

WHERE DID HUGH COME FROM?

By Margaret Amundson

In the past, several different family historians have offered theories explaining where they thought Hugh was from in Europe. One such theory was advanced by the Reverend French Forrest, a descendant of Hugh's in answer to a *Richmond Times Dispatch* weekly genealogy column, popular at the turn of the last century.^{1[1]} He said in the article the Frenches were from Roscommon County, Ireland. Rudimentary attempts have been made to prove or disprove this theory, without results.

Others have advanced the theory that he was related somehow to the George Mason family and point to the use of Mason as a given name, in the French family and French in the Mason family, as evidence of this relationship. Certainly the *George Mason of Gunston Hall Family*, clearly had a reason for using French as a given name. George¹ Mason's mother was Ann French. His first wife is said to have been Mary French. There is evidence she was named Mary,^{2[2]} however, nowhere is there a record that identifies her as nee French. This theory was probably advanced long before the authors of *The Five George Masons*, discovered the record in England showing Ann French married George¹ Mason's father. Thomas Mason, his father, was a yeoman farmer in the village of Pershore, in the Vale of Eveshame, Worcestershire, England.^{3[3]} No creditable evidence establishing a kinship tie between these two families has been found.^{4[4]}

There was not the web of interconnecting relationships typical of community structure between this Mason and French family. The Mason's were part of the elite. They were vestry, served on the court and served in the legislature. Hugh served in a minor office the first year he was married to Margaret and none after that. It was the third generation before the names were linked in any way. There were several other Mason families and at least one other George Mason,^{5[5]} living in Stafford County, Virginia during the mid to late seventeenth century. It is doubtful Charles Baldrige would have accepted George Mason or George Brent as arbitrator in his dispute with Hugh, if either of them were closely related to Hugh.

Now that it is known Margaret was not the daughter of Daniel Gaines, she could be the reason for naming a son Mason. Any attempts to find a Mason connection should focus on Margaret as well as Hugh for the explanation. One should keep in mind Margaret named her first son Anthony. Her husband John Prosser was married before and one of his older sons may have been named for his father. Assuming Margaret followed the custom of others of the time, and named a second son after

^{1[1]} The Reverend Douglas French Forrest, *Richmond Times Dispatch*, October 30, 1904.

^{2[2]} John Frederick Dorman, comp., *Westmoreland County, Virginia Records, 1658-1661* (Washington, D.C.: P. p., 1970), p. 27.

^{3[3]} Pamela C. Copeland and Richard K. Macmaster, *The Five George Masons - Patriots and Planters of Virginia and Maryland* (Lorton, VA: Regents of Gunston Hall, 1989), p. 2.

^{4[4]} In a meeting with Genevieve Jones, the genealogist for the George Mason Family, held at Gunston Hall, June 1994, with this compiler, a review of all the records extant on Masons in Stafford County, produce no evidence that the early statements that found their way into the literature, relative to a close sanguine tie, can be supported with evidence.

^{5[5]} There were several male Masons found in the same area as the George Mason of Gunston Hall Family. One was an Edward Mason who wrote his will in Stafford County, Virginia in February 1690. Edward had an eldest son named George Mason, and daughters named Margaret and Ann. See Sparacio, comp., *Deed & Will Abstracts of Stafford County, Virginia 1689-1693* (McLean, VA: P.p., 1989), p. 29. Mrs. Jones, Mason family genealogist thinks this Edward was the brother, Edmund Mason found in the church records in England. There was an Isaac Mason also living in the area that seems to be related to this family also. See Sparacio, comp., *Deed & Will Abstracts of Stafford County, Virginia 1686-1689* p. 81.

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the wife's father, her father's given name could be Anthony. Future researchers should be cognizant of this possibility.

Immediately upon Hugh's arrival in Virginia, he was met with law suits relating to the settlement of the estate of Simon Miller. As long as Margaret remained a widow, she could enter and defend suit on her late husbands behalf, but once she married, her husband had to do so for her.

At the 7 April 1686 session of the north side court,^{6[6]} Hugh was appointed by *his Mattes Justices of peace as surveyor of the highways* in place of James Taylor for the next year.^{7[7]} Hugh was given this office a year after his arrival in Virginia. According to a chart prepared by the Rutman's this would be a *second tier* office in colonial Virginia society.^{8[8]} Hugh never served in a higher office such as vestryman or justice. He served on juries in both Maryland and Virginia. He also inventoried estates. Perhaps he never aspired to any higher office or was not well connected. He seems to have devoted most of his time pursuing ventures that would increase his wealth rather than civic affairs.

^{6[6]} [Old] Rappahannock County was located on both sides of the Rappahannock River. It was wide at the point where the court was held. Sessions were divided into north side and south side and alternated between the two. In 1692, [Old] Rappahannock County was divided into Richmond on the north and Essex on the south.

^{7[7]} Sparacio, comps., Order Book Abstracts of [Old] Rappahannock County, Virginia 1685-1687 (McLean, VA: The Antient Press, 1990), p. 41.

^{8[8]} Rutman, *A Place in Time*, p. 147.