

Wanchese ^[1]

Wanchese

by David B. Quinn

fl. 1584–86

Wanchese, (name from bird-gens), was an Algonquian Indian of the Roanoke tribe living on or near the present [Roanoke Island](#) ^[2]. He was taken to England in September 1584 by [Arthur Barlowe](#) ^[3], who had been sent to the New World by [Walter Raleigh](#) ^[4] to search out a site for a settlement. Wanchese was probably in the company of Granganimeo, elder of the tribe, when he was induced to go away with the English reconnaissance party in August 1584.

Wanchese was described as a "lusty" (physically strong) person, and he and his companion, [Manteo](#) ^[5], were said on 18 Oct. 1584, to look like "white Moors," originally dressed in mantles of rudely tanned skins, no shirts, and a pelt before their privy parts. In England, however, they were soon fitted out in English clothing of brown taffeta. He was at the time wholly unintelligible to the Europeans. Whether he learned much English or taught much [Algonquian](#) ^[6] to his captors before he sailed back to North America with Sir [Richard Grenville](#) ^[7] on 19 Apr. 1585, we cannot say. He appears to have been on the flagship, the *Tiger*, and thus saw a number of places in the Caribbean, mainly in the islands of [San Juan](#) ^[8] de Puerto Rico, and Española before the *Tiger* ran aground on Wokokon (now [Ocracoke Island](#) ^[9]) on 29 June.

At some time before [Ralph Lane](#) ^[10] established his settlement on [Roanoke Island](#) ^[2] in August 1585, Wanchese returned to his own people. This was a disappointment to the English settlers, but it appears natural that there was at least an even chance that an uprooted Indian would prefer to identify on his return with his own people rather than with the intruding Europeans.

During the period of growing hostility between the Roanoke tribe and [Lane](#) ^[10]'s men from March to June 1585, Wanchese was identified by [Lane](#) ^[10] with the hostile group in the tribe, centering around the chief [Pemisapan](#) ^[11], which objected to the continuing presence of the English and to the burden of their food demands. After [Lane](#) ^[10]'s departure ([Pemisapan](#) ^[11] having been killed), Wanchese, according to [Manteo](#) ^[5] later, was a leading member of the group that harassed the small band of settlers left on [Roanoke Island](#) ^[2] by [Grenville](#) ^[7] in 1586 and eventually drove them off. We hear nothing further about him. Traditionally the villain who betrayed his white benefactors, he now can take on the image of a defender of the Amerindian peoples against the white invaders, though we know too little of his personality to pronounce on it.

References:

David B. Quinn, ed., *The Roanoke Voyages* ^[12], 2 vols. 1955, which contains all of the extant sources.

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[American Indians](#) ^[14]

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[18]

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