

William Penn and the Development of a Discourse of 'Civil Rights'

Anna Lloyd Hellier
Université Rennes 2, France

Abstract

This article sets out to highlight a less well-known aspect of William Penn's politically engaged campaign for liberty of conscience. Specifically, it will demonstrate that Penn had much wider objectives than merely seeking guarantees from the state on religious toleration. He sought extensive reform of the civil laws governing the rights of individuals. Drawing on his early Quaker experiences in England and his experiences among the French Huguenots, Penn forged a vision of the rights and duties pertaining to any godly civil society. The development of a discourse of 'Civil Rights' became central to Penn's campaign, and came to symbolise a set of universal, not specifically English, rights to be observed for the mutual benefit of all. This has implications for our understanding of Penn's experience as a Quaker, but also for English seventeenth-century religious and civil politics in general, as well as their evolution over time.

Keywords

Early Quakers, 'Civil Rights', Huguenots, Pennsylvania, politically engaged publications, religious liberties, religious nonconformity, seventeenth century, William Penn

Introduction

The life of William Penn was an eventful and multi-faceted one, and has lent itself to ample exploration by scholars over time, producing a wealth of literature and also a wealth of sometimes contradictory images of this complex existence lived in complex times. Penn's life encompassed multiple changes of political regime and multiple geographical zones. He was born into Civil War England, grew up in Interregnum and Restoration England and Ireland, spent time in

absolutist France as a young student, travelled several times within the Dutch Republic and German states as a Quaker missionary and sailed for Pennsylvania, his North-American proprietary colony, on two occasions to oversee affairs there. He began life within the Anglican tradition,¹ developed early sensibilities towards Quakerism and nonconformism in Ireland in the late 1650s, demonstrated a continuing attraction to nonconformist practices with John Owen and his circle as a young student at Oxford University in the early 1660s and studied within the French Huguenot Protestant Academy of Saumur for a period, before finally becoming convinced of the truth of the Quaker approach to Christianity at the tender age of twenty-two in 1667.² An outer context of religious and political turmoil as well as an inner world of spiritual curiosity and an open and creative approach to religious nonconformity were thus constants in Penn's early personal life experience, spanning Britain, Ireland, Europe and America.³

My aim in this article is to take a fresh look at one small part of one of the major aspects of Penn's lifework: his political campaign for liberty of conscience. My particular focus will be on the development of a discourse of 'Civil Rights' in Penn's early politically engaged publications, as the natural corollary to his better-known discourse on religious toleration.⁴ The scope of the article is thus intentionally fairly narrow in both temporal and subject terms, covering a period of intense political activity in Penn's life on behalf of the Quakers in England in the 1670s and 1680s, and focusing on his development of a specific rhetoric of

1 Based on his baptism record in the parish register of the Church of All Hallows by the Tower, London, and his being enrolled, in October 1660, at Christ Church College, Oxford, a renowned place of training for Anglican clergy. Penn's parents were not Quakers, were loyal to the new monarchy and conformed to the Anglican Church at the Restoration.

2 Penn's conviction is usually dated to late summer or early autumn 1667, while in Ireland, and just before his 23rd birthday on 14 October. The Quaker minister Thomas Loe is generally seen to have been instrumental in the conviction of Penn in 1667, and it seems that it was also Loe who was responsible for first introducing Penn to Quaker faith and practice during an earlier visit to Ireland as an itinerant minister in around 1657. See, for example, Maples Dunn, M., and Dunn, R. S., (eds), *The Papers of William Penn: vol. I 1644–1679*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, p. 49.

3 For some of the more recent literature on William Penn and his religious and political thought see Murphy, A. R., *Liberty, Conscience & Toleration: the political thought of William Penn*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016 and *William Penn, A Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019; Angell, S. W., 'William Penn's Debts to John Owen and Moses Amyraut on Questions of Truth, Grace, and Religious Toleration', *Quaker Studies* 16/2 (2012), pp. 157–73 and 'Leaving Father or Mother for Christ's sake: William Penn's veiled autobiography through scripture references', *Quaker Studies* 25/2 (2020), pp. 169–88; Frost, W. J., 'William Penn: Quaker humanist', *Quaker Studies* 16/2 (2012), pp. 174–89 and 'The Enigmatic Mr. William Penn: a biographer's dilemma', <https://www.swarthmore.edu/friends-historical-library/enigmatic-mr-william-penn> (accessed 07/12/2021).

4 Murphy, *Liberty, Conscience & Toleration*, gives an in-depth analysis of Penn's political campaign for religious toleration, and the links he drew between religious toleration and political liberty.

'Civil Rights' across his more politically engaged publications of the period. I will attempt to demonstrate how Penn, drawing primarily on his Quaker experiences in England and his Huguenot experiences in France, used this collocation to signify, in surprisingly modern fashion, the full range of law-sanctioned privileges due equally, and without distinction, to all citizens, or subjects of the English monarch, for the mutual benefit of governors and governed. Moreover, it will be argued that, in the particular way Penn developed his discourse of 'Civil Rights', he opened the way to a less Anglo-centric application of the notion of ancient English birth-rights than that generally adopted by his seventeenth-century contemporaries, lending the expression, and the particular vision of civil society and government that it entailed, a more universalist dimension and application.

The Background to Penn's Political Activism on Behalf of the Quakers in Restoration England

In the 1670s and 1680s Penn wrote, among other things, a remarkable series of politically engaged tracts in the cause of religious toleration and equal civil rights for all. This was at a time of sustained legal attacks on religious nonconformity and religious nonconformists from the English civil authorities (notably parliament and local magistrates) under the cover of the notorious Clarendon Code, a set of laws aimed at actively and coercively discouraging nonconformist beliefs and practices, introduced progressively by the cavalier parliament at the Restoration in the 1660s and including a specific law directed against Quakers, the Quaker Act of 1662. Penn's campaign literature followed on, in many ways, from the more politically engaged literature and campaigning of the early Quakers of the Interregnum period, with such tracts as George Fox and James Nayler's *Saul's Errand to Damascus* (1653), *The Cry of Blood* (1656) by George Bishop and other Bristol Quakers, *The West answering to the North* (1657) from George Fox and George Bishop, and the wealth of pro-army and commonwealth literature of the crisis year of 1659 from Edward Burrough, Edward Byllinge, George Bishop, George Fox and Isaac Penington, among others.⁵

This literature had been concerned with lobbying for liberty of conscience for all Protestants, highlighting abuses of justice towards Quakers for their religious nonconformity and urging the army and successive Commonwealth governments to honour their commitments to religious and political reform, as voiced at the end of the Civil War years. Penn's political literature owed a considerable and conscious debt to this earlier radical Quaker tradition, particularly in its Civil

5 K. Peters (*Print Culture and the Early Quakers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and 'The Quakers and the politics of the army', *Past and Present* 231/1 (2016), pp. 97–128) and R. Moore (*The Light In Their Consciences: early Quakers in Britain, 1646–1666*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000) have written in detail about the politically engaged writings and actions of the early Civil War and Interregnum Quakers.

War language of the 'birth-rights' due to all Englishmen. However, Penn raised the Quaker political rhetoric to a whole new level. His political vision emerges across these tracts as more detailed and concrete, his arguments as more elaborate, his idiom based more on logical development to persuade his audience and less on the mode of prophecy and apocalyptic warnings more typical of the early Quaker campaign.⁶ This difference can, I would suggest, be explained by the fact that Penn was happy to draw on and exploit multiple Protestant and Republican sources, not limiting himself to early Quaker sources for inspiration, although, as a Quaker, he did not often make these debts explicit. Linked to this observation is another. Penn's willingness to draw on multiple sources and lines of reasoning may also have been a means of reaching out to a wider and more diverse audience than that of the early Quakers, as Penn sought to ally the Quaker cause to that of republican and early 'Whig' circles in the years leading up to the Exclusion Crisis of 1679–81, as the likes of Algernon Sidney and the first earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, sought to exclude Catholic James I from the throne and secure a Protestant succession, with a greater degree of toleration towards nonconformist Protestant groups and an increased role for parliament within a constitutional monarchy.⁷

Penn's connections to the English Republican Algernon Sidney and the Republican circles meeting at the Quaker Benjamin Furly's residence in Rotterdam have been well documented.⁸ We can add to these potential republican sources of inspiration that of the French Huguenots, and particularly those of Saumur, where Penn studied for above a year between 1662 and 1664 before his convincement as a Quaker. The early French Huguenots of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and particularly Philippe Duplessis-Mornay, had carried out a systematic and sustained campaign to lobby successive French monarchs to grant them both freedom of conscience and religious practice and equal civil and legal rights to those of their Catholic counterparts. This had, of course, finally led to the granting of those rights in the *Edict of Nantes* (1598). Moïse Amyraut, still present

6 Peters, *Print Culture*, p. 210, for example, underlines this characteristic of early politically engaged Quaker literature. See also Corns, T. N., and Lowenstein, D., (eds), *The Emergence of Quaker Writing: dissenting literature in seventeenth-century England*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1995, especially the chapter by Lowenstein, 'The War of the Lamb: George Fox and the apocalyptic discourse of revolutionary Quakerism', pp. 25–41.

7 See Keeble, N. H., ('The Politic and the Polite in Quaker Prose: the case of William Penn', in Corns, T. N., and Lowenstein, D., (eds), *The Emergence of Quaker Writing: dissenting literature in seventeenth-century England*, London: Frank Cass, 1995, pp. 112–25) on Penn's language choices and rhetoric and his target audience compared with that of earlier Quakers such as George Fox.

8 See, for example, Simonutti, L., 'English guests at "De Lantaarn". Sidney, Penn, Locke, Toland and Shaftesbury', in Hutton, S. (ed.), *Benjamin Furly 1646–1714: a Quaker merchant and his milieu*, Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2007, pp. 31–65. See also Scott, J., *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic 1623–1677*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988 and *Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis 1677–1683*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

at Saumur during Penn's time there, if elderly and ailing by this time, had been instrumental in continuing negotiations with Louis XIV's Cardinal Mazarin in order to conserve these hard-won rights and liberties. This specific and sustained approach to campaigning for Huguenot rights as Protestants in Catholic France, begun by the early Huguenots in the 1560s, systemised by Duplessis-Mornay later in the sixteenth century and continued by Moïse Amyraut and Jean Daillé in the seventeenth century, has been termed the 'Saumur school' by French historians of the Huguenots.⁹

This campaign, carried out particularly by the northern Huguenots, for religious, legal and civil rights as a minority Protestant community in Catholic France in the late sixteenth and early to mid seventeenth centuries can be compared in many ways to that of the Quakers, as a minority nonconformist Protestant community in Interregnum and Restoration England. The young Penn's connections with these two minority, but highly organised, religious groups, with a history of sustained political negotiation with the authorities, can thus provide us with a further key to understanding the particular mode and style of discourse that he brought to the Quaker campaign in the 1670s and early 1680s. Given Penn's early attraction to separatist, nonconformist beliefs, as evidenced by his association with John Owen and the unorthodox and unofficial religious meetings organised by the latter in Oxford, during Penn's brief period as a student at the university there, a fruitful line of research is opened up, I would suggest, in drawing a direct link between these three formative experiences among Protestant nonconformist groups in Penn's early life: John Owen's group in Oxford, the Huguenots of Saumur and the Quakers of England and then Holland. Stephen Angell has already drawn this line in highlighting Penn's awakening religious conscience.¹⁰ However, the same remains to be done for his developing political awareness.

Penn's personal connection to the Huguenots' religious and political campaign is cemented by his early links to the Sidney family, various members of which were intimately and personally connected with Duplessis-Mornay and the French Protestant Academy at Saumur.¹¹ This reinforces the notion of connected networks of individuals and groups in England and on the continent, all with interrelated

9 Various French historians have detailed the negotiations between the French Huguenots and kings of France, with an emerging strategy of deliberate political engagement over time. See, in particular, Daussy, H., *Les Huguenots et le roi : Le combat politique de Philippe Duplessis-Mornay (1572–1600)*, Geneva: Droz, 2002 and 'Huguenot Political Thought and Activities', in Mentzer, R. A., and Van Ruymbeke, B. (eds), *A Companion to the Huguenots*, Leiden: Brill, 2016, pp. 66–89; Poton, D., 'Les Protestants de Saumur au XVIIe siècle : Étude Démographique', *Saumur, capitale européenne du protestantisme au XVIIe siècle*, 3^e Cahier de Fontevraud (26–28 avril 1991), pp. 11–26 and *Duplessis-Mornay—Le pape des huguenots*, Paris: Perrin, 2006; Laplanche, F., *L'écriture, le sacré et l'histoire: érudits et politiques protestants devant la Bible en France au XVIIe siècle*, Amsterdam: Holland University Press, 1986.

10 Angell, 'William Penn's Debts'.

11 Scott, *Algernon Sidney*.

visions of a godly civil society founded on tolerated religious plurality and an equality of legal and civil rights for citizens or subjects of different religious denominations. The political and legal achievements of the small Huguenot Protestant minority in France, up against the goliath of the French Catholic Church and state, could well thus have provided a further early source of inspiration to Penn, to add to his experience of the authorities' harsh treatment of nonconformists at Oxford before he ever joined the Religious Society of Friends in 1667. My suggestion is that Penn, indeed, drew on Huguenot modes and rhetoric of political engagement, as well as Quaker and Republican ones, and this could explain the emergence of a discourse not just of religious liberties, ancient English rights and equal justice but of integral 'Civil Rights' across Penn's early political texts. Indeed, a close examination of Penn's early, more politically engaged tracts seems to indicate that this discourse went further than the general mid seventeenth-century rhetoric of 'fundamental laws' and 'birth-rights', based on notions of the 'ancient constitution', built on the bedrock of Magna Carta and reasserted in the 1628 Petition of Right from parliament to Charles I. Recourse to this type of discourse was common to radicals across the parliamentary, commonwealth and republican spectrum, including many early Quakers. Penn, however, also appears to have taken on board, for example, the discourse of 'natural' laws and rights developed by the likes of Hobbes and Locke from the mid seventeenth century in England, again indicating a willingness in the young Penn to appropriate and combine a wide range of notions and discourses to support his campaign, as a Quaker, for an equal and just system of religious and civil rights for all inhabitants of a given nation. Moreover, Penn's coherent and systematic use of the particular collocation 'Civil Rights' across a series of politically engaged texts from this period seems to be fairly unique, among both Quakers and Republicans of his era.

Tracing Use of the Expression 'Civil Rights' in Quaker and other Politically Engaged Literature in the Civil War, Interregnum and Restoration Eras

The first indication that Penn was using the phrase 'Civil Rights' in an innovative way is delivered by a search on the expression 'Civil Rights' or 'Civil Right' in the Digital Quaker Collection database, developed by the Earlham School of Religion. This database can be used to search for particular terms in the whole collection, or in a particular set of documents.¹² It turns up very few examples of usage of this term among Quakers, other than in Penn's texts. We do find a single use of the term 'Civil Rights' in a Quaker document from 1660: *Declaration*

12 Here I must underline my debt to Stephen Angell, who kindly demonstrated to me how this database could be used for this type of search on the use of particular terms in the collected Quaker literature in the database. There are currently more than 500 individual seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Quaker texts in the base.

and information from us the people of God called Quakers, penned by Margaret Fell on behalf of the Quaker community, subscribed to by George Fox, Richard Hubberthorne, Samuel Fisher and William Caton, among others, and addressed to the new king, Charles II, and his government:

We do not desire *any liberty* that may justly offend any ones Conscience, but *the Liberty* we do desire is, that we may keep *our Consciences clear and void of offence* towards God and towards men, and that we may enjoy *our civil Rights and Liberties of Subjects*, as *freeborn English men*.

As the Digital Quaker Collection is not exhaustive, and tends to concentrate on the production of more well-known early Quakers, such as Robert Barclay, Margaret Fell, George Fox, Isaac Pennington and William Penn himself, I also carried out individual searches for the expression 'civil right' or 'civil rights' in some of the other more politically engaged texts from early Quakers, such as those penned by George Bishop and Edward Byllinge.

Interestingly, it is only in George Bishop's *Mene Tekel* (1659) that we see anything like Penn's systemised use of the expression. This is significant, as Penn's political campaign discourse has other points in common with that of George Bishop, notably his notion of 'civil interest' and how the peace and prosperity brought to a community through a government policy of toleration of religious plurality is beneficial to both governors and governed. This was also a core argument of the Huguenots in arguing for their religious and civil rights, providing further evidence for my theory that what Penn encountered and admired among the Huguenots of Saumur and their historic campaign for equal rights with their fellow French subjects he found mirrored by the campaign approach and arguments of certain early politically engaged Quakers, and possibly particularly in those of George Bishop, an early Quaker protector and father figure to Penn.¹³ The similarity between Bishop's deployment of the collocation 'civil Right' in his 1659 text, and the discourse of 'Civil Rights' developed by Penn across his texts of the 1670s and 1680s certainly suggests this as a distinct possibility. George Bishop, as Penn was to do, clearly associates the term with 'freedom of conscience'. However, he does not limit it to this right alone, but describes 'freedom of conscience' as one 'civil Right' among many in a 'Free State', including 'free speech' and a 'free mind' in general:

And so the *right of freedom of Conscience*, is a *civil Right*, and a *civil Right* it is to have the *freedome of Conscience*; And where this *Liberty* is abridged by a *State*, that *State*

13 George Bishop welcomed the newly convinced William Penn in Bristol on his return from Ireland in autumn 1667, recalled by an anxious and irate father unhappy with his son's new religious identity. He wrote a letter to Sir William Penn, a former acquaintance under the Commonwealth government, in an attempt to intervene on the son's behalf and convince the father to gladly accept his son's chosen religious path, from which he could also perhaps learn something himself. See Dunn and Dunn, *Papers*, Vol. I, pp. 54–55 for a copy of this letter.

is not *free*, For (according to the received *Axiome*) a *free mind*, and a *free speech*, and a *Free State*, go together, and were the *two former* are wanting, the *later* is not, nor doth it call such a people *happy*.¹⁴

This far-ranging approach to the notion of ‘Civil Rights’ is similar to that adopted by Penn, and seems to anticipate our modern concept of a whole range of civil rights to be guaranteed to all citizens by a modern democratic or ‘free’ state.¹⁵ Bishop uses the collocation ‘civil Right’ only twice in his text, as cited above. However, he also builds a sustained discourse on ‘the civil and religious liberties of the People of these Nations’ due to all subjects equally as a ‘Birth-right’. Penn’s later discourse used a similar rhetoric. My research into this question would thus seem to indicate that the notion of ‘civil Rights and Liberties [...] as freeborn English men’ was integrated into the seventeenth-century Quaker view of their place within English society well before Penn joined the Religious Society of Friends, and that he adopted and built on this tradition. However, the collocation was not systematically evoked in earlier Quaker texts written in the defence of their rights. Furthermore, aside from perhaps in the specific case of George Bishop, who had a pre-Quaker history of working for the early Commonwealth government, the expression, as used by, for example, Margaret Fell in the name of the early Quakers and quoted above, seems to refer to a general notion of age-old ‘civil rights’ due to all ‘freeborn English men’, following on from the Leveller, army and more radical parliamentary arguments of the Civil War years.¹⁶

Moving away from Quaker sources to other Commonwealth and republican sources of the Interregnum years, to give a wider perspective and context for Penn’s discourse, I have found one use of the collocation ‘civil rights’ in Milton’s *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660):

The other part of our freedom consists in the civil rights and advancements of every person according to his merit: the enjoyment of those never more certain, and the access to these never more open, than in a free commonwealth.¹⁷

14 Bishop, G., *Mene Tekel*, London: Brewster, Thomas, 1659, pp. 30–31, viewable online on the Early English Books Online (EEBO) website, <https://proquest.libguides.com/eebopqp/home>.

15 George Bishop’s use of the term ‘free state’ can be taken to refer to a republican state of the kind set up during the early Commonwealth years (1649–53), under which Bishop participated in government in his pre-Quaker, New Model Army period. See Feola, M. S., *George Bishop: seventeenth-century soldier turned Quaker*, York: William Sessions, 1996.

16 The Leveller John Lilburne, a.k.a. ‘Freeborn John’, was, of course, the best-known proponent of this discourse of the historic rights and liberties due to all ‘freeborn English men’. The Leveller *Agreements of the People*, however, refer to the ‘common’, ‘natural’ or ‘birth’ rights and liberties of the people of England, and do not make use of the collocation ‘Civil Rights’ as such.

17 Milton, J., *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, London: printed for the author, 1660, p. 93. See the online version available on the EEBO website. Milton had, of course, been the official defender of the Commonwealth and Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell. His notion of the desired regime or ‘state’ can thus be taken to refer

Milton thus uses the term here to contrast civil rights with liberty of conscience, the other great part of Englishmen's freedom within the 'free commonwealth' that he desired to see properly established, and which he sensed was in great danger in the early months of 1660. Penn, however, used the term consistently to encompass both of these, and more. Sir Henry Vane the Younger, meanwhile, employs the expression 'civil right' in the singular in his *A Healing Question* (1656):

This, in substance, is the right and freedom contained in the nature and goodness of the cause, wherein the Honest party have been engaged. For in this, all the particulars of our civil right and freedom are comprehended, conserved in and derived from their proper root ...¹⁸

Vane was, of course, writing, on the occasion of Cromwell's increasing move towards a fully fledged 'monarchical' Protectorate to offer his solution to 'heal' the religious and political differences that were continuing to divide the nation, despite the 'Honest' party—that is, the Independent parliamentary party—having prevailed, with God's help, in the civil wars. Vane is, in essence, arguing, like Milton, for the proper implementation of the 'good old cause', jointly fought for by the whole 'Honest party' and comprised primarily in the establishment of a duly elected and representative Commonwealth government, concerned with the general safety and wellbeing of all those it represents, thereby guaranteeing their natural and age-old 'civil right'. He places as a corollary to this 'civil right' the establishment of true liberty of conscience: 'true freedom in matters of conscience' (page 3). Like Milton, then, Vane was using the expression 'civil right', contrasted with religious freedom, to describe the set of customary legal and political rights due to all Englishmen according to what was seen as the 'ancient constitution'. Penn would thus seem to have operated a transformation of the expression, compared with the general usage of his times.

Indeed, Penn appears to have adopted the expression 'Civil Rights' as a synthetic and symbolic linguistic rendering of an ambitious ongoing Quaker campaign to bring extensive reform to the English legal and constitutional system, so that religious and civil liberties would be guaranteed by the established civil government to all subjects or citizens on an equal basis. As such, he appears to have been the only seventeenth-century Quaker to have developed a full discourse of 'Civil Rights' across multiple tracts and with a concerted political agenda. Moreover, it appears that even other radical or republican writers of his

to a republican Commonwealth regime with a single-chamber, elected and representative parliament, although a semi-permanent executive Council of State, composed of worthy defenders of the 'good old cause', could be necessary to ensure the stability and survival of the regime.

18 Vane, H., *A Healing Question*, London: printed for T. Brewster at the Three Bibles at the West end of Pauls, 1656, p. 4. An online version of the original is also available on the EEBO website. Vane was also defending a return to a republican Commonwealth as envisioned by the civilian and army radicals at the end of the civil wars.

era did not do this in such a systematic and intentioned fashion.¹⁹ Penn's notion of 'Civil Rights', as developed across his early texts, thus comes to stand neatly for the whole spectrum of religious and civil liberties and rights fought for by Quakers and other seventeenth-century political radicals and religious nonconformists across the century, and across its various regimes. In the process, the typical seventeenth-century notions of 'fundamental laws', or 'natural laws', and 'birth-rights', based on age-old customary rights, metamorphose into something seemingly much more modern and akin to the notion of general human or civil rights to be adhered to, and respected by, all civil governments worthy of the name.

It is true that Penn adopts the traditional ancient-constitutionalist arguments of so many of his contemporaries as a starting point for his defence of the 'Civil Rights' due to all. However, as we shall see, he operates an important transformation so that the expression 'Civil Rights', as deployed by Penn, comes to transcend ancient law and custom to bring a new universalist aspect to his defence. In so doing, Penn's unique vision of 'Civil Rights' as pertaining to any godly civil society at once offers a logical culmination to the seventeenth-century Quaker campaign for a better English society and beckons towards a more modern and universalist concept of general inalienable civil rights, of the type associated, for example, with the *American Declaration of Independence* of 1776 or the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens* adopted by the French National Assembly in 1789 at the start of the French Revolution. Interestingly, it is perhaps Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, written in defence of the causes of the French Revolution in 1791, over a hundred years after Penn's publications, which gives the formulation of the concept of civil rights closest to that which Penn was developing. A fairly long quote is necessary to do justice to the clear demonstration that Paine makes on the difference between 'natural rights' and 'civil rights', and which is one that it seems to me that Penn shared: namely that 'civil rights' grow out of the sum of 'the natural rights' of man, but pertain specifically to a civil society formed from a compact based on the mutual interest and protection of all the individuals that make it up, who can thus expect the civil government under which they place themselves to guarantee the respect of these civil rights equally and universally for all its members:

19 Aside from the texts by John Milton and Sir Henry Vane mentioned, I have so far searched several key political and constitutional texts of the Civil War, Interregnum and Restoration era, including the three *Agreements of the People* (1647, 1648, 1649) and the 'Officer's Agreement' presented to parliament on 20 January 1649, John Lilburne's *The Legall Fundamentall Liberties of the People of England* (1649), Isaac Penington's pre-Quaker *The Fundamental Right, Safety and Liberty of the People* (1651), James Harrington's *Oceana* (1656), Henry Neville's *Plato Redivivus* (1681), John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) and Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698), and have found no other occurrence of this particular collocation, or anything akin to Penn's use of it. There is, however, obvious room to extend this research.

Hitherto we have spoken only [...] of the natural rights of man. We have now to consider the civil rights of man, and to shew how the one originates from the other. Man did not enter into society to become *worse* than he was before, nor to have fewer rights than he had before, but to have those rights better secured. His natural rights are the foundation of all his civil rights. [...]

[...] Natural rights are those which appertain to man in right of his existence. Of this kind are all the intellectual rights, or rights of the mind, and also all those rights of acting as an individual for his own comfort and happiness, which are not injurious to the natural rights of others.—Civil rights are those which appertain to man in right of his being a member of society. Every civil right has for its foundation, some natural right pre-existing in the individual, but to the enjoyment of which his individual power is not, in all cases, sufficiently competent. Of this kind are all those which relate to security and protection.²⁰

Penn's concept of 'Civil Rights' also relied on the notion of the duty of established civil governments to guarantee and protect these equally for each individual member of any civil society worthy of its name, thereby ensuring the 'security and protection' of all its members. By contrast, the rights at the centre of John Locke's famous 1690 philosophical tract on civil government, *Two Treatises of Government*, written at approximately the same time as Penn's published texts on the question, are much more concerned with the theoretical question of establishing the foundations and rights of a civil government in relation to the individual citizen and the rights and duties of the citizen with respect to the government under which he chooses to live, in the form of a social contract, than with defining a notion of universal civil rights *per se* and the duty of a civil government to uphold these.²¹ Indeed, I would suggest that the general preference in seventeenth-century England for the notions of the 'civil liberties' and 'natural rights' pertaining to all 'freeborn Englishmen', while calling on the civil government to respect, uphold and not infringe these ancient national individual rights and liberties, did not extend in quite the same way as in Penn's, and later Paine's, meaning to either the notion of the universality of these rights in any civil or civilised society or the notion that a civil government had an absolute duty to positively guarantee these 'civil rights' equally to all individuals by law and action, and not just to negatively guard against a tyrannical impingement upon the rights of individuals through an agreed settlement or constitution.²²

20 Paine, T., *The Rights of Man: being an answer to Mr. Burke's attack on the French revolution*, London: J. S. Jordan, 2nd edn, 1791, pp. 51–52, viewable online on the Online Library of Liberty site, <https://oll4.libertyfund.org/title/paine-the-rights-of-man-part-i-1791-ed> (accessed 07/12/2021).

21 See, for example, Laslett, P. (ed.), *John Locke: two treatises of government*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988 [1960].

22 See, for example, Quentin Skinner on the negative concept of liberty, which essentially involves citizens or subjects living free from outside constraints in so far as their liberties harm no other: *Liberty before Liberalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. The Levellers, for example, couched their concept of a new constitutional settlement for

Tracking the Development of a Discourse of 'Civil Rights' in Penn's Early Politically Engaged Publications

Turning now to a closer consideration of Penn's published texts concerning questions of civil government, I will attempt to provide clear evidence to support the above claim that Penn was, indeed, bringing an extra significant layer of meaning to his use of the expression 'Civil Rights' when compared with the more general seventeenth-century understanding of the notion. As highlighted above, William Penn wrote a series of politically engaged tracts during the 1670s and 1680s as part of the Quaker campaign for equal religious, legal and political rights with their conformist counterparts in England. We can take all of these tracts to have been written with the collective approval of the group, as they were all published by one of the preferred Quaker publishers of the era, Andrew Sowle, and would seem to have been endorsed by the Second Day's Morning Meeting, set up in 1673 and responsible for approval of all Quaker publications. Indeed, William Penn was a regular and active attender of the new central meetings of the Society of Friends, including the Second Day's Morning Meeting, in the 1670s and early 1680s. If some of the early politically engaged tracts produced by Penn were published under the pseudonym Philanglus rather than Penn's own name, this can be taken more as a sign of the danger to an individual, and indeed to the group by association, of voicing such sentiments in the context of the times—that is, within the heat of the 'Exclusion Crisis' context²³—than as due to a desire on the part of Quakers to distance themselves from the content and aim of Penn's texts and actions at this stage. Indeed, the earlier texts were written overtly under Penn's own name, and expressed very much the same arguments, and in very similar terms, to the later ones, penned in more dangerous times under his adopted pseudonym.

England at the end of the civil wars in terms of 'reserves' on the powers of civil government to intervene in the private lives and beliefs of the free people of England. William Penn, however, believed in a degree of positive intervention from government in a civil society, in order to promote morality or religious tolerance, for example, or, indeed, to guarantee the respect of civil rights for all. His aforementioned politically engaged publications and the set of laws attached to his proposed 1682 *Frame of Government* for Pennsylvania all attest to this vision of the role of a civil government with respect to upholding the religious, legal and civil rights and liberties of all those living under it.

23 The 'Exclusion Crisis' (1679–81) refers to the period where the new 'Country' or 'Whig' opposition to the 'Court' party in parliament introduced successive, if ultimately unsuccessful, bills in an attempt to have Charles II's brother, James Stuart, excluded from the royal succession on the grounds of his Catholic leanings. The intent was to guarantee a Protestant succession in England, free of the tyranny of 'popish' influence and 'arbitrary' government. Associating with this 'party', and its pro-parliamentarian and anti-royalist stance, could evidently be construed as treason, and so was very dangerous for a nonconformist religious society already regarded with considerable suspicion as having 'seditious' designs by those in authority.

The first of Penn's texts in which we see the use of the collocation 'Civil Rights' is *England's Present Interest Considered* (1675). This tract set out to engage the English government and public in a sincere reflection over how to reach a new civil and religious settlement for the nation, given the ongoing context of religious and civil strife and persecution, which could only harm the nation and its prosperity. The current regime had very obviously not yet managed to find concrete, workable solutions to the persistent religious and political troubles that had divided England since the civil wars. Penn intended to rectify this with his vision for a new start for England. Penn first uses the expression 'Civil Rights' in the context of a plea for the separation of religious affairs from civil affairs, as a first step to righting the situation. This was, of course, the typical seventeenth-century Quaker line. He also links the notion to the seventeenth-century concept of 'natural rights' and 'natural laws', following seventeenth-century developments in philosophical thought and enquiry by the likes of Thomas Hobbes or, later, John Locke:

But certainly nothing is more unreasonable, than to sacrifice the Liberty and Property of any Man (being his Natural and Civil Rights) for *Religion*, where he is not found breaking any Law relating to Natural and Civil Things.²⁴

So far, then, he seems to be using the term 'Civil Rights' in a manner fairly typical to both Quakers and republicans of his era, as discussed above. However, Penn goes on to make the case for the observance of 'Civil Rights' as the basis for any peaceable form of government, irrespective of particular religious persuasions pertaining to a nation. This time, the expression 'Civil Rights' stands alone as central to the business of peaceful civil government the world over:

Certainly, the *Civil Affairs* of all Governments in the World, may be peaceably transacted under the different *Liveries*, or *Trims of Religion*, where Civil Rights are inviolably observ'd.²⁵

Penn concludes with the argument that English dissenters have a right to equal 'Civil Rights' with all other Englishmen, following on from an earlier argument that dissenters are as Christian, as loyal and as useful to their kingdom as any other Englishman:

To be sure, they are *Englishmen*, and have an Equal Claim to the Civil Rights of their Native Country, with any that live in it.²⁶

Already, then, Penn is returning repeatedly and deliberately to the notion of 'Civil Rights' within a single text, building it into a coherent discourse and weaving it into his vision of an equal and equitable system of government as a central corner

24 All quotes from Penn's politically engaged tracts are taken from Murphy, A. R. (ed.), *The Political Writings of William Penn*, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002. This particular quote appears on p. 48.

25 Murphy, *Political Writings*, p. 49.

26 Murphy, *Political Writings*, p. 69.

stone. The iterative and systematic way he is using the expression thus transforms it into more than the sum of its individual words, and seems to bring wider implications that those commonly associated with it in his era.

Penn's first arguments on equal and general 'Civil Rights' in this text come, of course, in the context of a political manifesto, in which Penn sets out his vision of good government. This rested, and would continue to rest, in Penn's political vision on three fundamental laws or rights due to all Englishmen, according to the ancient constitution of the nation. These begin with: 'I. An Ownership, and Undisturbed Possession'. Penn clarifies this concept in the following manner: 'This relates both to Title and Security of *Estate* and Liberty of *Person*, from the Violence of Arbitrary Power.'²⁷ Thus, 'ownership' or 'propriety' is to be understood in terms not just of material estate and possessions but also in terms of the liberty of the individual person. What is more, 'Liberty of Person' included, of course, total liberty of conscience, as being outside the realm of civil authority. Penn then gives his second fundamental right: 'II. A Voting of every Law that is made, whereby that Ownership or Propriety may be maintained'. In other words, the right to popular consent to government, and thus to the laws under which one agrees to live, is to be guaranteed. These laws, of course, are voted in by those eligible to vote in order to protect individual 'Civil Rights', as defined by Penn above. Finally, Penn's third and final fundamental right placed the monitoring of equal justice and the guarantee of the respect of 'Civil Rights' for all, as established by law and government, in the hands of the ordinary people of England. This was to operate through the mechanism of trial by a jury of impartial peers to oversee and curb any partiality in magistrates: 'III. An Influence upon, and a Real Share in that Judicatory Power that must apply every such Law, which is the Ancient Necessary and Laudable Use of Juries'.²⁸

Penn hence makes the case here, in this 1675 document, that all Englishmen have an equal claim to the protection of their 'Civil Rights', as guaranteed by the civil government under which they have voluntarily consented to live and to which they extend their loyalty. However, in Penn's scheme, this claim is also valid the world over: any civil government worthy of its name receives its authority through popular consent to its rule and in return has a duty to guarantee the equal protection of the 'Civil Rights' of all its law-abiding citizens, while refraining from the use of arbitrary authority and unlawful incursion into the private domain of individual faith. Penn is thus setting up a

²⁷ Murphy, *Political Writings*, p. 27.

²⁸ Murphy, *Political Writings*, pp. 26–27 for above quotes. Of course, Penn's own recent brush with what he saw as the 'arbitrary' authority of the English magistrates and judicial system is recounted in his *The People's Ancient and Just Liberties Asserted* (1670). This court case and the jury's heroic stand against the sitting magistrates and their insistence on a guilty verdict for Penn and Mead's preaching illegally in front of the closed Quaker meeting house in Grace Church Street, London, led to what came to be known as 'Bushel's Case', after the head jury man, and the establishment of the independence of juries.

sophisticated political discourse around the notion of 'Civil Rights' as he saw it. Moreover, his vision is starting to resemble a very modern conception of the notion of 'Civil Rights' and the civil duties of both the governed and governors, as chiefly developed from the times of the 'Enlightenment' and within the context of the American and French Revolutions, but building on earlier Renaissance and seventeenth-century debates across Europe, as we have seen. Collin's online English dictionary gives the following definition of the contemporary British meaning of 'civil rights': 'The personal rights of the individual citizen, in most countries upheld by law ...'. The Cambridge online dictionary states that: 'Civil rights include freedom, equality in law and in employment, and the right to vote.' Meanwhile, the OED simply and succinctly gives 'the rights of citizens to political and social freedom and equality'. Penn's vision of 'Civil Rights', as first set out in *England's Present Interest Considered*, seems to find a similar foundation in equality before the law, voting rights and legal and constitutional guarantees of personal rights and liberties, be these political, social or, of course, religious, and which applies in any established civil society, to these modern-day dictionary definitions.

In *One Project for the Good of England* (1679) and *A Perswasive to Moderation* (1686), both written to defend religious toleration, rather than the more general political platform of *England's Present Interest Considered*, Penn turns his arguments in support of 'Civil Rights' for all to the service of the typically Huguenot concern of guaranteeing the loyalty of dissenting subjects to the king and his government. *One Project for the Good of England* contains a lengthy and eloquent development of this theme, warning of the dangers to a government of failing to protect the nation's dissenting subjects from persecution by others:

But as the *Good* of the People is properly the *Civil Interest* of the People, and *that*, the Reason and End of Government; so is the Maintenance of that *Civil Interest entire*, the Preservation of Government. For where People are sure of their *Own*, and are protected from Violence or Injury, they cheerfully yield their Obedience, and pay their Contribution to the Support of that Government. But on the contrary, where Men are insecure of their Civil Rights, nay, where they are daily violated, and themselves in Danger of Ruin, and that for no Sin committed against the Nature of Civil Interest, (to preserve which, Government was instituted) we ought to suppose their Affections will flag, that they will grow dead-hearted, and that what they pay or do, may go against the Grain ...²⁹

Penn would, hence, appear to be issuing here, in a manner typical of early Huguenot politically engaged texts, and particularly *monarchomaque* tracts such as *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, a warning to governors who do not protect the religious and civil rights of all their subjects or citizens equally. Regular violation of the civil rights of law-abiding citizens, without the intervention and due protection of governors, might legitimately lead to disobedience and disloyalty, it is hinted.

29 Murphy, *Political Writings*, p. 121.

This is a classic statement of the right to resist unlawful and tyrannical governors, as found in the aforementioned Huguenot *monarchomaque* literature, for example.³⁰ The flip side to Penn's argument, also like that of early Huguenots writing to the king of France to beg for his equal protection as loyal Christian subjects, was, of course, the assertion that Quakers were intrinsically extremely loyal, law-abiding and government-respecting subjects. Disobedience would thus be only an extreme response in the face of a tyrannical disregard for the wellbeing of all loyal Christian subjects and citizens.

Furthermore, Penn, like other Quakers, never suggested violent resistance to the civil authorities,³¹ hinting more along the lines of justified pacific acts of disobedience to arbitrary and abusive uses and enforcement of the laws of England by the local and state authorities, which, of course, Quakers had long been practising in their questioning of what were seen as unwarranted arrests, imprisonments, trials or sequestration of goods.³² Penn's *A Perswasive to Moderation* thus insists rather on the benefits to the monarch and his government of protecting the civil rights of all equally, another device used regularly by the Huguenots in their tracts. In this tract, Penn specifically applies the Huguenot argument to the allegiance of all parts of a nation's people to their king:

Nor is this all the Benefit that attends the Crown by the Preservation of Civil Rights; for the Power of the Monarchy is kept more Entire by it. The King has the Benefit of his whole People, and the Reason of their Safety is owing to their Civil, and not Ecclesiastical Obedience: Their Loyalty to Caesar, and not Conformity to the Church.³³

In other words, both the governed and their governors will reap the mutual benefits if a civil government indeed guarantees equal 'Civil Rights' to all citizens, including respecting the right to individual liberty of conscience as being outside its power and remit.

30 William Prynne's *The Sovereigne Power of Parliament and Kingdomes* (1643), written to defend parliamentary and popular sovereignty against the 'tyranny' of Charles I at the start of the English civil wars, adopted more or less wholesale the arguments for the grounds giving the right to resist regal authority expressed in the *monarchomaque* text *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, giving us one illustration of the complex history of the transmission and exchange of religious and political ideas across Europe in the early modern era.

31 Indeed, the Quakers were very keen to stress their intrinsic loyalty to their king and his government, as well as the absence of any seditious and treasonous intents, as witnessed by the famous Quaker 'Peace testimony', *A Declaration to King Charles II*, delivered to King Charles II in January 1661 by George Fox himself. The early Huguenots were also at pains to stress the non-seditious nature of their beliefs and practices, as well as their absolute loyalty to their king, in their early addresses and petitions to the monarch, from 1561.

32 See, for example, George Fox and George Bishop, *The West answering to the North*, London, 1657.

33 Murphy, *Political Writings*, pp. 307–08.

Significantly, it is in this tract that Penn makes a lengthy reference to Huguenot history and their worthy campaign for religious freedom and civil rights. Penn writes extensively in this tract, across several pages, on the Huguenot campaigns during the French 'Civil Wars' (Wars of Religion), and speaks in extremely fond and admiring terms of the 'Singular Merit' of the Huguenots and the role of Henry IV in securing their 'Liberties' for them.³⁴ The tract was, of course, written at the time of Louis XIV's Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), an act that removed, in one fell swoop, all the hard-won religious liberties and civil rights that the Huguenots had spent so long negotiating with successive monarchs of France. In referencing them extensively at this time, Penn was thus perhaps offering his sympathy and support in trying times, as a fellow sufferer of laws against nonconformity to the state religion. He was also, almost certainly, tapping into fresh public sympathy for an example of unwarranted state persecution against fellow Protestants. However, he also seems to be referencing his time among the Huguenots more clearly than he allowed himself, as a Quaker, to do in any other tract, and using his knowledge of their history and modes of political engagement to feed his own demonstration. Although it is only in this tract that Penn specifically details the history of the Huguenot campaign for religious liberties and civil rights, he does make several admiring references to Amyraut and Duplessis-Mornay in other early texts.³⁵ This, when taken together with the aforementioned similarity in arguments and discourse, suggests that his time spent among the Huguenots at the Protestant Academy of Saumur remained significant to Penn, providing an inspiring model to be appropriated and applied to his own cause: that of promoting religious tolerance and equal civil rights for all English nonconformist Protestants.

It is in *England's Great Interest in the Choice of this New Parliament, Dedicated to All Her Free-Holders and Electors* (1679), another highly politicised tract, that the language and rhetoric of general English 'Civil Rights' is developed to its full power, in order to persuade electors to choose parliament-men who will guarantee equal 'Civil Rights' for all Englishmen.³⁶ Penn starts by reminding English electors of their duty in this respect:

be sure to find out, and cast your Favour, upon Men of Large Principles, such as will not Sacrifice their Neighbour's Property to the Forwardness of their own Party in Religion: Pick out such Men, as will Inviolably Maintain Civil Rights, for all that will Live Soberly and Civilly under the Government.³⁷

34 Murphy, *Political Writings*, pp. 304–07.

35 See Angell, 'William Penn's Debts' on these references.

36 It was during these elections that Penn actively supported Algernon Sidney's efforts to be elected to parliament as just such a worthy parliament man, thus implementing the advice of the Second Day's Morning Meeting, in 1675, for those Quakers feeling able to do so to support in parliamentary actions 'such moderate and indifferent men, as they are free to give their voice for', Minutes of 31 May 1675, quoted in Braithwaite, W. C., *The Second Period of Quakerism*, London: Macmillan, 1923, p. 90.

37 Murphy, *Political Writings*, p. 390.

The tract concludes with this impassioned appeal to the English electorate to make the right choices for their parliamentary representatives in selecting men who act not narrowly from self-interest but in the interests of all Englishmen, present and future, by acting to protect their heritage of English 'Civil Rights':

And will you *compel* or *persecute* your selves, or chuse such as do so? ... But God defend you from so doing, and direct you to do, as you would be done by; that chusing such as love *England*, her *People*, and their *Civil Rights*, Foundations may be laid for that Security and Tranquillity, which the Children unborn may have Cause to rise up and bless your *Names* and *Memories* for.³⁸

Penn thus builds, across this series of politically engaged tracts from the 1670s and 1680s, a compelling case for the respect of 'Civil Rights' for all in seventeenth-century England, and even beyond. He returns time and again to this notion, making it a cornerstone of his arguments for religious freedom and equal civil rights for all. His use of the expression seems to be much more systematic and systemised than that of either fellow Quakers or of other radical and republican writers of his era. Moreover, his notion of equal 'Civil Rights' for all extended not just to legal rights but was expanded to include political and religious rights, too. All-importantly, Penn's notion of 'Civil Rights' was a two-way affair, committing a duly established civil government to the equal protection of the 'Civil Rights' of all if it was to expect the loyalty and law-abiding behaviour of those it purported to represent. Finally, Penn also saw fit to make his vision of 'Civil Rights' applicable to any civil government worthy of its name, across both geographical and temporal boundaries. I would argue, then, that Penn took this pre-existing expression as emblematic of his far-reaching religious and political vision for a godly society, founded on consent, representative and accountable government and an equality of legal, political and religious liberties and rights, and then purposefully moulded and developed it to form a coherent and persuasive discourse, with his vision of universal 'Civil Rights' at its core.

Conclusion

The above was written with the intent of producing compelling evidence that William Penn did, indeed, use a specific and systematic discourse of 'Civil Rights' in his early politically engaged tracts, in a way that other Quakers, and indeed other writers of his era, did not. I also hope to have shown that Penn's notion of the values and system of government attached to his use of the collocation was distinct from that of other users, and that he seems to have expanded and added to the implications and guarantees attached to the expression. On the one hand, Penn seems to have cannily capitalised on a shared perception of English exceptionalism, in terms of ancient civil and religious rights and liberties. On the

38 Murphy, *Political Writings*, p. 391.

other hand, however, his vision of a just and godly civil society, in typical Quaker fashion, given the geographic extent of early Quaker missionary expeditions,³⁹ extended far beyond English shores. His own personal experiences and encounters with minority Protestant groups across Europe cemented this vision. From the two perspectives—both the more Anglo-centric and the wider universalist ones—stemmed Penn's unique and particular vision of a godly civil society and the 'Civil Rights' pertaining to that, wherever in the world it might be established.

To conclude, it is perhaps useful to also ask ourselves what the wider implications of this claim are: why does it all matter? First, I think it is important to remind ourselves of the historical roots of our modern notion of the term 'Civil Rights'. It is easy to see this as an inherently modern concept, tied up with our claims to equity and equality from our so-called modern democratic governments. So perhaps it is useful to remind ourselves that, like so many of our supposedly modern political and legal concepts, this term has its roots in much older discussions and debates on the relationship between the state, the individual and specific groups of individuals, and the obligations and duties of each. Secondly, this approach has potential implications for the model of civil state Penn wished to carry across and confer on his proprietary colony in North America—Pennsylvania—and for the evolution of that model over time, leading up to and beyond the American Revolution. Finally, and not least, it offers us fresh insights into the work and goals of William Penn in the seventeenth century, as a member of the Religious Society of Friends but also as a free citizen of England, committed to the goals not just of religious toleration but also of citizens' rights more generally.

In other words, tracing the development of a discourse of 'Civil Rights' across Penn's more politically engaged tracts from the 1670s and 1680s gives us not only fresh insight into Penn as an Englishman, Quaker and political actor but also new historical perspectives on the development of the very notions of 'Civil Rights' and 'citizenship' in British and American society, as these evolved out of the fierce debates stemming from the religious and political turmoil of the seventeenth and then the eighteenth centuries.

39 Early Quaker ministers and proselytes, men and women, famously travelled extensively across northern and southern Europe, and as far afield as Constantinople in the Ottoman Empire, as well as to the American colonies in the Caribbean and on the mainland in the 1650s in their quest to bring the 'true' religion to as many people as possible. On the impressive extent of Quaker proselytising in the mid seventeenth century see, for example, Braithwaite, W. C., *Beginnings of Quakerism*, London: 1912, Chapter XVI, 'Work Beyond Seas'; Hamm, T. D., *The Quakers in America*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, especially Chapter 6, 'Quakers and the World'.

Note on the Research Method Used

Like Stephen W. Angell in his aforementioned article, 'Leaving Father or Mother for Christ's sake: William Penn's Veiled Autobiography Through Scripture References', published in *Quaker Studies* 25/2 (December 2020), pp. 169–88, I wish to comment on the research method used in producing the material for this article. Indeed, I was very much inspired by the method used by Stephen Angell for this article, and his earlier one, 'William Penn's Debts to John Owen and Moses Amyraut on Questions of Truth, Grace, and Religious Toleration' (*Quaker Studies* 16/2 (March 2012), pp. 157–73), and presented to me at a conference in 2018. Stephen Angell demonstrated to me, on that occasion, the possibilities opened up for word or concept searches within the whole corpus of Quaker documents collected together in the Digital Quaker Collection database developed by the Earlham School of Religion. This database houses over five hundred Quaker documents from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and thus offers an enormous potential for this kind of search on specific terms or expressions within the corpus. As Stephen Angell points out in an endnote to his 2020 article, new technologies thus encourage new approaches to research, in that carrying out a similar search on an extensive corpus of documents using the traditional method of reading carefully through them all to find all occurrences of a particular term or expression would take considerably longer. Having begun my search on the Digital Quaker Collection corpus, and having thus established an interesting and intriguing result concerning Penn's use of the term 'Civil Rights', I was then able to extend the search to other documents, accessed, for example, via the EEBO site, and using the typical word search function in the edit menu.

It goes without saying that a research project must be established before the potential of search functions offered within digital databases and document collections can be exploited. I had already noted what appeared to me a very innovative and systemised use of the collocation 'Civil Rights' by Penn in his more politically engaged writings of the 1670s and 1680s, which I was closely examining for my doctoral research project. The Digital Quaker Collection Database, however, allowed me to pinpoint all occurrences of the expression across Penn's texts and to make an initial check for similar uses across the Quaker texts contained in the database. This set me off on an enriching and fascinating quest for a more in-depth study into Penn's use of this term within the seventeenth-century context in which he was writing. I wish, therefore, to underline the potential offered by the new digital technologies and resources for this type of wide comparative study on the use of a particular expression within a given time period and context. Many thanks to Stephen Angell for revealing this potential, for me to then pass on in my turn.

Author Details

Anna Lloyd Hellier works as an English teacher at Université Rennes 2 in Brittany, France. She has recently completed her doctoral thesis with Sorbonne Université, Paris, on William Penn and his developing political thought in his early years, c.1660 to 1683. Her works include a chapter in French on the seventeenth-century Quaker campaign for religious liberties and civil rights in Anne-Claire Faucquez and Linda Garbaye (dir.), *Citoyenneté et liberté dans l'Empire britannique et les jeunes États-Unis, XVII^e–XIX^e siècles*, 2021, and a chapter in English on Quaker political engagement between the English Revolution and the Glorious Revolution in another collective French university publication on the theme of 'Revolutions'. Mailing address: Département d'anglais, Université Rennes 2, Place Recteur Henri le Moal, 35000 Rennes, France. Email: anna.hellier@univ-rennes2.fr