

# A Guide to the Journal and letters of Adam Cuninghame, 1728-1736

Journal and letters of Adam Cuningham 1728-1736  
1728-1736

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A Collection in The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation MS 2011.8  
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

## History

**Processed by:** Doug Mayo

## Title Statement

A Guide to the Journal and letters of Adam Cuninghame, 1728-1736

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**Author:** Doug Mayo

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## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from MARC record, created by Doug Mayo, 2016

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Descriptive Summary

### Accession number

MS 2011.8

### Language

English

### Abstract

Journal and letters of Adam Cuningham.

### Creator

Cuninghame, Adam.

### Extent

4 items..

### Repository

Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

## Administrative Information

### Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

### Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Acquisition Information

Acquired 2011.

## Preferred Citation

Adam Cuninghame Journal and letters, 1728-1736, MS 2011.8, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

## Alternative Form Available

The journal is published in *The Colonial Physician & Other Essays* / Whitfield Bell. New York: Science History Publications, 1975.

## Scope and Content

Journal and letters of Adam Cuninghame. The journal of Adam Cuninghame records his voyage to Virginia from Scotland, April 4-October 21, 1728. Cuninghame recounts the many adventures of the ship and its crew who were fired upon by a French vessel, lost a man overboard who was killed by sharks, ran out of provisions and liquor (the latter due to theft by the transports), endured a hurricane, and were at the mercy of a drunken captain who often failed to leave his cabin for days at a time.

Cuninghame wrote two letters from King George County, Virginia to his father, William, in Glasgow. In the first letter dated August 2, 1729, Cuninghame describes Williamsburg as "but a small Village containing not 60 families at most." Cuninghame explained to his father that there were too many physicians in Williamsburg for him to be successful there. In the second letter dated May 24, 1730, Cuninghame wrote concerning his continuing troubles at making a living and his indebtedness. Cuninghame explained to his father that the way to wealth in Virginia was not through the practice of medicine but through trade explaining that this is how his fellow Scotsmen, Alexander McKenzie and Dr. Archibald Blair made their fortunes.

In a final letter written to his father from Newcastle upon Tyne, March 23, 1736, Cuninghame requested a secret meeting with his father. Cuninghame asked his father for financial assistance and informed him of his desire to be transported "to some Forreign Plantations where I may pass the remainder of my days in a Sincere repentance for my former folly."

## Index Terms

### Persons:

Cuninghame, Adam

Blair, Archibald, -approximately 1734.

Cunninghame, William, Sir, 1673-1740, recipient.

### Subjects:

Hurricanes.

Merchants--Virginia.

Scots--Virginia.

Scots--Virginia--Williamsburg.

Surgeons--Virginia.

Surgeons--Virginia--Williamsburg.

## Geographical Names

Williamsburg (Va.)--Economic conditions--18th century.

Williamsburg (Va.)--Description and travel.

## Contents List

## **Adam Cuninghame Journal. Pages 3-16. 1728 May 5-October 28.**

**Folder 1**

**Extent**

1 volume

## **Adam Cuninghame letter to William Cuninghame, 1729 August 2.**

**Folder 1**

**Extent**

2 pages.

### **Scope and Content**

Concerning his decision to leave Williamsburg Adam writes: "please to know that Williamsburgh is but a small Village containing not 60 families at most; and in and about this City are no less than 25 or 30 phisishians [sic] and of that number not above 2 capable [sic] of living handsom[e]ly." Cuninghame goes on to describe the expense of living in Williamsburg, his failed attempt to become a ship's surgeon and his indebtedness to Dr. Blair.

## **Letter of Adam Cuninghame, Bristol mines, to his father William, in Edinburgh. 1730 May 24**

**Folder 1**

**Extent**

4 pages

### **Scope and Content**

Cuninghame writes to his father detailing his struggles in Virginia. In part, he ascribes his difficulties to his own charitable nature writing: "I cannot see a poor planter asking my advice, or begging my medicines, without being touch't with pity and freely give him away the Druggs have cost me above 150 p cent. in this country. I must own indeed I do my endeavour to make it up with the richer sort, but these gentlemen are so very carefull not to fall sick, as I almost despaire of making any thing of them." Cuninghame goes on to explain that physicians in Virginia attain wealth by becoming merchants not by practicing medicine. "... in my humble opinion there is no way of making mony in this country so easy as by merchandizing, this being the occupation they all aime [sic]at, for after they have purchas'd a little stock by there [sic] Practice they presently commence Merchants, and so make their Fortune." Cuninghame explains that this is the route taken by Alexander McKenzie and Doctor Archibald Blair.

## **1736 March 23**

**Folder 1**

**Extent**

4 pages

### **Scope and Content**

Letter of Adam Cuninghame, Newcastle upon Tyne, to his father William, in Edinburgh, March 23, 1736. Cuninghame requests a meeting with his father and requests that it be kept secret from his mother and siblings. Cuninghame explains his financial difficulties and requests that "I may be transported from Port Glasgow to some of the forreign [sic] Plantations where I may pass the remainder of my days in a Sincere repentance for my former folly."