ABSTRACT

English colonization of Virginia is characterized as boldly intrusive, spreading quickly from the first toehold at Jamestown into the hinterlands and leading to open hostility with native peoples almost from the start. In this dissertation, I examine links between practices in the home country and Virginia through the actions and backstory of one particular colonizer: Daniel Gookin Jr. (1612–1687), an English Puritan adventurer who migrated from Ireland to Virginia and later to Maryland and Massachusetts. I use archaeological evidence from both Ireland and southeastern Virginia to demonstrate that Irish influences on 17th-century colonial projects in Virginia were greater than previously thought.

Prior to emigrating to the colonies, Gookin was one of a number of Puritans owning property in County Cork, Ireland. I surveyed the ruins of 12 fortified houses and four archaeological sites in County Cork that were either owned or leased by Gookin, or were properties of his associates. In Virginia, Gookin is credited with building the Nansemond Fort Site (44SK192), a ca.1637 inland fortified bawn in Suffolk. The Nansemond Fort’s similarities with bawns from the same period in Ireland’s Munster Plantation indicate that the Virginia property was also built for the dual purposes of personal defense and animal husbandry. The plantation system Gookin learned in Ireland he replicated in North America—raising cattle and
corn for transatlantic and intercolonial provisioning, maintaining a tight trading network of Puritan family members in Ireland and Puritans in other British colonies, and negotiation with indigenous people—resulting in his acquisition of three plantations in Maryland and Virginia and five in New England. I draw on archaeological evidence from four sites in Virginia and from Massachusetts shipping records to illustrate the Puritan network that Gookin operated within during Britain’s Commonwealth period (1649–1660).

I use microhistory, archaeological biography, and landscape archaeology to situate the trajectory of Daniel Gookin Jr.’s career within a comparative transatlantic setting. In building a firm context for one family’s history, I tie together sites, people, and materials on an Atlantic scale, and so add to our understanding of the materiality of colonialism in the British Atlantic.