bustling port. Two of the most affluent and well-connected families of Wales

were the Wynns of Gwydir and the Vaughans of Golden Grove — among whom was none other than Sir William Vaughan.⁷ The same William Vaughan who established a dismal colony of Welshmen in Aquafort in 1617, sold land on the Avalon Peninsula to George Calvert in 1620, and later wrote about the good deeds of fellow “Cambro-Britan” Edward Wynne in 1626.

Wynne’s aptitude for military matters is demonstrated in his early letters to Calvert and by the traces left in the ground at Ferryland, but it is in his dedicatory letter to Charles I that he unequivocally states that this discourse was written “according to a Souldiers abilitie.” His title of Captain can, therefore, be attributed to his military background rather than an indication of experience at sea. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries few European nations maintained a standing army; therefore, in times of war European leaders would draw upon the services of mercenaries. These “soldiers of fortune,” who had become readily available, particularly in Wales, served in countless conflicts.⁸ Nothing is known about Wynne’s military experience but he might have seen action in Ireland, Europe, or in other mercenary forces that recruited Welsh soldiers. The assignment by Calvert of a military man to govern his settlement was likely prompted by the contested nature of Newfoundland during the time period. Calvert would have been aware of various European powers with shared interests in the island, not to mention the numerous acts of privateering and piracy along its coasts.

In the seventeenth century, the military title of Captain was almost always reserved for gentlemen. The Welsh gentry had a concept of “24 feats” or characteristics that were the defining factors of high breeding.⁹ By far the majority of these characteristics related to military or combat prowess, while others focused on various refinements such as the composition of poetry and a knowledge of literature. Wynne’s writings seem to indicate he was proficient in many of the prerequisites for a gentle upbringing. His military captaincy, literacy, and knowledge of history and literature would have been virtually unobtainable in the time period without a significant social standing. Welsh, rather than English, would have likely been Wynne’s native tongue, which indicates a fluency in at least two languages. Henry VIII’s 1536 Act of Union mandated English as the official language of the Welsh courts, which all but insured that public offices were held by the gentry.¹⁰ In response to these policies, many of the Welsh gentry sent their sons to be educated in English Universities, particularly Oxford, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The majority of knights and gentlemen involved in early Newfoundland colonization endeavors also attended Oxford colleges, including Calvert, Vaughan, and Henry Cary.¹¹

It appears that Wynne and Calvert were first introduced by Vaughan. Gillian Cell implies that William Vaughan’s connection with Calvert initially came through his older brother John.¹² Captain John Vaughan served in Ireland during the Nine Years’ War (1594-1602), a conflict that saw the service of more than 6,000 Welshmen.¹³ Regardless of how Wynne and Calvert became acquainted, the former was commissioned to settle, construct, and govern the colonial enterprise at Ferryland.

Given Calvert's preoccupation with governmental affairs, it seems that he trusted Wynne with the design of the settlement. From the progress reports Calvert received, and from the evidence in the archaeological record, Wynne clearly accomplished a great deal in the initial years of the project. However, for reasons that are unknown, in 1625 Calvert decided to replace Wynne with another military man, Sir Arthur Aston. By 1627, Calvert wrote of Ferryland "I must either go and settle it in better Order than it is, or else give it over, and lose all the Charges I have been at hitherto for other Men to build their Fortunes upon."¹⁴ Calvert seemed concerned about the management of the settlement, but it is uncertain if he blamed Wynne or other individuals. A clue regarding the nature of Calvert and Wynne's relationship can be observed in the somewhat defensive and apologetic tone evident in *The Brittish India*, but the events surrounding the end of their association remain unknown.

Like most early literature on Newfoundland, Wynne's treatise promotes the island's favourable climate. Wynne viewed Newfoundland winters as comparable to those in Hamburg, Germany, and discusses the habitability of other cold locations including the Snowden mountains, Italian Alps, Norway, and Iceland. Much of this information could have been acquired first hand during his "observations in travaile (in which I spent the active part of my age)." It is possible he made these observations while taking "The Grand Tour" of Continental Europe, a rite of passage for many young gentlemen in early modern Britain. Common tour routes included various parts of France, Germany, and Italy, locations which George Calvert and William Vaughan also potentially visited on their respective excursions after college.¹⁵ Another possibility is that Wynne copied this argument about the relative climates of other nations from the earlier discourses written by John Mason and Richard Whitbourne. Both men discussed the continental climate with respect to Newfoundland and one or the other lists numerous places including Hamburg and Norway. Wynne borrowed freely from the knowledge contained in Whitbourne's *Discourse*, and in some cases, almost copied it verbatim into *The Brittish India*.¹⁶

The Brittish India is only the second piece of promotional literature on Newfoundland that sets out a plan for how better to colonize the island. Whitbourne (writing in 1620) provided extensive details as to why and how migratory fishermen should leave behind a specific number of crew members in their harbour each season and advocated establishing a settlement in Trepassey.¹⁷ Wynne's suggestion, on the other hand, is much more focused. He proposed that England's colonization effort first be concentrated in three principal harbours (Trinity, St. John's, and Ferryland) and that these locations be cleared and prepared by a small group of 20 labourers each. The number of workmen recommended is likely based on his experiences at Ferryland, where in 1621-1622 many tasks were completed by just 11 labourers and tradesmen.¹⁸ Wynne repeatedly stressed the need for these locations to be fortified, so that they "may be made the safe Chambers of succour and retrait, for the said scattering inhabitants to make their repaire unto, if anie trouble should happen; whoe as yet remaine there without anie defence at all." Passing reference to the erection of fortifications in case

of hypothetical attack by the Beothuk or the Spanish are found in both Mason (1620) and Eburne (1624). However, neither man made a case for their necessity. Wynne may have been one of the first to recognize the defensive potential of these three areas, but he was certainly not the last. All three eventually saw fortification and occupation by the British continuing into the eighteenth century.¹⁹

The ongoing excavations at Ferryland affect our reading of some of the themes in *The British India*. An obvious example is Wynne's repeated calls to build both storehouses and fortifications — two features which are well represented in the archaeological record. In the early 1990s archeologists found a massive stone seawall and large stone storehouse immediately to the south of Ferryland's inner harbour (Figure 1). Based upon the stratigraphy and associated artifacts, these features date from the 1620s and several aspects of their construction point directly to



Figure 1. At left, stone seawall and storehouse, Ferryland.

Edward Wynne's influence.²⁰ The storehouse was built with stone walls two and a half feet thick, it was roofed in slate, was partially floored in flagstones, had a large door on the north end to facilitate the receiving of provisions, and its interior dimensions are an impressive 16 by 56 feet. The size and substantial nature of this building sheds light on the importance Wynne placed upon the adequate storage of provisions, points which are driven home repeatedly in this discourse. It also provides important context to Wynne's proclamation to Charles I claiming knowledge in "erecting Storehouses, and strengthening that erection; as also for the number and their quality, necessarie for a Plantation."

Wynne's military background prepared him not only for directing the construction of fortifications, but also in their use. On 28 July 1622 Wynne twice refers to the de-

fenses at Ferryland. First, they raised up “a face of defence to the water-side ward, with the earth that we digged both for celler and Kitchin roome, (which we found a very labourious worke)” and second, they had “got home as much or as many trees, as serued vs to palizado into the Plantation about foure Acres of ground, for the keeping off of both man and beast, with post and rayle seuen foote high, sharpened in the toppe, the trees being pitched vpright and fastened with spikes and nayles.”²¹ Both descriptions are very brief, even modest in comparison to what was uncovered at Ferryland. Excavations at the eastern extent of the colony’s original boundary revealed a massive fortification in the form of a 20 foot wide ditch and 20 foot wide rampart. The ditch was dug down approximately four feet, and in places was faced in stone along its scarp and counter-scarp walls (Figure 2). The same earth that was dug to make the ditch was



Figure 2. Defensive Ditch, Ferryland.

thrown back to the west to build up the rampart which was also faced in stone along its back wall (or talus). It is reasonable to assume that the “*palizado*” (palisade) mentioned by Wynne was set atop the rampart despite the fact that the later neglect of the defenses and the ephemeral nature of the wooden palisade has made this difficult to prove archaeologically. Finally, the south end of the ditch and rampart fortification ends in a large bastion, also built using earth and possibly faced up with field stones. The placement of this defensive feature, on elevated land at the southeast corner of the colony, would have provided an ideal location to monitor the movement of ships entering into the harbour and to place ordinance for the defense of the colony — pieces such as the “full Saker” and “Minion” requested by Wynne in 1622.²² The careful planning and erection of defensive works under the leadership of Wynne certainly brings to mind Richard Eburne’s (1624) statement that Calvert’s colony was “well fortified and secured.”²³

This document also provides details about the development of the Ferryland colony which have hitherto escaped attention. It is known that a salt maker, John Hickson, was working at Ferryland in 1622 and by July of that year the “salt-work” was almost completed.²⁴ In his letter dated 17 August 1622, Wynne writes “our Salt-maker hath performed his part with a great deale of sufficiency, by whom I haue sent your Honour a barrel of the best Salt that euer my eues beheld, who with better settling doth vndertake to better this, which hee hath made already.”²⁵ This potential source of commerce which Wynne initially promoted, and which Whitbourne promoted at length, is never mentioned in *The Brittish India*. In fact, Wynne’s later opinion on the acquisition of salt is clear. He suggested that “the salt used in the Fishing affaire, might still be carried thither, the year before it is to be used, in suche shippes as goe thither yearely for their loading of dry fish.” It seems the amount of work involved in producing salt at Ferryland made it economically unfeasible compared to the cost of salt purchased in bulk in Southern Europe and transported across the North Atlantic. Like many early attempts to diversify Newfoundland’s early colonial economy, the salt making industry was doomed to fail.

The Brittish India is notable from a historical and paleographical perspective because there are two known copies of this discourse in existence. The original of the version transcribed here is housed in the Royal Manuscripts Collection at the British Museum. Sotheby’s London sold the second copy to a private collector in 2007.²⁶ Unfortunately, a detailed comparison of the two documents is impossible, but from the auction catalogue it is clear that the two versions were penned by different individuals. This version was also written by more than one individual. The initial dedication to Charles I, and the letter to Sir Kenelm Digby are in a different hand than the bulk of the treatise. The discourse itself has numerous deletions and additions to the text, leading one to believe that this was the first copy of the document and possibly written by Wynne himself. As stated above, it appears that the discourse was never printed, and it is possible the Sotheby’s version was intended for submission to the King’s advisors.

The exact year in which Wynne wrote *The Brittish India* is uncertain. Raymond Lahey was the first to suggest a date of 1628 based upon internal evidence, likely

Wynne's reference to "our Corne that growe there about 6 yeares since."²⁷ However, there are clues within the text that point to 1630 or 1631. First, the wording of this treatise strongly suggests that it was written after Calvert had essentially abandoned the Ferryland colony in 1629. In the opening sentence, Wynne demonstrated his great displeasure with this current state of affairs:

The Travails of my best endeavour, for the advancement of that Colony in Newfoundland, being, at this present, encountered with such a disappointment, as causeth the constancy of my loyall minde, to seeke the way which may fortunately meete with suche a resolucon, as will happily render that worke of better success of a more acceptable growth, and, from thence of more gratefull efforte.

Other evidence supports a post-1629 date. The text mentions that British settlers had already made their "abode above twenty yeares" in Newfoundland, likely a reference to the Cuper's Cove colony established in 1610. This treatise was also submitted to Sir Kenelm Digby, who was in a position of authority and influence particularly after he was made English Naval Commissioner in 1629.²⁸ In light of this, it is likely that "6 yeares since" is a comment about events that transpired six years ago during the time Wynne had last been at Ferryland (in 1625), therefore suggesting a date for the treatise of 1631.

In only one instance does Wynne include a specific date in *The Brittish India*, and even this is not definitive. He reported that "Our first winter (in Anno 1620) was very mild; the second not much harder; but the third proved milder" and he later goes on to mention his "severall Voyages, and long staies in Newfoundland." If we take these statements at face value and assume that Wynne's memory was not erred, then this overturns the commonly held belief that 1621 was the first year George Calvert sent colonists to overwinter in Newfoundland. Lahey first interpreted these statements to suggest that Wynne had spent time in Newfoundland in the year prior to "official" colonization in 1621.²⁹ Cell supports this notion by stating that Wynne's 26 August 1622 letter implies that the site chosen for settlement was picked out well in advance.³⁰ Based on Wynne's report that he spent the winter of 1620 in Newfoundland, it is reasonable to assume that Calvert sent Wynne (and others) to reconnoiter, in advance, the parcel of land he was to purchase from Vaughan. It would make sense that an investor would ensure that the land for sale was suitable for permanent year-round settlement. Once established, Calvert would have felt more secure in his initial purchase and in the substantial monetary investment he later put into the colony. Were it not for those few mild winters in the early 1620s, Wynne may have come to the same conclusion about Ferryland that Calvert did in 1628-29, and which he finally admits to in *The Brittish India* — that it is "a pleasant place in Sommer; but bleake in winter." Then again, were it not for Edward Wynne's industry and perseverance in the face of Newfoundland's harsh winters, the Ferryland colony may have never gotten off the ground.

Note on transcription

The following transcription has been slightly modified and modernized to allow for improved readability. Abbreviations are spelled out, consequently the early modern long *s* and thorn (resembling a *y*) appear as a standard *s* and *th*, respectively. The contemporary usage of *v* for *u* and *i* instead of *j* has been changed to appear in modern form. Otherwise all spelling is original. Deletions in Wynne's text are represented by a strikeout (—), while additions are contained within greater/less than symbols (< >). In one instance, a word was added to a sentence for the purpose of clarification and this is found in square brackets ([]).

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Notes

¹British Museum, Royal MSS 17 A LVII.

²This includes printed literature by John Mason, *Briefe Discourse of the New-found-land* (1620), Richard Whitbourne, *Discourse and Discovery of Newfoundland* (1620), and *Discourse Containing a Loving Invitation* (1622), Richard Eburne, *A Plaine Path-Way to Plantations* (1624), William Vaughan, *The Golden Fleece* (1626), and *The Newlanders Cure* (1630), and Robert Hayman *Quodlibets Lately Come Over from New Britaniola* (1628).

³See Barry Gaulton and James A. Tuck, "The archaeology of Ferryland, Newfoundland until 1696." In *Avalon Chronicles 8: The English in America 1497-1696*, edited by James A. Tuck and Barry Gaulton, (Ferryland: Colony of Avalon Foundation 2003), 187-224.

⁴See, Gillian T. Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered: English Attempts at Colonization, 1610-1630* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1982), 253-257, 195-198.

⁵Sir William Vaughan, *The Golden Fleece...Transported from Cambriol Colchos, out of the Southernmost Part of the Iland, Commonly Called the Newfoundland* (London 1626); available from, <http://www.mun.ca/rels/Hrollmann/relsoc/texts/vaughan/contents.html>; accessed 9 February 2009.

⁶See John Gwynfor Jones, *The Welsh Gentry 1536-1640 Images of Status, Honour and Authority* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸See Alexander Severus, "The Fetish of Military Rank," *Military Affairs*, 5 (Fall 1941), 171-176.

⁹Glanmor Williams, *Recovery Reorientation and Reformation Wales c. 1415-1642* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 114.

¹⁰See, Janet Davies, *The Welsh Language* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1987).

¹¹Mention of the Oxford education of these gentlemen can be found in Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*, 16, 18.

¹²*Ibid.*, 16.

¹³Glanmor Williams, *Recovery Reorientation and Reformation Wales*, 367.

¹⁴George Calvert to Thomas Wentworth, 21 May 1627. See Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*, 273.

¹⁵Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*, 16. See James W. Foster, *George Calvert: The Early Years* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1983), 53-55.

¹⁶Examples where Wynne copies information directly from Whitbourne's *Discourse* can be seen in reference to the size of the island and its latitude/longitude and details of the Grand Bank fishery. See Whitbourne in Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*.

¹⁷See Richard Whitbourne, *Discourse and Discovery of Newfoundland* (1620), reprinted in Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*.

¹⁸For more information on the tasks completed by Wynne and the first group of settlers in 1621-1622, see Wynne's letters to Calvert dated 26 August 1621 and 28 July 1622. See Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*.

¹⁹See D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial and Foreign Records* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1895), 297.

²⁰See Barry Gaulton, "Seventeenth-century Stone Construction at Ferryland, Newfoundland (Area C)," in *Avalon Chronicles: Volume 2* (St. John's, 1997), 1-43.

²¹Edward Wynne to George Calvert July 28th, 1622. See Gillian T. Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*, 197.

²²Edward Winne to George Calvert, 26 August 1621. See, Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*, 253-257. According to William Harrison's *The Description of England* (1587), a Minion fired a four and a half pound shot while the ammunition for a Saker was five pounds.

²³Richard Eburne, *A Plaine Path-Way to Plantations* (1624); available from, <http://www.mun.ca/rels/Hrollmann/relsoc/texts/eburne/third.html>; accessed 5 February 2009.

²⁴Wynne's reference to the "salt-work" is a description of a structure rather than an activity. The full quote from 28 July 1622 reads "The Forge hath been finished this five weekes: the Salt-worke is now almost ready". See, Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*, 195-198.

²⁵Edward Wynne to George Calvert, 17 August 1622. See, Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*, 202.

²⁶This item was listed as Lot 3312 and sold at Sotheby's London on 15 March 2007 for £36,000. See the Sotheby's catalogue; available from, <http://artfact.com/catalog/viewLot.cfm?iid=7620109>; accessed 5 February 2009.

²⁷See R. J. Lahey, "The Role of Religion in Lord Baltimore's Colonial Enterprise," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 72 (Winter 1977), 494.

²⁸R.T. Petersson, *Sir Kenelm Digby the Ornament of England 1603-1665* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 322.

²⁹See R.J. Lahey, "The Role of Religion in Lord Baltimore's Colonial Enterprise," 494.

³⁰Cell, ed., *Newfoundland Discovered*, 51.