

**William Burgess (Borges)**  
*People of London Town, Maryland*<sup>i</sup>

William Burgess is remembered as the founder of London Town. Born somewhere in Britain about 1622, he emigrated to Jamestown, Virginia as a teenager around 1637.<sup>1</sup> By 1651, he left Virginia for Maryland. It has been theorized that there were religious reasons for his move, but these have not been proven.<sup>2</sup> The move does nearly coincide with the emigration of Puritans out of Jamestown to Providence, Maryland. It is possible he was a Quaker or Puritan, as he refused to take an oath in 1658, arguing “it was in no case lawfull to sweare.”<sup>3</sup>

Throughout his life, Burgess was a family man. He married three times in America. As his gravestone in All Hallows Parish proudly announces, he left behind “his dear beloved wife Ursula and eleven children viz: seven sons and four daughters and eight grandchildren.”

William Burgess became involved in public service about 1659, and remained so until his death. In that year he became a member of the Lower House of Anne Arundel County, and was a Lieutenant in the militia. Burgess made the unfortunate choice to support Fendall’s Rebellion, a bloodless political crisis in which the governor and members of Maryland legislature attempted to overthrow the power of the proprietary government. Unfortunately for them, this came in 1660, about the same time that the Cromwellian Government in England, which had supported their rebellion, fell to the monarchy. Burgess was pardoned for his participation because of his renewed support of Lord Baltimore. Rising through the ranks of the colonial militia, Burgess became a colonel in 1676.<sup>4</sup>

About the same time Burgess entered the public sphere, George Westhill secured a land grant on the South River. Scorton Plantation was an 800-acre tobacco plantation extending across the peninsula that would later be home to London Town.<sup>5</sup> William Burgess purchased this plantation in 1673. Scorton bordered Burgess’ own plantation on the South River, purchased in 1651, named “Burge.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1683, Col. Burgess was named a commissioner in constructing “An Act of the Advancement of Trade” in the Maryland Legislature. Intended to streamline the exportation of tobacco, the Act established seaport towns and explicitly named Burgess’ property as one of those slated to become a new maritime community.<sup>7</sup> This was London Town.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants, 1623-1800*, Nell Marion Nugent, Richmond: Press of the Dietz Print Co., 1934, pages 61-62. Via [Archive.org](#)

<sup>2</sup> *Maryland Historical Magazine*, “Londontown on South River, Anne Arundel County, MD. (240th Anniversary of its Founding, 1683-1923.)” Henry J. Berkley, vol. 19, 1924. Contradicted by Mechelle Kerns in unpublished master’s thesis *London Town: The Life of a Colonial Town*.

<sup>3</sup> Proceedings of the Council of Maryland, 1636-1667, Maryland State Archives, [page 351](#).

<sup>4</sup> *A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature 1635-1789*, Maryland State Archives, Ed Papenfuse et al., [page 182](#).

<sup>5</sup> George Westill, AA Co. Liber Q page 454 Pat. Certificate, Maryland State Archives.

<sup>6</sup> *London Town: The Life of a Colonial Town*, Mechelle Kerns, unpublished master’s thesis, UMBC: 1999, page 32.

<sup>7</sup> *Bacon’s Laws of Maryland*, Maryland State Archives, Volume 75, [Page 70](#)

Unfortunately, Burgess did not get to enjoy the community he founded for very long. In February of 1686/7, Col. William Burgess, the founder of London Town, died.<sup>8</sup> He is buried at All Hallows Parish, and the gravestone his widow Ursula secured for him can still be seen there.

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<sup>1</sup> As the research into colonial London Town's inhabitants is an ongoing process, the caveat is offered that additional information may be found at any time and that a correction of information might also occur at any time.

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<sup>8</sup> Kerns thesis, 130.