

## 2018 George Richardson Lecture

### William Penn after 300 Years: Paradoxes and Legacies of a Boundary Spanner

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#### Abstract

2018 marked the 300th anniversary of the death of William Penn, and offered an ideal opportunity to revisit the life and career of this paradoxical figure. I argue that, over the course of his long career, Penn accomplished all that he did not only through his considerable skills (political, oratorical, intellectual) but also because he spent that career at the intersection of an extraordinary number of social networks in early modern England, Europe and America. It was precisely his role as a boundary spanner—occupying a nodal point linking the Society of Friends, the broader Dissenting community, the English government and those engaged in the colonial and imperial project throughout the British Atlantic—that accounted for Penn’s extraordinary range of relationships with so many of his contemporaries. His boundary-spanning efforts were not always successful, but his indefatigable energy propelled him into multiple arenas from his convincement in 1667 until the end of his public career 45 years later.

#### Keywords

William Penn, boundary spanning, Restoration, toleration, liberty of conscience, Pennsylvania, Popish Plot, Society of Friends, Glorious Revolution, James II, Quakers, Dissenters

#### Introduction

The 300th anniversary of the death of William Penn, which occurred in 2018, provided an ideal opportunity to revisit the life and career of this crucially important yet paradoxical figure in the history not only of Quakerism but of

England, America and Europe more generally. In pursuing this revisitation in the context of the George Richardson Lecture, it seems only fitting to note that George Richardson himself was quite familiar with Penn's work. Both men entered the Quaker ministry in their mid twenties; and Richardson records in his *Journal* that, during an early 1825 preaching tour in Sheffield, he preached on 'the important Christian maxim inculcated by William Penn, "No cross, no crown"'.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps even more importantly, in 1844 Richardson gathered together selections from Penn's writings in a volume that he titled *William Penn His Own Interpreter*. In this work, Richardson defended Penn's controversial treatise *The Sandy Foundation Shaken*, the 1668 polemic that landed Penn in the Tower of London on blasphemy charges. He also praised Penn's 'long life of beneficence and piety' and insisted that Penn 'was firm in his belief of the great essential doctrines of Christianity', though he did admit that 'at times the unreasonable conduct of many of his opponents excited in [Penn's] own mind indignant feelings.'<sup>2</sup> (Those familiar with seventeenth-century Quaker polemic, to say nothing of the work of the young William Penn himself, may have some idea of what Penn's 'indignant feelings' looked like as they spilled onto the page.)

In *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration* I described Penn as 'a figure whom many know a little, but few know well'—someone at once both familiar and elusive.<sup>3</sup> Gary Nash has called Penn the 'most important and least studied' of the colonial founders.<sup>4</sup> I argue in what follows that Penn's complex legacy is due not only to idiosyncratic personal factors and his considerable intellectual and oratorical gifts and practical political skills, but also to his almost unique placement at the intersection of an extraordinary number of social, political, religious and economic networks in early modern England, Europe and America. I open by highlighting a number of paradoxical aspects of Penn's life and career as it played out between his Quaker conviction in 1667 and 1712, when he suffered the stroke that hobbled him, both physically and mentally, for the final six years of his life. I further suggest that it was precisely his role as a boundary spanner—occupying a nodal point linking the Society of Friends, the broader Dissenting community, the English government and those engaged in the colonial and imperial project throughout the British Atlantic—that led Penn to such significant, complicated and contentious relationships with so many of his contemporaries. As will become apparent, Penn's efforts at boundary spanning were not always successful, but his peripatetic nature and indefatigable energy for his causes propelled him into

1 Richardson, G., *The Journal and Gospel Labours of George Richardson*, London: Alfred Bennet, 1864, p. 134.

2 Richardson, G., *William Penn His Own Interpreter*, London, 1844, pp. 5, 34, 35.

3 Murphy, A. R., *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration: the political thought of William Penn*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. ix.

4 Personal communication with author and later included as endorsement for Andrew R. Murphy, *William Penn: a life*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

multiple arenas from his earliest Quaker preaching tours until the end of his active career 45 years later.

### William Penn: A Paradoxical Life and Career

Before proceeding further, let me offer four paradoxes that help make sense of Penn's complex life and legacy, since they set the stage for the broader revisitation of Penn's career that I pursue in this essay.<sup>5</sup>

**1. Egalitarian Quaker theology and hierarchical expectations.** William Penn lived with a sharp tension between egalitarian ideas, on the one hand, and hierarchical and deferential expectations on the other. As an influential member of the Society of Friends, Penn embraced a radically egalitarian theology that proclaimed human equality in the sight of God and the transformative power of the Light within. As an outgrowth of this radical theology, Quakers upended social hierarchies, disdained conventional markers of social distinction and, of course, found themselves on the receiving end of bitter condemnation and brutal punishment. Over his long years of service as a Quaker controversialist and Public Friend, Penn never wavered from these theologically explosive tenets of Quakerism. Yet as a prominent Englishman—with a war hero, member of parliament and recipient of expropriated Irish lands for a father—Penn grew up expecting deference from others, consistently lived beyond his means, was never without servants and even owned several slaves who worked at Pennsbury, his American estate. Much of Penn's correspondence with Pennsylvanians during his extended absences from the colony read like the fulminations of a disappointed parent at his wayward children, who refused to subordinate their wills and express appropriate gratitude for all his sacrifices on their behalf.

**2. Champion of popular institutions and mouthpiece for an autocratic king.** During much of the 1670s William Penn vocally defended popular institutions, including parliament and juries, as guarantors of the people's liberties. (His famous 1670 trial with William Mead, popularised in *The Peoples Ancient and Just Liberties Asserted*, is merely the most noteworthy example.<sup>6</sup>) Yet during the late 1680s Penn was widely reviled (not without reason) as King James II's mouthpiece, the paid lackey of an absolutist monarch bent on destroying the rule of law by decreeing religious liberty in the face of parliamentary opposition. Penn reconciled these three commitments—to representative institutions, to liberty of conscience and to the king's programme for pursuing toleration—by insisting that the King's Declaration would be followed by parliamentary confirmation, as part of what he called a 'new Magna Charta for liberty of conscience'.<sup>7</sup> It was a theoretically

5 This section draws on my *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration*, pp. 9–11.

6 [Penn, W.], *The Peoples Ancient and Just Liberties Asserted*, London, 1670.

7 On this campaign, see Sowerby, S., *Making Toleration: the repealers and the Glorious Revolution*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013, ch. 2.

coherent and plausible position, although in the heated political atmosphere of 1688 we ought not to be surprised if its nuances escaped those who saw Penn's royal employer as an existential threat to English liberties.

**3. American coloniser and absentee English landlord.** A few months after his arrival in Pennsylvania Penn wrote to a correspondent that 'I am mightily taken with this part of the world ... I like it so well, that ... my family being once fixt with me; and if no other thing occur, I am like to be an adopted American.'<sup>8</sup> He threw himself energetically into the business of founding, attempting to harmonise the political theorising he had articulated in England with conditions on the ground in America. But some 'other thing' did occur: legal disputes with his southern neighbour Lord Baltimore, which drew him back to England just two years after his arrival; and, later, repercussions from Penn's involvement in English politics during the late 1680s. In all, he spent only around four of his remaining thirty-six years in America, a stranger to his own settlers, and was laid to rest far from Philadelphia, in the burial ground of Jordans Meetinghouse in Buckinghamshire, just outside London. And there he remains, with his wives and several of his children, to this day (despite an ill-fated and unsuccessful attempt to repatriate Penn's remains to Philadelphia for the 1882 bicentennial of his arrival in America).<sup>9</sup>

**4. Thriving colony and indebted proprietor.** Pennsylvania soon became a thriving centre of American political, intellectual, economic and religious life, a popular destination for emigrants from across Europe and a crucial hub in the emerging British imperial economy. Yet Penn was never able to reap these benefits. His eight-month imprisonment for debt in 1708 provides evidence of his chronic difficulties managing money and stemmed directly from his inability to take advantage of the economic potential of American colonisation (not to mention his inability or unwillingness to curtail his standard of living). In fact, he bankrupted himself in the process of colonisation, and was in the process of selling Pennsylvania back to the Crown when a stroke incapacitated him in 1712. I suggest in the closing chapter of *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration* that the dynamic growth of Pennsylvania took place precisely *because of*, rather than *in spite of*, the proprietor's extended absences.<sup>10</sup>

Appreciating the cumulative effect of these four paradoxes is essential for understanding the complexity of William Penn's career. But larger contexts always structure the living out of individual lives, and one way to understand these paradoxes is to acknowledge the ways they derived their power from the many different roles that Penn played, both within the Society of Friends and

8 Penn to Lord Culpeper, 5 February 1683; in Dunn, R. S. and Maples Dunn, M. (eds), *The Papers of William Penn*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982, II: 203. Hereafter, references to selections from *The Papers of William Penn* will be denoted *PWP*, volume: page.

9 That effort is chronicled in Harrison, G. L., *The Remains of William Penn*, Philadelphia: Globe Printing House, 1882; and more briefly in the Epilogue to my *William Penn: a life*.

10 Murphy, *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration*, ch. 8.

in English, European and American society. During the 1670s he participated in the vibrant Restoration debate over the toleration of Dissenters as both a theorist and an activist. Within the Society of Friends he worked tirelessly in support of George Fox's vision of 'Gospel Order', a series of organisational innovations designed to present a unified Quaker face to the outside world by disciplining wayward Friends and dissent within the Society. During the early 1680s his role as the proprietor and chief governing officer of an English colony in America added yet another dimension to his advocacy. Later in that same decade, as a close ally of James II, Penn occupied the role of courtier, the 'intellectual architect of the king's toleration project':<sup>11</sup> a royal policy that aroused a great deal of popular resistance. His association with James cast a pall of suspicion over Penn from 1688 until the end of his life, three decades later. During the 1690s and 1700s he assumed a leading role among the various proprietors and colonial agents in both London and America, seeking to maintain their autonomy as the Crown attempted to reassert control over its far-flung empire. And, of course, Penn himself changed over the years. The young radical who rose to national fame in his twenties became, by the late 1680s, an ambitious insider trying to achieve similar ends through the new means at his disposal. By the early 1700s the utopian visionary was embittered and alienated from his own colonists, and was felled by a stroke just as he completed an agreement to sell back his government of Pennsylvania to the Crown.

### **Making (Some) Sense of the Paradoxes: The Notion of Boundary Spanning**

Building on these preliminary considerations, let me now turn to the notion of Penn as boundary spanner. In referring to William Penn as a 'boundary spanner', I am of course using a word that was not in circulation during his lifetime. Boundary spanning is a relatively recent term that has been widely used by scholars studying public health, social policy, organisational behaviour and other arenas in which the gathering and communication of information is essential for successful outcomes. Boundary spanners are crucial to the effective functioning of groups of various kinds, which depend on well-placed members who can facilitate the flow of information both within the group and between the group and key external constituencies, and who develop ways to 'deal with difficulties of gathering and diffusing information'.<sup>12</sup> The success of any individual boundary spanner depends on personal as well as structural factors: useful individual

11 Sowerby, *Making Toleration*, 40.

12 Tushman, M. L., 'Special Boundary Roles in the Innovation Process', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 22 (1977), p. 593. For more on the notion of boundary spanning see, e.g., Tushman, M. L. and Scanlan, T. J., 'Boundary Spanning Individuals: their role in information transfer and their antecedents', *Academy of Management Journal* 24 (1981), pp. 289–305; and Williams, P., 'The Competent Boundary Spanner', *Public Administration* 80 (2002), pp. 103–24.

qualities, the ability to cultivate and draw on personal and professional networks and a fortuitous placement at the intersection of a group's internal actors and important external audiences and sources of information.

How might it illuminate something about William Penn to see him as a boundary spanner? Which boundaries did he attempt to span, and how does the concept of boundary spanning help explain his significance in the development of Quakerism and in English and American history? One point to make at the outset is to acknowledge that many of the networks and connections that would enable Penn to become an effective boundary spanner—social, educational, political, religious and colonial—were in place well *before* his Quaker convincement in 1667. Although it was in the 1670s that William Penn really came into his own as a Quaker controversialist, his father, Admiral Sir William Penn, had already laid the groundwork for his eldest son to embark on an influential public career well before the Cork Quaker Meeting that would change his life so radically. William Penn the younger had spent five years in Ireland as a youth; gone on to Christ Church, Oxford, for two unhappy years at university; travelled to Europe with Robert Spencer, later earl of Sunderland, who would be instrumental to the success of his colonising efforts during the 1680s; studied at the Protestant Academy in Saumur, France; entered Lincoln's Inn to study law (although the Inn was promptly closed by plague, ending his studies before they began); personally carried messages about naval affairs between his father and King Charles II during the run-up to the Second Anglo-Dutch War; and travelled again to Ireland to negotiate leases with his father's tenants. So Penn was not an ordinary Quaker convert, if such a thing existed; he arrived in the Society of Friends groomed for a position of influence in English society more generally.<sup>13</sup>

### The 1670s

William Penn's boundary spanning began in earnest following his celebrated 1670 trial and his October 1671 return from travels in Holland and Germany, when he began to assume the leading role in the Society of Friends that he would occupy for the rest of his life. He had his hands full. During the 1670s attacks came from all sides, and Penn quickly became one of the most prominent Friends involved in interacting with a diverse range of audiences. Within the Society, opposition to George Fox's authority erupted into a number of divisive schisms and opposition to Fox's 'Gospel Order'. Quakers also faced a hostile landscape of critics in both the Dissenting and Anglican camps, critics who harshly assailed Friends' doctrines and behaviour. And, of course, Quakers continued to need spokespersons who could articulate principled and pragmatic arguments against persecution to

13 For more on these aspects of Penn's early life and career, see my *William Penn: a life*, chs 1–4.

political authorities, who held enormous power over Friends' ability to survive in a hostile world.

As is widely known, the history of Quakerism, like that of any other religious community, is replete with instances of division and acrimony, despite its aspirations toward unity and consensus. And no one, except perhaps Margaret Fell, was more committed to defending George Fox's leadership of the Society of Friends than William Penn. He worked to get Fox released from prison in 1675. He confronted dissenting Quakers such as William Mucklow and John and Mary Pennyman in both private correspondence and published works. He was among a group that the Yearly Meeting tasked in October 1675 to meet with the Story–Wilkinson dissidents, whose fierce objections to Fox's leadership convulsed the Society for much of the decade. Several years later, continuing that effort, Penn convened a meeting with William Rogers, one of the separatist leaders in Bristol, whom he had known for years; Rogers was a prosperous Bristol merchant with whom Penn had visited before sailing for Cork in 1669. As he soon found out, familiarity does not ensure success, and some boundaries remain resistant to spanning. The meeting was notoriously unsuccessful, and the schism persisted.

These years also saw the founding of several Meetings that would be instrumental to the institutionalisation of Fox's notion of 'Gospel Order', the disciplinary structure that aimed to impose order within the Society of Friends and unify its public, outward-looking face. Although efforts in this regard had been going on for some time, the real organisational advances came with the establishment of the Six Weeks' Meeting (1671); the Second Day's Morning Meeting (1672), which oversaw the Quaker press; and the Meeting for Sufferings (1675), which gathered evidence of persecution and advocated in favour of liberty of conscience.<sup>14</sup>

William Penn was central to this effort. He was a key member of the Morning Meeting, which first met in September 1673, charged with organising Quaker responses to their critics. Of course, to respond to critics one needs to know who those critics are and what they are saying, so at that very first meeting William Penn and George Whitehead were directed to obtain copies of all books written against Friends. Much of the Morning Meeting's work during the 1670s involved assigning members to read and respond to anti-Quaker tracts. As time went on and the Quaker presence in North America and the Caribbean grew, the Morning Meeting increasingly took on responsibility for providing colonial Quakers with Friends' writings. Given Penn's prominence as a controversialist, he played an important role in these discussions and features prominently in the Meeting's minutes.<sup>15</sup>

14 On the introduction of these Meetings, the way that they fostered a broader transatlantic Quaker community and the resistance they sparked, see Landes, J., *London Quakers in the Trans-Atlantic World*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015; and Mack, P., *Visionary Women: ecstatic prophecy in seventeenth-century England*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, pp. 283–85.

15 Minutes of Morning Meeting, 15 September 1673, in Morning Meeting Minutes (1673–1692), Library of the Religious Society of Friends, London, YM/MfS/MOR/M, 1;

These years also saw the founding of the Meeting for Sufferings, first convened in October 1675. Penn's membership in the Meeting for Sufferings both reflected his deep social networks and facilitated his further boundary-spanning activities. The scope of the Meeting's work was not restricted to England alone, and it directed its attention to the mistreatment and persecution of Friends as far away as Barbados, Jamaica, Ireland, Germany, Maryland and New England. The Meeting for Sufferings also took on responsibility for organising appeals to the king or parliament, as well as advocating with proprietors who controlled territories in which Quakers faced hostility or persecution. Penn was one of a group sent to intervene with the governor of Jamaica on behalf of Friends there; to the king to advocate for better treatment of Friends in Barbados; and to agents of New England to seek better treatment for Friends living in those territories. And, along with James Claypoole, who would later serve as treasurer of the Pennsylvania Free Society of Traders, Penn corresponded with Irish Friends regarding the conditions they faced.<sup>16</sup>

Penn's work with the Society of Friends also reached beyond England and Ireland. He journeyed to Holland and Germany twice during the 1670s: with Thomas Rudyard and Benjamin Furly in 1671; and again in 1677, accompanying Fox, George Keith, Robert Barclay and others to a General Meeting of Dutch Friends in Amsterdam. This Dutch meeting adopted a number of the elements of 'Gospel Order' that Fox had been implementing in England, and represented a significant step in the organisation of Dutch Friends. Following that General Meeting, Penn travelled hundreds of miles with a number of other prominent Friends, spreading the Quaker message and seeking out like-minded believers.<sup>17</sup> Each of his European trips during the 1670s laid the foundation for relationships on which Penn would build for the rest of his life.

At the same time that he was arguing for religious liberty across English society, then, Penn was working with Fox to control the face that Quakerism presented to the outside world. Far more public than his work within the Society of Friends, of course, were Penn's activities in spanning boundaries *between* Friends and their adversaries. This task picked up after the king's 1672 Declaration of Indulgence, which provided a welcome respite from persecution but also, perhaps ironically, set the stage for even more vitriolic public criticism of Dissenters. Attacks came not only from Anglicans but also from other Dissenters, who saw Friends as theologically misguided, politically subversive and socially divisive. And thus Penn's budding career included a number of contentious interactions with Baptists,

Braithwaite, W. C., *The Second Period of Quakerism*, London: Macmillan, 1919, p. 281; Martin, C. J., 'Tradition Versus Innovation: the Hat, Wilkinson-Story and Keithian controversies', *Quaker Studies* 8 (2003), p. 13; and Landes, *London Quakers*, pp. 24–29, 38–39.

16 'Meeting for Sufferings: The Initial Remit', Meeting for Sufferings Minutes, Library of the Religious Society of Friends, London, MfS/M1, pp. 1, 39. See also Landes, *London Quakers*, pp. 29–32, 66–67, 69.

17 Penn, 'An Account of My Journey into Holland and Germany', 1677, *PWP* I: 430ff.



Congregationalists, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Muggletonians. He published nearly two dozen defences of Quakerism during the first half of the 1670s alone.

Not surprisingly, Quakers found themselves on the receiving end of a great deal of criticism from representatives of the Church of England. In 1673, Henry Hallywell, an Anglican vicar from Sussex, called Quakers ‘the refuse of the world, persons of the meanest quality and lowest parts and education’. (William Penn was not the only one with ‘indignant feelings’.) Their doctrines, he went on, were ‘not only destructive of all civil polity and government, but of religion itself and the worship of Almighty God established amongst us’. Penn responded quickly with a chapter-by-chapter response entitled *Wisdom Justified of her Children*. Several years later Penn found himself in a public dispute with another Anglican clergyman, John Cheyney from Cheshire, who published at least four anti-Quaker works in 1676 alone. In *The Skirmisher Defeated*, Penn insisted on the essentially Protestant nature of Quakers’ understanding of conscience, invoking Luther, Calvin and English Reformers in support of his claims. Then again, not every interaction between Quakers and Anglicans threw off such rhetorical sparks. In 1675 Penn received a long letter from Anglican scholar Henry More, the noted ‘Cambridge Platonist’. More eschewed invective and instead engaged in a detailed engagement with Quaker doctrines, and even praised the ‘wit and seriousness’ and ‘several excellent passages’ of Penn’s writings. This is not to say that More agreed with Quaker doctrines: he was an Anglican, after all. But the tenor of the exchange differed radically from that of most of Penn’s other interactions with Anglicans.<sup>18</sup>

William Penn had been accused of Socinianism early in his Quaker career, but in 1672 he found himself debating an actual Socinian, Henry Hedworth, whose *The Spirit of the Quakers Tried* attacked Friends and more particularly Fox, whom Hedworth declared ‘a false prophet, liar, or imposter’. Penn replied in *The Spirit of Truth Vindicated*, and used his response not only to defend Fox but also to develop a more elaborate understanding of the Light Within and its relation to Scripture as a guide for Christian life.<sup>19</sup>

These controversies, however, pale before those between Penn and his two chief adversaries during these years, Thomas Hicks and John Faldo, each of which stretched on for several years. Faldo, an Independent from near Barnet, found his congregants forsaking his own preaching for nearby Quaker meetings, and in response produced *Quakerism No Christianity*, a two-hundred-plus-page denunciation that described Friends as ‘know[ing] no God above that they call the Light in their consciences’ and insisted that they ‘no more call themselves Christians’. Penn’s lengthy response, published in March 1673, insisted that

18 Hallywell, H., *An Account of Familism*, London, 1673, p. 124; Penn, *Wisdom Justified of her Children*, London, 1673; Cheyney, J., *A Skirmish Made Upon Quakerism*, London, 1676; Penn, *The Skirmisher Defeated*, London, 1676; From Henry More, 22 May 1675, *PWP* I: 305.

19 Hedworth, H., *The Spirit of the Quakers Tried*, London, 1672, p. 4; Penn, *The Spirit of Truth Vindicated*, London, 1672.

Quakerism was, as his title claimed, ‘a new nick-name for old Christianity’. Penn’s reply lamented the ways in which Dissenters of all stripes were piling on Quakers just when they should all be celebrating their newfound common liberty.<sup>20</sup>

Penn’s other nemesis during these years, the Baptist Thomas Hicks, attacked Quakers in his 1673 *Dialogue between a Christian and a Quaker*, in which, not surprisingly, ‘Christian’ thoroughly bested ‘Quaker’ in a debate over faith and doctrine. Penn collaborated with George Whitehead on a response, *The Christian-Quaker*, which presented a systematic theological defence of the Quaker doctrine of the Light. Undeterred, Hicks produced *A Continuation of the Dialogue*, in which, once again, Quaker ‘errors’ were skewered in dialogue format. In this case, debate in print led to debate in person, and Penn and Whitehead debated Baptists in October 1674. From all accounts, they were raucous affairs, discharging years’ worth of bitterness and acrimony—and, one suspects, changing few minds.<sup>21</sup>

Penn’s highest-profile debate during the 1670s was surely that with the Presbyterian Richard Baxter, one of the most prominent Dissenters in the land. Like so many other such public disputations, the debate between Penn and Baxter, which stretched for seven hours on 5 October 1675, shed far more heat than light.<sup>22</sup> But what all of these disputes—both in print and in person—show is the degree to which William Penn was a key member of a sophisticated ‘rapid response team’ poised to defend the Society of Friends from attacks from the outside.

Penn also served as a boundary spanner between Quakers and the government. Not surprisingly, given his famous name, such efforts frequently operated on a national scale. In January 1678, on assignment from the Meeting for Sufferings, Penn and several others addressed the king and the privy council, appealing for permission to offer affirmations instead of oaths in legal settings and protesting Friends being prosecuted under anti-Catholic legislation. In March of that year Penn testified before parliament, deflecting the claim that Quakers were closet Catholics while maintaining that Catholics too deserved the liberty to follow their consciences. ‘I am far from thinking that papists should be whipped for their conscience’, he insisted, ‘because I declaim against the injustice of whipping Quakers for papists.’ He also attempted to engage in electoral politics more

20 Faldo, J., *Quakerism No Christianity*, London, 1673, Preface, final pg., unnumb; Penn, *Quakerism, A New Nick-name*, London, 1672.

21 Hicks, T., *A Dialogue Between a Christian and a Quaker*, London, 1673; Penn and Whitehead, G., *The Christian-Quaker*, London, 1673; Hicks, T., *A Continuation of the Dialogue Between a Christian and a Quaker*, London, 1673; Penn, *Reason Against Railing*, London, 1673.

22 From Richard Baxter, 6 October 1675, *PWP* I: 340; To Richard Baxter, 6 October 1675, *PWP* I: 339; To Richard Baxter, 8 October 1675, *PWP* I: 345. For the timing of these debates and the Penn–Baxter correspondence, see Thomas, R., ‘Letters of William Penn and Richard Baxter’, *Journal of the Friends’ Historical Society* 48 (1956), pp. 204–07.

directly, by supporting his friend Algernon Sidney's unsuccessful campaign for parliament. After Sidney's defeat Penn even encouraged him to contest the results, offering to draw on his connections in parliament to help the cause. (Sidney declined, probably wisely.)<sup>23</sup>

Although he used his connections at the royal court when necessary, Penn also realised that local authorities often had a great deal of leeway in the enforcement of laws, and directed his efforts at justices of the peace, sheriffs and other magistrates. While visiting Ely during the fall of 1671 Penn composed a blistering attack on the conduct of two justices of the peace there for actions including physical assaults, fines and destruction of Friends' property. Penn sent copies of his own writings (*A Seasonable Caveat against Popery* and *The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience*) to Middlesex magistrates in 1674, and reminded them that nothing was forcing them to jail or fine Quakers: they could simply look the other way, or perhaps offer what he called 'some gentle caution for the future'. Most fundamentally, though, Penn told the Middlesex magistrates that 'you have work enough to employ yourselves about, in ... executing all laws, that recover and preserve morality, mercy, justice, sobriety, and godly living' rather than harassing sober and industrious Dissenters.<sup>24</sup>

Penn's many boundary-spanning activities during the 1670s not only enabled him to play a key role in the development of Quakerism and in dealings with the English government but also provided connections on which he would later draw in his colonisation efforts. By 1677 he had observed firsthand, or nearly firsthand, the complexities of migration and resettlement in a number of different settings. He was familiar with Ireland, where he had spent five years during his youth and to which he had later returned to manage his father's estates, developing friendships with figures such as Sir William Petty and the earl of Arran. He had taken part, as mediator of an intra-Quaker dispute, in laying the foundations of the American colony of New Jersey. And his travels through the Palatinate on a preaching tour with other Quakers taught him that migration might take place to the east rather than west. From the local Meeting to the intersections of English and Dutch Quakerism, Penn had clearly 'arrived' as a leading English Quaker and, increasingly, as a figure known across Europe as well.

23 To the Commons of England, in *A Collection of the Works of William Penn* (London, 1726), I: 117; Two Speeches to a Committee of Parliament, 22 March 1678, *PWP* I: 534; Two Toleration Bills, 1678, *PWP* I: 537–40; To Algernon Sidney, 1 March 1679, *PWP* I: 547. On Sidney, see Houston, A. C., *Algernon Sidney and the Republican Heritage in England and America*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991, and Scott, J., *Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis, 1677–1683*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

24 To Squire Bowles, 1674, *PWP* I: 276; To JH and companion, 31 March 1674, *PWP* I: 279–81.

### The 1680s and 1690s

Penn's boundary-spanning activities during the 1670s laid the foundation for the remainder of his career. That said, the 1680s added another set of connections to Penn's public life, beginning with his colonisation efforts in Pennsylvania and continuing during his embrace of James II's tolerationist agenda later in the decade. After a difficult period in the wake of the 1688 Revolution, Penn re-emerged during the mid 1690s and played an important role in unifying and representing those with colonial interests in their efforts to retain autonomy from the Crown, adding yet another boundary-spanning activity to his already extensive portfolio.

William Penn first petitioned for an American territory in June 1680 and, over the next nine months, his plea worked its way through the byzantine structures of the English government. After he received his colonial charter in March 1681, the establishment of the political and economic foundations of his colony led Penn to a renewed engagement with a variety of audiences. He circulated drafts of his governing documents to associates both within and outside the Society of Friends (e.g., Thomas Rudyard, Benjamin Furly, Algernon Sidney). In early 1682 he offered a series of 'Concessions' to his First Purchasers to entice investment in and emigration to Pennsylvania, and soon had a network of agents in place, which drew on his pre-existing connections to facilitate sales of land in America: Philip Ford in London, Robert Barclay in Scotland, Robert Turner in Dublin, Furly in Rotterdam and James Harrison in Lancashire. The urban centres of European Quakerism—London, Dublin, Bristol, Rotterdam, Cork, all places where Penn had visited or spent time over the past decade and a half—were heavily represented among the First Purchasers.<sup>25</sup>

Once he had arrived in Pennsylvania in October 1682, one of the most important pieces of business was to establish a system of Quaker meetings

25 On Penn's promotional efforts, see To Friends in the Countries, March 1681(?), Reel 3, frame 139 of microfilm *Papers of William Penn* (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1975); Penn, W., *Some Account of the Province of Pennsylvania*, London, 1681; Tully, A., *Forming American Politics: ideals, interests, and institutions in colonial New York and Pennsylvania*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1994, pp. 29–30; Smolenski, J., *Friends and Strangers: the making of a Creole culture in colonial Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia: Penn Press, 2010, p. 61. On his circulation of drafts of founding documents, see To Algernon Sidney, 13 October 1681, *PWP* II: 124–25; Benjamin Furly's Criticism of The Frame of Government, post May 1682, *PWP* II: 235; Thomas Rudyard's commentary on the Frame of Government, 13 January 1682, *PWP* II: 184–89; and Nash, G., 'The Framing of Government in Pennsylvania: ideas in contact with reality', *William and Mary Quarterly* 23 (1966), pp. 183–209. On land sales and the First Purchasers, see 'Conditions or Concessions to the First Purchasers', *PWP* II: 100; Pomfret, J. E., 'The First Purchasers of Pennsylvania 1681–1700', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 75 (1956), pp. 137–63; and Vann, R. T., 'Quakerism: Made in America?' in Dunn, R. S. and Maples Dunn, M. (eds), *The World of William Penn*, Philadelphia: Penn Press, 1986.

throughout the province's three counties (Philadelphia, Chester and Bucks). By spring 1683 each county had its own Men's and Women's Monthly Meetings, and the first Philadelphia Yearly Meeting took place in 1683. And so Penn added the role of spanning English and American Quakerism to his other activities. There were other transatlantic boundaries to span as well: Penn's status as a Fellow of the Royal Society, aided by his friendship with Society Fellows Sir William Petty, John Aubrey and Robert Boyle, enabled him to keep his colony fresh in the minds of an influential segment of English society. The Society considered Penn a kind of 'resident correspondent' in American territory, and he sent back detailed descriptions of the flora and fauna, and even the natives.<sup>26</sup>

Penn's attempts to work with other proprietors—yet another boundary he attempted to span—were rather less successful than his efforts at promoting his own settlement. A bitter dispute with his southern neighbour, Lord Baltimore, would send him back to London just two years after he arrived, but Baltimore was hardly the only colonial figure with whom Penn found himself at odds during his first visit. He became embroiled in difficulties with his neighbours in the Jerseys, an outcome made all the more painful by the fact that nearly all the principals in the dispute were Friends. As 1683 wore on, Penn became aware of rumours circulating in England about him and his colony, and traced those rumours to West Jersey, viewing them (rightly, it seems) as attempts to scare settlers away from Pennsylvania. He complained bitterly to the government of West Jersey, citing 'great and ... irreparable injuries by some members of your colony'.<sup>27</sup> Nor were his relations with his northern neighbour, New York, free from conflict. In the summer of 1683 Penn turned his attention to the Susquehanna River valley, which (in the words of Gary Nash) 'not only watered a vast region highly suitable for agricultural development, but also held the key to the coveted Iroquois fur trade'. But the newly arrived governor of New York, Thomas Dongan, understood the strategic importance of retaining control of the fur trade and put a stop to all negotiations with the natives, stymieing Penn's attempts to gain title to Susquehanna lands. The dispute between Penn and Dongan over the Susquehanna purchase and the fur trade would drag on for years.<sup>28</sup>

26 Minutes of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, 9 January 1683, *PWP* II: 333–34; To Friends in Great Britain, 17 March 1683, *PWP* II: 528. On the early meetings, see Janney, S. M., *The Life of William Penn*, 4th edn, Philadelphia: Friends' Book Association, 1878, p. 234; and Pomfret, J. E., *The Province of West New Jersey, 1609–1702: a study in the origins of an American colony*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956, pp. 222–23. On Penn and the Royal Society, see Balderston, M., 'The Mystery of William Penn, the Royal Society, and the First Map of Pennsylvania', *Quaker History* 55 (1966), pp. 79–87; and To John Aubrey, 13 June 1683, *PWP* II: 395.

27 To the Governor and Council of West New Jersey, 11 June 1683, *PWP* II: 391.

28 See Sutto, A., 'William Penn, Charles Calvert, and the Limits of Royal Authority, 1680–1685', *Pennsylvania History* 76 (2009), pp. 295, 296; To Lord Baltimore, 23 April 1683, *PWP* II: 384; To Lord Baltimore, 30 May 1683, *PWP* II: 388; From Lord Baltimore, 24 June 1683, *PWP* II: 405–09; To the Earl of Sunderland, 28 July 1683, *PWP* II: 417. More

After his return to England in 1684, the accession of James II a year later paved the way for Penn to wield influence at the highest levels of English politics and to expand on his already extensive networks and connections. Penn clearly saw his continued presence in England as serving a number of important purposes: for liberty of conscience; for better treatment of English Friends; and for sheltering Pennsylvania from the Crown's increasing attempts to assert direct control over the colonies. 'My being here', he wrote in the fall of 1686, 'has not only advanced the reputation of the province, and gained many great persons into our interest, but prevented a storm as to us, that is falling upon other colonies.' (He toured northern and western England, and wrote back to Pennsylvania Friends that 'Meetings [were] never larger, or better'.) Penn's proximity to the levers of power also enabled him to press the king for particular leniency to Friends. And, in his more overtly political capacity, he engaged in personal negotiations on behalf of the king, assisting in efforts to remove local officeholders who resisted James' efforts to impose toleration.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, he remained a prominent and influential Friend. As a member of the Meeting for Sufferings, he continued to seek relief from penal legislation for Friends who found themselves under attack by local magistrates. He retained a number of important connections with Dutch Quakers as well, ones that enabled him to further his efforts on behalf of toleration in England. In the summer of 1686 James sent Penn to consult with William of Orange, a mission that Penn disguised by attending the Amsterdam Yearly Meeting. After 1688, Penn faced a backlash within the Society of Friends (particularly from his old ally Mead), many of whom felt that the very thing that had made Penn such a prominent and influential advocate during James' reign—his boundary-spanning roles and close relationship with the king—had brought the Society into disrepute. And Penn's second marriage, in 1695, to Hannah Callowhill, the daughter of a prominent Bristol merchant, was a boundary-spanning move of its own, as it brought together one of the pillars of London Quakerism and one of the most prominent and prosperous Bristol Quaker families. But here, too, Penn found himself on the receiving end of criticism from those who questioned the swiftness of his remarriage after the death of his first wife, or the age difference between Penn and his new bride (more than two decades).<sup>30</sup>

generally, see Munroe, J. A., *Colonial Delaware: a history*, Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1978, ch. 4. On New York, see Nash, G., 'The Quest for the Susquehanna Valley: New York, Pennsylvania, and the seventeenth-century fur trade', *New York History* 48 (1967), p. 3; From Thomas Dongan, 17 March 1684, *PWP* II: 532.

29 Tully, *Forming American Politics*, 33; Penn, 'A History of my Life from 1684, c. 1691–1692', *PWP* III: 342; To Thomas Lloyd, 21 September 1686, *PWP* III: 117; Sowerby, *Making Toleration*.

30 On Mead's criticism of Penn, see Minutes from January and March 1694, Morning Meeting minutes (1692–1700), p. 34; Gill, C., 'William Penn as Preface Writer and Controversialist', in Murphy, A. R. and Smolenski, J. (eds), *The Worlds of William Penn*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019. On Hannah, see Hutchinson Drinker, S., *Hannah Penn and the Proprietorship of Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia: National Society of the

As he re-entered political life during the mid 1690s, Penn's ability to bridge rival factions was put to its ultimate test. Much of his time was spent in near-constant attempts to fend off challenges to his proprietorship, which tended to come from Pennsylvania Anglicans or royal authorities, while simultaneously pleading with Pennsylvania Quakers to crack down on smuggling and provide funds for colonial defence in order to prevent the re-establishment of direct royal control. Caught between these two powerful forces, Penn drew on every connection available to him and worked indefatigably to defend his colony's interests. His chief rival in this effort was Edward Randolph, the king's surveyor-general of customs for the North American colonies, whom the Board of Trade charged with investigating colonial compliance with the Trade and Navigation Acts. In early 1697 Randolph presented the results of his investigations, and Pennsylvania came in for particularly hostile treatment. But proprietors and colonial agents representing the colonies did not take these charges lying down. And so, during the second half of the 1690s, Penn played an increasingly prominent role in rallying opposition to Randolph. The editors of Penn's *Papers* describe him as 'the de facto leader of the proprietors and agents of the nonroyal colonies' and 'the only proprietor with the necessary interest, energy, and influence to do battle with the Board of Trade'. Penn's correspondence with Fitz-John Winthrop, grandson of the famed Massachusetts Bay founder, then serving as a London agent for the Connecticut colony, makes clear that others in London looked to him for leadership in the search to preserve their colonies' autonomy. Early in 1697, Winthrop told Penn: 'we are flushed with success under your conduct in our general affair.'<sup>31</sup>

Part of his role in these boundary-spanning efforts involved thinking about ways to unite the colonies around their common interests and allegiance and to enhance their common prosperity and thus their value to the Crown. He laid out some of these ideas in his 1697 *Briefe and Plain Scheam*, proposing a system of intercolonial cooperation and governance that represented his attempt to

Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1958; and Duncan Hirsch, A., 'A Tale of Two Wives: Mythmaking and the Lives of Gulielma and Hannah Penn', *Pennsylvania History* 61 (1994), pp. 429–56.

31 Randolph's reports are mentioned by the Board of Trade in its letter to Penn on 9 February 1697, *PWP* reel 7, frame 345; see also Randolph's reports to the Board, which appear throughout August 1696 in the *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial*: see especially 17 August 1696, #149. The 20 February report is included in *The Manuscripts of the House of Lords, 1695–1697*, London, 1903, II: 440–44; see also Extract from a letter from Colonel Nicholson to the Board of Trade, 13 July 1697, *PWP* reel 7, frame 509; Petition from Proprietors, *CSP Colonial*: 5 November 1696, #365; 'the de facto leader', *PWP* III: 470; From John Winthrop, 4 January 1697, *PWP* III: 475. The best source on Randolph's life and career is Michael Hall, *Edward Randolph and the American Colonies, 1676–1703*, Chapel Hill, NC: published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1960; see also Johanssen, R. W., 'The Conflict Between the Three Lower Counties on the Delaware and the Province of Pennsylvania, 1682–1704', *Delaware History* 5 (1962), pp. 122–23.

find common ground between royal officials, who wanted to exert control over colonial affairs, and proprietors' and settlers' aspirations for autonomy. He also looked beyond the colonial context, presenting the Lords Justices of Ireland with his views on improving the Irish economy during his 1698 visit there. In taking this step, Penn was entering into a thorny political debate that touched on a number of interconnected issues: the long history of England's domination of Ireland (in which the Penn family was directly complicit); the competing economic interests of the two nations' wool and linen trades; and the relative roles played by the East India Company and Irish actors in the broader British economy.<sup>32</sup>

### Return to Pennsylvania: The 1700s

By the time he departed England for his long-delayed return to Pennsylvania in 1699, Penn's struggle with the Board of Trade had gone on for the better part of a decade. The Board ordered him to remove a number of the colony's leading politicians from office, actions that poisoned an already-fractious relationship between the proprietor and his colonists. In America, Penn continued his efforts at bringing together representatives of the colonies to advance their interests vis-à-vis the Crown and fend off encroachments on their affairs. Here again, his capacity for boundary spanning and bridge building served Penn well. 'I desire with all sincerity a good understanding among the governors of the provinces ... and the prosperity of the respective provinces', he wrote to Virginia Governor Francis Nicholson. To Nathaniel Blakiston, governor of Maryland, he professed his desire to pursue friendly relations with his neighbours, 'to be dutiful to the Crown, careful of its revenues and the good of the mother country'. He expressed similar sentiments to Sir William Beeston, lieutenant-governor of Jamaica; to the governor of Barbados; to Christopher Codrington, captain-general of the Leeward Islands; and Governor Fitz-John Winthrop of Connecticut. Penn also maintained a cordial correspondence with the Dickinson brothers, Jonathan and Caleb, prosperous (and slaveholding) Friends from Jamaica who had visited Philadelphia in the late 1690s after surviving a harrowing shipwreck. Early in October 1700, Penn travelled to New York for a governors' conference with the heads of his neighbouring governments. The governors proposed a number of measures to advance trade in the colonies, asked for standardisation of law and practice across the colonies and charged Penn with relaying their requests to the Board of Trade.<sup>33</sup>

32 Draft of *A Briefe and Plaine Scheam*, 8 February 1697, *PWP* III: 482; Kearney, H. F., 'The Political Background to English Mercantilism, 1695–1700', *Economic History Review* 11 (1959), p. 484; Cary, J., *An Essay on the State of England* (1695), 89; To the Lord's Justices of Ireland, 1 July 1698, *PWP* III: 548–51.

33 To Francis Nicholson, 12 December 1699, *PWP* III: 578; To Nathaniel Blakiston, 13 December 1699, *PWP* III: 579; To Nathaniel Blakiston, 13 January 1700, *PWP* reel 8, frame 215; To Sir Thomas Beeston, General of Jamaica, 2 February 1700, *PWP* reel 8, frame 243; To Governor Ralph Grey of Barbados, 2 February 1700, *PWP* reel 8, frame 245; To



Penn's history as a boundary spanner and his extensive personal and political networks facilitated his efforts to maintain control of his colony into the first decade of the eighteenth century. He was well acquainted with Robert Harley, speaker of the House of Commons, as well as with Lord Manchester, secretary of state and a commissioner on the Board of Trade. Each of these influential members of the English government made sure that Penn's and Pennsylvania's interests were represented in London, and he resumed a more direct role in this regard after his return to England in late 1701.<sup>34</sup>

Despite his extensive commitments in London, Penn remained active as a leading Quaker in the capital as well as in Sussex, where (until 1707) he retained his home at Warminghurst, and in Bristol, where his wife and children remained. In 1702 he and a company of Friends met Queen Anne at Windsor Castle to render 'humble and hearty acknowledgements' of thanks for her words and to 'assur[e] her (on behalf of all our Friends) of our sincere affection and Christian obedience'. According to Nicholas Gates, a Quaker from Kent, the queen replied to Penn personally, 'Mr. Penn, I am well pleased that what I have done is to your satisfaction, that you and your Friends may be assured of my protection.' (Penn had known the queen when she was Princess Anne, during the reign of her father, James II.)<sup>35</sup>

After his return to England in 1701, with the passage of time and Penn's increasing ill health and financial woes (he spent eight months in debtors' prison during 1708), Penn became increasingly despondent about his ability to wield influence as he had done in years past. After he was unable to rally any opposition to the Occasional Conformity Bill in 1711 he lamented to Harley, now earl of Oxford: 'I am heartily sorry I am now good for nothing. Twas otherways in former days.' Not long thereafter, in October 1712, a massive stroke brought the public career of this once-formidable Friend to an abrupt halt.<sup>36</sup>

### Conclusions

Let me conclude this consideration of William Penn's legacy after 300 years with a few final observations about boundary spanning in general and Penn's boundary-spanning activities in particular.

Colonel Codrington, 15 March 1700, *PWP* reel 8, frame 318; To Governor Winthrop, 13 May 1700, *PWP* reel 8, frame 467; To Baron Somers, 22 October 1700, *PWP* III: 621–22; To Governor Blakiston, 10 October 1700, *PWP* reel 8, frame 589.

34 From Lord Manchester, 16 February 1702, *PWP* reel 10, frame 48; Proposal to reunite proprietary colonies to the Crown, c. 17 February 1702, *PWP* IV: 153.

35 Epistle to Friends, 9 August 1702, *PWP* reel 10, frame 416; *PWP* IV: 174n2; Address to the Queen, c. 3 June 1702, *PWP* IV: 173; 'Nicholas Gates's report', 3 June 1702, *PWP* IV: 173.

36 From the Earl of Peterborough, c. May–June 1709, *PWP* IV: 646; To the Duke of Marlborough, 6 May 1709, *PWP* IV: 644; 'I am heartily sorry', To the Earl of Oxford, 6 December 1711, *PWP* IV: 710; To the Earl of Oxford, January or February 1712, *PWP* IV: 711.

First, the sorts of relationships and connections that enable some individuals to become successful boundary spanners are not merely sites of (and opportunities for) communication, connection and facilitation: they exist enmeshed in relationships of power. Within the Society of Friends Penn's role as a key supporter of George Fox aligned him with the forces of centralisation, systematisation and—we might even say—orthodoxy within Quakerism; while in English society at large his role as a Quaker spokesman placed him on the receiving end of jailing and fines. William Penn was, in one sense, an extraordinarily privileged individual. His father's connections—in the Navy, in the English government, in Ireland—made him no ordinary convert but a valuable asset in Quaker efforts to defend themselves in public debate against a wide range of foes. That said, of course Penn as a Quaker entered public life as the representative of a despised group of Dissenters, subject to the exercise of state power as well as violent popular animosity. The power dimensions of all of Penn's activities are worth keeping in mind as we move toward a more holistic assessment of his rich and varied career: despite his marginalisation from political and ecclesiastical centres of power in English society, he of course wielded power as Fox's ally and as proprietor and governor of Pennsylvania.

Second, Penn's boundary spanning, one of the things that makes him such a fascinating figure in the history of Quakerism, is also precisely the thing that caused him such difficulty at several points during his long career. Penn's role in promoting James' efforts at toleration was, in one sense, a quintessential example of boundary spanning: a well-known figure playing on his prominent social profile and lending the power of his affiliation to a politically ambitious monarch in order to pursue a shared goal. But, unlike James, Penn could not escape to France when the whole scheme collapsed in spectacular fashion in December 1688. He remained in England and had to reckon with the political consequences of choosing the losing side in the 1688 Revolution. Those consequences included multiple arrests, two years in hiding and a great deal of hostility and criticism from fellow Friends who felt that his close association with such a partisan political campaign had besmirched the Society's reputation.

Finally, it bears mentioning that there was one boundary that William Penn could never quite span: the boundary with his own colonists. After his first departure in 1684 the correspondence between Penn and his colonial government took on an increasingly sharp edge, with Penn frustrated at his settlers' unwillingness to do his bidding and Pennsylvanians (particularly those governing the province) increasingly resentful of the proprietor's meddling from afar. In fact, I have argued elsewhere that, if one views Pennsylvania as a sort of Quaker Meeting, Pennsylvania Quakers effectively read Penn—who, after all, had departed after just under two years—out of their Meeting just a few years after its founding.<sup>37</sup> This ouster may not have

37 Murphy, A., 'Reading Penn out of the Meeting: Pennsylvania's Two Foundings', paper presented at the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture conference, Williamsburg, VA, June 2018.

displayed all the hallmarks of Fox's 'Gospel Order'—visits by committees of Friends, formal admonition and censure, eventual disownment—but it was just as surely a highly effective exercise in power, leaving Penn sidelined, with little control over events in his own colony just a handful of years after its founding. Penn was hardly unique in this regard—proprietors and settlers tangled in almost all of the American colonies, to some degree—but in all his planning in the heady days of 1681 and 1682 Penn probably never contemplated the notion that his own interests and those of his colonists could diverge so starkly.

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