

### Winkfield

(fl. 1763–1780) enslaved worker at the College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia,

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held a position of responsibility at the college; in fulfilling it, he earned local trust and standing. His place and date of birth are unknown, but handwritten notes added to a letter about him printed in *The Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney, 30 Nov. 1775) state, “Winkfield is a Negro, Son of old Liverpool, the Ferryman.” Several ferries operated not far from Williamsburg, suggesting that Winkfield was born nearby.

The earliest mentions of Winkfield, in the William & Mary Bursar’s Books, record that he helped to resolve personnel and staffing problems. One entry records that Winkfield received a payment, 6 September 1763, of £6: “By do [ditto; i.e., ‘Wm. Cole’] pd. cook <sup>in part</sup> for wages pd. Winkfield.” A further entry the same month, 23 September 1763, records a second payment: “By Mr. Nicolson, the house keeper by order of the Presidt, paid to Winkie 10 pounds.”

The “wages” are paid to the cook, apparently, but the phrasing suggests that Winkfield was also paid, seemingly, a reward for helping overcome a staffing problem recorded in the Faculty Minutes. On 23 July 1763 the Housekeeper, Mrs. Isabella Cocke, having “behaved much amiss in her Office,” was fired and was replaced temporarily by the Steward, James Nicolson, until the appointment of Mrs. Garrett, 8 November 1763. Nicholson was “allowed the usual Salary of Housekeeper for his Trouble.” It appears that Winkfield was helpful to Nicholson during a difficult time, especially if he might already have been in charge of what is called today the Great Hall (see below) and might have therefore had some working connection with those in the kitchen beneath.

Several years later, entries in the Bursar’s Books suggest Winkfield’s being entrusted to deliver the equivalent of a year’s salary, in cash, to a sub-usher (and later usher) at the college, Samuel Klug. An 8 December 1766 entry records a payment, £51, cash, “(sent per Winkie).” A similar entry pertaining to Klug that year is also for cash, £60: 30 July, “D<sup>o</sup>. [Cash] Sent him on his note per Winkie.”

Winkfield’s standing is implied too in his being singled out for help even by those outside the college. Thomas Jefferson, a member at the time of the House of Burgesses, records in his papers paying Winkfield for aiding Jefferson’s brother Randolph, as he was quitting the college. On 13 October 1772 Jefferson pays Winkfield 22/6: “Pd. Winkfeild [sic] at College for R. Jefferson for findg. knives & forks, cleaning shoes &c. 22/6 as per acct. & rect” (in his fee book Jefferson records the payment to “Winkey at College”). Jefferson likely recalled Winkfield from his own days as a student at William & Mary (1760–1762).

Winkfield’s high standing locally is made clear after his name, co-opted, appears in *The Virginia Gazette*, signed to a letter about a crisis at the college. The letter drew a reply (noted above, 30 November 1775) from a pseudonymous correspondent who addresses him with an honorific, mentions the office that he held at the college, and praises his character:

To Mr. WINKFIELD. Superintendent of the hall of William and Mary college. No one, of your colour, has ever established a more respectable character than yourself. Exclusive of your literary abilities [i.e., the previous letter bearing Winkfield's name], you have ever been distinguished for your spirit and candour. I myself knew you did possess these excellent qualifications in no small degree.

The college hall was busy, the dining place for the masters and students for several meals each day (the basement kitchen was likely the workplace for the cook mentioned above). It also hosted other events, including lectures, meetings, and concerts. Under the scrutiny of temperamental students and masters, overseeing the hall and prepping it for its various uses was central to daily life at the college, demanding both physically and otherwise.

Winkfield is also mentioned some years later, at a time of financial stress for the college. According to the Faculty Minutes of 29 December 1779, Winkfield then was among five enslaved men who were not to be sold: "Resolved, that Winkfield, Bob, Lemon, Adam, & Pompey, be retained for cleaning the College, & other necessary Purposes."

The last mention of Winkfield in college records is his appearance in the inventory of those enslaved by the college circa 1780: "Winkfield, Daniell, Dick—almost an invalid, Pompey, Adam, Nedd, old Lucy—a invalid, old Kate a invalid, Effy—not much better." As in the 1779 list, Winkfield's name comes first.

After this point Winkfield disappears from all known records, except that in 1785 "an enslaved man in Virginia" is quoted by Samuel Henley in a note to a 1785 edition of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (II, I, 4-7), where the Prince of Morocco proclaims, "Bring me the fairest creature northward born, / Where Phoebus' fire scarce thaws the icicles, / And let us make incision for your love, / To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine." Henley had returned to England after teaching at William & Mary from 1770 to 1775; from their daily interactions, he would have known Winkfield well (indeed, the annotation above on Winkfield's parentage is in Henley's hand).

It seems likely then that Winkfield, a man of "spirit and candour," is the man Henley records in the note as having interrogated: "to try his acuteness, I had asked, '—How it happened that, as Adam and Eve were white, he, their descendant should be black?'—His reply was: 'don't know: but, prick your hand and prick mine, my *blood* is as *red* as your's [sic].'"

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