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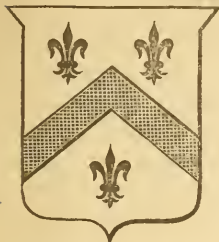




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## THE BONYTHON FAMILY OF MAINE.

By Dr. CHARLES E. BANKS, Passed Assistant Surgeon U. S. Marine-Hospital Service.



BONYTHON ARMS.

[Argent, a chevron between three fleurs de lis sable.]

THE name of Bonython\* is one of the most ancient and aristocratic in the county of Cornwall, England. Its antiquity is shown in the records which tell us that they were possessed of the Bonython Manor continuously from the 14th century to the beginning of the 18th century, and the social position of the family is certified by their intermarriage with the leading families of Cornwall for four centuries.

One Simon de Boniton in the middle of the 13th century was despatched to Ireland as a royal messenger (Pipe, 38 Hen. III., Rot. I. dors), and in 1397 another Simon Bonython, with his son Gavin, had license for an Oratory within the city of Exeter. [Bp. Stufferd Reg. folio 12.]



THE BONYTHON FLAGON.†

\* The pronunciation of this name is to be made by accenting the second syllable and rhyming it with "python"—Bo-ny'-thon. It means a furzy abode.

† A number of years ago, at the death of a lady who resided near St. Anstell, there was discovered among her effects a curious old jug of stoneware which had been preserved in her family as a precious heir-loom. A label attached to the flagon contained the following inscription: "Date of this jug 1598. It was used at the coronation banquet of James I. and VI. of Scotland by one of the Bonython family who officiated at the banquet." The lady's property came into the market, passed into other hands and became the object of a long and interesting search instituted by the present owner about 1879, which readers of the London "Notes and Queries" may remember to have noticed. Success rewarded his efforts, and now it is again in the possession of a member of the historic family, Mr. John Langdon Bonython of Adelaide, South Australia, who has kindly loaned the above engraving of his ancestral flagon and the family arms to illustrate this article. It is by his aid and at his suggestion that the writer has prepared this genealogy, and students of our early colonial history will be glad to learn that one of the Bonythons still lives, although at the antipodes, who has a sympathetic interest in helping us to know more of our ancestors. It will be remembered that the poet Whittier uses John Bonython as a character in "Mogg Megone," and Mr. J. L. Bonython has an autograph letter from the poet, acknowledging the error of his verse. The poet Longfellow is also connected with the Bonythons by descent, and thus two of our great literary lights lend an interest to this family name.

The Bonythons of Bonython were seated in the Lizard district of Cornwall in the parish of Cury,\* a bleak wild track on the serpentine formation, and notwithstanding their remote situation they became conspicuous figures in the political agitations of that period which culminated in the stormy days of the Stuart dynasty. Several branches issued from the parent stock, the most opulent of which, through a fortunate marriage, became possessed of Carelew, in Mylor, and is designatad as the Bonythons of Carelew to distinguish them from the elder house which held the ancient manor.† We shall not have occasion to follow out this junior line, as the Maine family were descended from the elder branch, and it will only be necessary to state that in 1749 the Carelew estate passed out of the family by sale, as in 1702 the Bonython manor had been alienated by the elder branch.

Bonython manor is a plain substantial building with a granite front, facing the sea, which it overlooks at a distance of about two miles by the valleys of Poljew and Gunwalloe. The view from the front of the house is a most extensive one, unusually so, as most of the ancient Cornish houses are built quite on the side of the hill or in the valley. On the lower part of the estate, in a small plantation, is a group of magnificent rocks, the grandeur of which strikes the beholder at the first glance. One of these—the topmost—is named the Fire or Bonfire Rock, and is probably a relic of the Druidic religion. [Western Antiquary (Supplement), pt. iv. 204.]

#### *Pedigree.*

1. RALPH<sup>1</sup> BONYTHON, of Bonython, Cornwall, paid a subsidy in the parish of Cury, 15 Henry VIII. He married twice, probably, (1) Elizabeth Downe, and (2) Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Frissey [Inq. Post. Mort. (James Frissey), 35 Hen. VIII. 62; comp. Coles Esch. Marl. Mss., No. 757, p. 38], and had issue :
  - i. RICHARD, son and heir.
  - ii. EDMOND, had issue two daughters: 1. *Katharine*,<sup>2</sup> who m. Thomas Godolphin; and 2. *Margaret*.<sup>3</sup>
  - iii. JOHN, d. s. p.
2. RICHARD<sup>2</sup> BONYTHON (*Ralph*<sup>1</sup>), also paid subsidy as above at the same time, but died the next year (1535), as his wife Jane, daughter and heir of John Durant of Pensinans, Cornwall, was a widow 16 Henry VIII., at Bodmin, where she was taxed. He had issue :
  - i. JOHN, son and heir.
  - ii. JAMES, paid subsidy in Mullion, 1 Elizabeth [Lay. Subsidy, 87-218]; m. Margerie, daughter of John Melhuise, of Truro, Merther, by whom he had: 1. *John*,<sup>4</sup> of St. Columb Major, who m. Margerie, daughter of John Kerne, alias Tresilian; 2. *Robert*<sup>5</sup>; 3. *Nicholas*.<sup>6</sup> a burgess, who m. Anne, daughter of Hugh Monday of Tregony; 4. *Thomas*,<sup>4</sup>

\* Subsidies had been paid on the manor since 15 Hen. VIII.

† "Carelew hath (after the Cornish manner) well-nigh metamorphosed the name of Master Bonithon, his owner, unto his own." [Carew, Survey of Cornwall (1602), p. 365.] Another branch of the family was seated at Tresadem in St. Columb Major. [Lake, Parochial Hist. of Cornwall, i. 234.]

a goldsmith of Cheapside, London, who m. Alice, daughter of Humphrey Purforoy of Leicestershire.

- iii. JANET, m. Tregolles.
- iv. CHRISTIAN, m. Nicholas Davy.
- v. BERSABA, m. John Davy.
- vi. ELIZABETH, m. (1) William Conden; (2) Peter Cooke.
- vii. ISABELLE, m. James Pawley.
- viii. CHARITY.

3. JOHN<sup>3</sup> BONYTHON (*Richard*,<sup>2</sup> *Ralph*<sup>1</sup>), paid a subsidy in the parish of Curry, 1559; he married Eleanor, daughter and co-heir of Job Myllayton of Pengerswick Castle, St. Breock, Kirrier; Governor of St. Michael's Mount. [Lake, Parochial History of Cornwall, i. 134, 137.] The Myllaytons became possessed of Pengerswick Castle, temp. Henry VIII., and Job Myllayton was made governor of St. Michaels in 1547 in place of Humphrey Arundell of Helland, who was executed for treason. Issue:

- 4. i. RESKYMER, son and heir.
- 5. ii. RICHARD, the emigrant to Maine.
- iii. EDMOND.
- iv. WILLIAM.
- v. JOHN, Captain of Pendennis Castle.
- vi. ELIZABETH, m. Henry Pomeroy, Mayor of Tregony, 15 April, 1600.
- vii. ANNE, m. Walter Roscarrock, 15 Oct. 1606.

4. RESKYMER<sup>4</sup> BONYTHON (*John*,<sup>3</sup> *Richard*,<sup>2</sup> *Ralph*<sup>1</sup>), was High Sheriff of Cornwall, 17 James I. [Tonkin, History of Cornwall, I. 287], and died 6 April, 1627 [Inq. Post Mort. 17 Chas. I. (pt. i.) No. 73]; married Loveday, daughter of William Kendall of Lostwithiel [Carew, Survey of Cornwall (1602), p. 109], by whom he had issue:

- 6. i. THOMAS, b. 1594, son and heir.

6. THOMAS<sup>5</sup> BONYTHON (*Reskymer*,<sup>4</sup> *John*,<sup>3</sup> *Richard*,<sup>2</sup> *Ralph*<sup>1</sup>), "was a captain in the Low Countries and much consumed his patrimony." [Tonkin Mss.] He married Francisca, daughter of Erasmus Waller, Esq., of London\* [Visitations of Cornwall, 1530, 1575, 1620, ed. Vivian], by whom he had issue:

- 7. i. JOHN, b. 1618, son and heir.

7. JOHN<sup>6</sup> BONYTHON (*Thomas*,<sup>5</sup> *Reskymer*,<sup>4</sup> *John*,<sup>3</sup> *Richard*,<sup>2</sup> *Ralph*<sup>1</sup>), married Anne, daughter of Hugh Trevanion of Trelegau, by whom he had issue:

- 8. i. CHARLES, son and heir.

8. CHARLES<sup>7</sup> BONYTHON (*John*,<sup>6</sup> *Thomas*,<sup>5</sup> *Reskymer*,<sup>4</sup> *John*,<sup>3</sup> *Richard*,<sup>2</sup> *Ralph*<sup>1</sup>), Steward of the Court of Westminster, 1683; represented the city of Westminster in Parliament, 1685; Sergeant-at-Law at Gray's Inn, 1692. [Wynne, Sergeant-at-Law, p. 90.] He sold the manor of Bonython in 1702 to Humphrey Carpenter, and three years later, 30 April, 1705, "in a fit of madness, shot himself in his own house in London."† By wife Mary Livesay of Livesay, Lincolnshire, he had issue:

\* According to Tonkin [Hist. of Cornwall], i. 287, he married Frances, daughter of Sir John Parker of London, but it may have been a second marriage.

† May 1, 1705. "Yesterday Mr. Sargeant Bonython, steward of Westminster Court, shot himself through the body with a pistoll." [Luttrell.]

- i. RICHARD, eldest son and heir; "an ingenious gentleman," says Tonkin, "but being tainted likewise with his father's distemper, . . . set fire to his chamber in Lincoln's Inn, burnt all his papers, bonds, &c., and then stabbed himself with his sword, but not effectually; he then threw himself out of the window and died on the spot." [History of Cornwall, i. 287; Comp. Luttrell, Brief Relation, i. 215, and v. 551-5.]
- ii. JOHN, the second son, King's College, Cambridge, B.A. 1717; M.A. 1721. While an undergraduate he wrote a Latin poem which was published in 1714 by some Cambridge students. He became an eminent physician in Bristol. He is mentioned in the will of his cousin Jane (Bonython) Kempe of Carelew, 1749. [Records Consistory Court, Exeter.]
- iii. [Daughter], m. Thomas Pearce of Helston.
5. RICHARD<sup>4</sup> BONYTHON (*John*,<sup>3</sup> *Richard*,<sup>2</sup> *Ralph*<sup>1</sup>), was baptized at St. Columb Major, 3 April. 1580, the second son of John<sup>3</sup> Bonython of Bonython. It is possible that he is the Richard Bonython who was Comptroller of the Stannaries of Cornwall and Devonshire, 1603 and 1604, and keeper of the Gaol at Lostwithiel in 1603 [Calender of State Papers, Domestic]. He came to Saco in 1631, bringing with him, as a copartner of Thomas Lewis, a patent, dated 12 February, 1629-30, for a large tract of land four miles by eight upon the East side of the Saco River, of which livery of seizen was given 28 June, 1631, following. His associate had "already been at the charge to transport himself and others to take a view of New England for the bettering his experience in the advancing a plantation," as is recited in the grant. I suppose that his emigration to this almost unknown land may be explained by recalling that he was not in the line of succession to the family seat and honors, his brother Reskymar having in 1620 a son and grandson to inherit the property. I judge also that he had been a soldier in some of the French wars, perhaps serving with Sir Ferdinando Gorges, from whom he imbibed some of the enthusiasm of "that grave knight" respecting the New England. This seems to be confirmed by his universal title of "Captain Bonython," as well as by a letter from Richard Vines to John Winthrop, 25 January, 1640, in which he says: "It seems the governor [Dudley] makes a question that Sir Ferdinando Gorges was not in the French wars in his tyme. Capt. Bonython intreats me to write a word or two thereof,"\* and then he proceeds to detail the facts as stated by him. This martial career secured to him an authoritative position among the early settlers, and he was undoubtedly a local magistrate under the "combination" government of Richard Vines, before the arrival in 1635 of Deputy Governor William Gorges. When this new executive officer arrived, he organized his first court 25 March, 1635-6, at the house of Captain Richard Bonython, who was then appointed one of the Provincial Commissioners, and in 1640, under the first charter, he was appointed one of the Councillors to Deputy Governor Thomas Gorges. We have no means of estimating his character except through negative testimony, and it is a legitimate inference that he must have been a man of ability and honor to have retained the respect and confidence of his fellow citizens for so many years. The court records are free from any charges impugning his moral,

\* 4 Mas., Hist. Coll. vii. Winthrop Papers.



social or political character, and to this is added the positive evidence that as a judge he spared not his own son from the utmost rigors of the law. One scrap of extemporaneous history affords us a sidelight into his character. Rev. Thomas Jenner, the Puritan minister at Saco [1640-6], writing to Governor Winthrop, says: "M<sup>r</sup> Vines & the captaine [Richard Bonython] both haue timely expressed themselves to be utterly against church-way, saying their patent doth prohibit the same." Parson Jenner's "church-way" did not suit loyal Captain Richard or Deputy Governor Vines, for the latter says: "I like Mr. Jenner his life and conversacion and also his preaching, if he would lett the Church of England alone; that doth much trouble me to hear our mother church questioned for her impurity vpon every occasion."\* Richard Bonython served as Councillor through 1645, and died about 1650. [Folsom, Saco and Biddeford, 113.] By wife, whose name I judge to be Lucretia, he had issue:

9. i. JOHN, son and heir.
- ii. ———, m. Richard Foxwell.
- iii. ———, m. Richard Cummings.

9. JOHN<sup>5</sup> BONYTHON (*Richard*,<sup>4</sup> *John*,<sup>3</sup> *Richard*,<sup>2</sup> *Ralph*<sup>1</sup>), born certainly before 1620, was the opposite of his father, for he lived a life of debauchery and outlawry during twenty years of his existence. The first court held at his father's house in 1636, brings him to view as the father of an illegitimate child, and his excesses developed to such a degree in 1645, that "threatening to kill and slay any person that should lay hands on him," the court, at which his father again sat, adjudged him "outlawed and incapable of any of his Majesty's laws, and proclaim[ed] him a Rebell." [York Court Records.] After Massachusetts assumed control of the government of Maine in 1652, he refused to submit to her government, and so far carried his guerilla warfare that the General Court proclaimed him an outlaw and offered a price upon his head to the person who would bring him to Boston alive or dead. This seemed to have the desired effect, and submitting to their authority in 1658, he behaved himself for a few years until the Restoration, when the Gorges party once more came to the front in Maine. Then he unloosed his bonds again, and defied his late political masters in an insulting letter to the Massachusetts magistrates. In 1668 the tables were again turned, and although Bonython remained recalcitrant, he found, after three more years of ineffectual opposition, that submission was the wisest course, and he wrote the magistrates a letter asking them to pardon his past offences, alleging that he "was blinded by a letter from Mr. Gorge." [Mass. Arch. xlvi. 108.] His offences were not always of a political nature, for he quarrelled with his brother in law, Richard Foxwell, in 1654, and tore down his house, for which he had to pay roundly when the court reviewed the case. In 1640 he was sued for libel by Rev. Richard Gibson (who had married Mary Lewis, the daughter of his father's partner), in that he had called him "a base priest, a base knave and a base fellow," besides slandering his wife.† The court gave the plaintiff a verdict of

\* 4 Mass. Hist. Coll. vii. Winthrop Papers.

† He was probably the instigator of the charges against Gibson's wife, recounted in the letter to Winthrop, 14 Jan. 1678-9, and we may suppose that jealousy was the cause of the trouble. [5 Mass. Hist. Coll. i. 267.]

£6. 6. 8. and costs 12s. 6d. This is a record unusually crowded with the events of a disreputable career, and it is not at all certain that the story is complete.\* We are relieved, however, to learn that in 1666 he had so far obtained the confidence of his towns people as to be placed on a trial jury, but that is the extent of his public services, as far as can be learned.† At the outbreak of the Indian hostilities in Maine, 1675, his house was burned about September of that year, and with his family he fled to Marblehead for safety. There, 17 February, 1676, "in his last sickness," he made his will, from which we learn the names of his wife and children [*ante*, xxxiv. 99]. This date may be taken as the time of his decease; but though dead, his fame will not only live in Whittier's "Mogg Megone," but in an epitaph still preserved, which sums up his life in expressive rhyme:

"Here lies Bonython the Sagamore of Saco  
He lived a rogue and died a knave and went to Hobbowocko."‡

Folsom says "He was buried at his own request near the river on the line separating one division of his estate from that of [James] Gibbins. A man who lives near the spot informs us that having had frequent occasion to pass it when a boy, . . . he was often told that the 'governor of Saco' lay buried there." [History Saco and Biddeford, 116.]§ His estate was not administered until 1732, when the property was found to consist of 5000 acres of land valued at 18 shillings per acre, which was divided among his heirs.

By wife Agnes he had issue:

- i. JOHN, "the eldest sonne," b. 1654; selectman, 1685; removed to Newcastle, N. H., 1689, where he was living in 1694. He had children: 1. *Richard*,<sup>7</sup> of Newcastle, a cordwainer, who was living there in 1713, but died before 1732; 2. *Patience*,<sup>7</sup> m. John Collins. She was the only heir of John Bonython, Jr., living in 1732, to take part in the division of the estate.
- ii. ELINOR, m. Churchwell. This daughter inherited her father's moral proclivities. She was examined, 20 Sept. 1667, on a charge of bastardy, and being convicted was punished in the usual way by standing in a white sheet in public meeting, but her father paid the alternate of £5 fine.
- iii. GAVRIGAN.|| In 1672, this son had a suit at law against George Norton in the New Hampshire courts. [Mass. Arch. xxxix. 413.]
- iv. THOMAS, "who then lay sick" at the date of his father's "last sickness." Presented to the court in 1669 with his brother John "for living in a disorderly family in the house of their father, a contemner of this (Massachusetts) authority." [Folsom, 144.]
- v. WINNIFRED, m. [Robert] Nichols.

\* In 1683, as if to atone for his past misdeeds and secure the good will of the people, he gave the town twenty acres of upland for the minister. [Folsom, 116.]

† In 1665 the townsmen elected him constable, but he refused the honor and was fined 4s. for not taking the oath of office. [Folsom, 115.]

‡ Hobbowocko is the devil of the Indians, according to Jocelyn, who says: "They acknowledge a God whom they call Squantan, . . . but *Abboicocko*, or Chepie, many times smites them with incurable diseases, seares them with his apparitions and panic terrors, by reason whereof they live in consternation worshipping the Devil for fear."

§ It is presumptuous to offer corrections to Folsom's accurate work, but I suggest that the tradition of the burial place of the "governor of Saco" refers to Captain Richard, his father, who was in fact a magistrate of the place. John may have been buried near his father.

|| This name, like Reskymer, is a Cornish surname, and possibly gives clue to the maiden name of John's wife or mother. The Gavigan family lived in St. Columb Major, where Capt. Richard Bonython was baptized.

This closes the record of a family of gentle blood who came to the Province of Maine to aid in the perpetuation of the feudal seignories of Old England. With this aristocratic scion of Bonython Manor were associated the almost royal Champernowne, owning kinship to the Plantagenets and Courtenays of England and the Montgomerys of France; the gentle Joscelyn of the knightly house of Kent; the noble Cammock, related to the powerful Earl of Warwick, and Godfrey, who bore the arms of the renowned Godfrey of Buillon the chivalrous King of Jerusalem. All these men were the associates of Richard Bonython, but no one to-day bears the name of Bonython, Champernowne, Joscelyn, Cammock or Godfrey in the state which they helped to found. The fate of the Bonython family in America bears a striking resemblance to the tragic end of the elder line in England, for the line of Richard the emigrant tapers off miserably in the profligate "Sagamore of Saco," for we hear nothing of his son's descendants. In the female line, however, through the Cummings match, the families of Bragdon, Banks, Longfellow and others, deduce their pedigree, while from the Foxwell marriage several other Maine families can be traced, including Thornton and Libby.

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NOTE.—I am indebted to the *Western Antiquary*, Supplement, Part IV., March, 1882, for the facts connected with the English portion of the family. This was furnished to me by Mr. John Langdon Bonython of Adelaide, South Australia, who had collected most of the material for that magazine.













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