

## WILLIAM PENN, THE OGLETHORPES AND AN ELECTION IN HASLEMERE: A NEW LETTER

A rediscovered letter by William Penn illuminates his political dealings in 1702, at the opening of Queen Anne's reign, when he was on the verge of semi-retirement after returning to England from Pennsylvania. (See Appendix) It demonstrates not only his continued involvement in English politics at this juncture, but also his willingness to involve both local Quakers in such affairs.<sup>1</sup> On April 30<sup>th</sup>, Penn wrote to two leading Friends in the Haslemere area, urging them to support Lewis Oglethorpe (1681-1704), the young heir of a former Member of Parliament for the borough, Sir Theophilus Oglethorpe (1650-1702), in the forthcoming general election for Queen Anne's first Parliament. The Haslemere seat would be fiercely contested, with a losing candidate casting sufficient doubt on Lewis Oglethorpe's victory to persuade the returning officer to make a double return. In the event the young Oglethorpe heir won this case too – which had questioned his age rather than the size of his majority – and by December was seated in his father's former seat in the House of Commons. However, while Lewis Oglethorpe could demonstrate his social position in August 1702, ahead of the election, being listed as one of the Deputy Lieutenants for the county when new lists were compiled, any further electoral support that the heir to the Oglethorpe interest could secure prior to a contentious election would be valuable.<sup>2</sup> This gesture by Penn on Oglethorpe's behalf was potentially useful in its own right and suggests that the respect that Penn had long received from leading politicians at Westminster as someone who could mobilize the 'dissenting' vote remained well-earned.

In broader terms, the letter demonstrates contacts between William Penn and Sir Thomas Oglethorpe, a high-Tory M.P. whose wife's Jacobite sympathies were notorious.<sup>3</sup> This is also useful. It helps to confirm an identification suggested by the editors of the *Papers of William Penn* when annotating a letter of Penn's written from Pennsylvania in July 1701, where Penn cited 'Sr,Th:O' as his source for the key role being played by William Blathwayt, the long-serving Secretary at War, Commissioner of the Board of Trade and a Whig Member of Parliament for Bath, in promoting a wartime Parliamentary measure proposed by William III's government to rein

in proprietary governments in the colonies to reunite them with the Crown.<sup>4</sup> The 'S<sup>r</sup> Th:O,' who supplied advice on who was behind a measure that threatened Penn's role as Proprietor in Pennsylvania would, indeed, seem to be Sir Theophilus. This is in keeping with Alison Olson's argument that in fending off this major legislative assault, Penn turned to the Tories for allies, including some individuals from the party's crypto-Jacobite wing.<sup>5</sup> This new letter shows Penn, recently returned from America, coming to visit Oglethorpe in his house in St James's Westminster, and his arrival becoming a proximate cause of Sir Thomas's death. We can also see why, two days before a meeting with the Council of Trade and Plantations where some of his louder critics were to attend and several of his actions as Proprietor in Pennsylvania were likely to face detailed critiques. Penn still took time from preparing his defence to write this note.<sup>6</sup>

Demonstrating Penn's dealings with the Oglethorpe family may also help to explain why Lewis Oglethorpe's younger brother and eventual political heir as M.P. for Haslemere, James Edward Oglethorpe, would be aware of William Penn's proposals for colonial projects – even if the future General and colonial founder was only seven when this electoral support was offered. In the 1730s, when Sir Theophilus's youngest son and now M.P. for Haslemere was helping to float the Georgia scheme, a tract of Penn's on colonisation was among the texts reprinted in the volley of pamphlets that General Oglethorpe and the thoroughly Anglican Georgia Trustees published recommending a new American settlement.<sup>7</sup> The choice may now appear less of a bibliographical surprise.

As for the letter's recipients, John Smyth and Caleb Woods were brothers-in-law and established Surrey Friends who were likely to have contacts in Haslemere.<sup>8</sup> They were both among the ten co-signatories of a Lease, Release and Counterpart Release of 19 and 20 August 1684, relating to the premises held for the Guildford Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. Thirty three years later Smyth, now described as 'mealman' rather than 'haberdasher', was listed again, this time as one of 'three' surviving grantees of the [...] premises'.<sup>9</sup> In 1695 a John Smith of Godalming, draper, was once again a co-signatory with Caleb Woods, senior, of Guildford, witnessing a set of title deeds. John Smyths are always legion, so firm identifications are difficult, but, given Caleb Woods's citing 'John Smith of Godalming, Corn merchant' in his will of 1713, this is probably also the John Smith or Smyth, mercer of Godalming, who features in a lease of the Quaker burial ground in Brinscombe, Godalming, in 1695.<sup>10</sup> These legal documents cite a number of trades

to describe a single individual, but if he started in the cloth trade in the 1680s before transferring to trading in grain, then the various descriptions do cluster together, sometimes viewing him as a wholesaler, sometimes as a retailer. He may also be the John Smith who the Surrey Quarterly Meeting appointed to wait on members of Parliament in 1721.<sup>11</sup> In the latter case prior involvement in local elections may have done no harm.

Caleb Woods was a more substantial figure from Guildford. Two generations of Caleb Woods were maltsters there: the elder died in 1713, the younger in 1716.<sup>12</sup> Woods senior, who we have already encountered co-signing property deeds in the 1680s and '90s, can also be found as a leading Friend in the Guildford area under Charles II, when the memorandum book kept as a justice of the peace by Sir William Moore, Bart. of Loseley Hall, the then lord of the manor of Haslemere, notes Caleb Woods hosting an illegal conventicle in his house. With the Moore influence in abeyance after Sir William's death in 1684, these would be useful people to contact prior to a local election.<sup>13</sup> The tone of Penn's letter suggests that this was not the first time that he had asked for their assistance in supporting an Oglethorpe candidate at a Haslemere election. As Sir Theophilus Oglethorpe did not stand for election in December 1710 and was unopposed in January 1701, Woods's and Smyth's earlier interventions would have been in 1698, when Sir Theophilus first ran for the Haslemere seat as a highly contentious candidate.<sup>14</sup>

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Fresh letters from William Penn remain unexpected discoveries, with few gleanings left after the search undertaken by the editors of the *Papers of William Penn*. This stray letter is now in Jamaica, in the West Indies Collection at the Library of the University of the West Indies, Mona. It has been bound into an extra-illustrated version of Thomas Clarkson's *History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, first published in 1808, to celebrate the end of British participation in the Slave Trade and reprinted in 1839 to mark 'full free' and the conclusion of the post-Emancipation 'Apprenticeship' transition for the ex-slaves. This lavish early Victorian compilation was donated to the newly-founded University College of the West Indies in 1954 by Ansell Hart, a leading Jamaican lawyer and book collector who had purchased West Indian material from dealers in London during the 1920s and '30s.<sup>15</sup>

The lithographed title page to the second volume describes the

compilation as 'illustrated with Portraits, Autographs, Views, maps &c. &c. by Arthur West in Two Vols, 1846.' It is an interesting example of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fad for creating 'Graingerised' or 'extra-illustrated' editions of prized volumes, where the compiler bound in further engravings and autographs: producing 'a customised version of a mass-disseminated book that represented the owner's engagement and intimacy with the contents of that volume.'<sup>16</sup> In this instance the additional material virtually doubles the size of the original book. Clarkson's retelling of the prominent part that English and American Friends played in the early stages of the campaign against slavery prompted the compiler to insert seventeenth and eighteenth-century documents alongside autographs and engravings. These include a 1684/5 letter by George Fox (printed from another text in the 1902 edition of his *Journal*, though with its lay-out and punctuation modernised there), which *may* be an autograph copy and is a contemporary transcript;<sup>17</sup> this letter by William Penn and a further long letter signed with the pseudonym 'Tobias Sealittle', that seems to have been written for publication as a contribution to the debates against purchasing slave-produced material, where Sealittle proposed extending the existing boycott of sugar to include any Friends who as retailers sold not just slave-grown Sugar or Rum, but also Tobacco and Snuff. The last text was assigned a date of 1790 by the volume's 1846 compiler. It probably dates from the first phase of the wider British anti-Slave Sugar campaign that began in 1791.<sup>18</sup> There are also further Quaker-related illustrations, including three different engravings of William Penn and an autograph of Anthony Benezet's.

Can any more inferences be extracted? Perhaps. One swallow hardly makes a summer, but this instance does demonstrate how the historical prominence of some early Quakers could result in their autographs and autograph letters appealing to unexpected collectors. A later generation who traced – and then extra-illustrated – histories of Abolition and Emancipation prompted collections which may yet include further early letters. Today the 'gentle art' of extra-illustrating books has lost favour with curators, so that libraries which own these volumes tend to downgrade them, postponing the heavy chore of the retroactive cataloguing of the host of autographs that busy 'Graingerisers' inserted into their compilations.<sup>19</sup> Occasional complete letters from individuals who late eighteenth and nineteenth-century collectors respected may yet drowse between these ornate covers too. The 2007 bicentennial of the end of the slave trade along with the individual stages of the subsequent reform programme up to 1838 and "full free", with the successive

exhibitions the anniversaries of these reforms are likely to prompt, should bring further extra-illustrated volumes addressing slavery and emancipation out from the dimmer corners of libraries' reserve collections. If so, it may be worth while looking through such compilations to see if any more unknown Fox, Penn or Benezet letters lie concealed there.

*James Robertson*

APPENDIX

De. Friends,	}	
Caleb Woods &	}	Lond - 30 th 2 <sup>nd</sup>
John Smyth	}	1702

Being surprised with the  
 Death of Sr. The: Oglethorp  
 at his door, when I went to –  
 visit him (knowing nothing  
 of his illness) I resolved, upon  
 so sorrowfull an occasion, & to  
 serve his family, for his  
 very friend by healp! of  
 me & all my friends, &  
 his honourable principles  
 at large; and perceiving by  
 his Lady she designes her son

to

(v) succeed his father, if the Bur-  
 ough of Haselmore [Haslemere, Surrey] will be as  
 kinde to him (and truly the  
 young gentleman seems to  
 deserve it) I do earnestly In-  
 terest my selfe in his favour  
 with you (my old, & always  
 true friends) that you would  
 lend him your best, Influence  
 & endeavours in this ~~pasage~~  
 affair, and after what I  
 have heard from him, I dare  
 assure you of your aid in  
 it, & our persuasion, on all  
 occasions. Besides, his father  
 missing of it as he did <last time> ~~last time~~  
 'tis almost a debt due to the

son.

2) Your very affec[tionate]  
 Warm Friend  
 Wm Penn

For my [       ]  
 Friends C[aleb]  
 Wood Joh[n Smyth]

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## NOTES

1. Caroline Robbins, 'William Penn, 1689-1702; Eclipse, Frustration, and Achievement' in *The World of William Penn* ed. by Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn, (Philadelphia, Penn: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), pp. 71-84; downplaying the retirement theme, Mary K. Geiter, *William Penn* (Harlow: Longman, 2000).
2. Eveline Cruickshanks and Perry Gauci, 'Oglethorpe Lewis (1681-1704)', in Eveline Cruickshanks, Stuart Handley and D.W. Hayton, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1690-1715*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), v. *Members O-Z*, pp. 9-10; Perry Gauci, 'Haselmere', *ibid.* II, *Constituencies*, pp. 581-584; as a deputy lieutenant, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the reign of Anne, preserved in the Public Record Office, I, 1702-1703*, ed. Robert Pentland Mahaffy, (London: H.M.S.O., 1916), p. 393, 25 August 1702.
3. Eveline Cruickshanks and Perry Gauci, 'Oglethorpe, Sir Theophilus (1650-1700)', *Members O-Z*, pp. 10-12; Phinzy Spalding, *Oglethorpe in America* (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 1984), pp. 2-3, and for the continuity of these Jacobite sympathies into the next generation, Keith Thomas, 'James Edward Oglethorpe, sometimes Gentleman Commoner of Corpus', in John C. Inscoe, ed. *James Edward Oglethorpe: New Perspectives on His Life and Legacy - A Tercentenary Commemoration* (Savanna, Ga: Georgia Historical Society, 1997), pp. 16-34.
4. To Charlwood Lowton, 2 July 1701, in *The Papers of William Penn*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, Penn: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), IV, 1701-1718, eds. Craig W. Horle, Alison Duncan Hirsch, Marianne S. Wokeck and Joy Wiltenburg, pp. 57-59; also Geiter, *Penn*, pp. 90-93, and *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies*, XVIII, 1701, ed. Cecil Headlam, (London: H.M.S.O., 1910), pp. xxxiv-xxxix, 179.
5. Alison Gilbert Olsen, 'William Penn, Parliament and Proprietary Government', *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser. 18 (1961), pp. 176-195.
6. For the dispute with Robert Quarry that was one of the items before the Board, *Penn Papers*, 4: 160-167, where they suggest 28 April as the date for Penn's reply. Also, Geiter, *Penn*, pp. 90-93; *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies* XIX, *Jan-Dec 1 1702*, (ed.), Cecil Headlam, (London: H.M.S.O., 1912), pp. 370-371.
7. Robbins, 'Eclipse, Frustration and Achievement', 74.
8. Kew, The National Archives, the Public Records Office, Canterbury Probate Court, PROB 11/533, ff. 199v-205, will of Caleb Woods, elder, Maltster of St. Mary, Guildford, f. 205, describes Smith as 'my brother in law'.

9. Typescript handlist of documents from the Godalming Preparative Meeting, prepared by the Surrey Records Office, (now the Surrey History Centre), unpaginated, consulted at Friends House Library, 'Miscellaneous Papers', Records relating to the premises of the Guildford Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 5021/1/11, 12, 13, and 17, 18, 19, 2 and 4 April 1717.
10. Guildford, Surrey History Centre, LM/354/7; Chichester, West Sussex Records Office, Lytton/377-379, 21, 22, 25 May, 1695.
11. Surrey History Centre, 6189/1/1/19.
12. The elder, above note 8; the younger, P.R.O. PROB 11/544, ff. 215v-216, 31 October 1716.
13. Surrey History Centre, LM 1046/1; Gauci, 'Haselmere', 581.
14. Cruickeshanks and Gauci. 'Oglethorpe, Theophilus', 11-12.
15. The hobby was promoted by the publication in 1769 of *A Biographical History of England, from Egbert the Great to the Revolution*, by the Rev. James Grainger (1723-76). University of the West Indies, Mona, West Indies Collection, 'List of Books Donated to the University College of the West Indies by Mr. Ansell Hart, 1954', (typescript), p. 5; writing up some of his other bibliographical finds, Ansell Hart, 'Bryan Edward's Copy of Long's History', *Jamaican Historical Review*, 1 (1945), P. 100, and Shirley Davis, 'A gift of the late Ansell Hart to the Library of the University College of the West Indies in 1954', *Jamaica Journal*, 8:2 (1974), pp. 26-32.
16. Lucy Peltz, 'The extra-illustration of London: the gendered species and practices of antiquarianism in the late eighteenth-century', in *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice, 1700-1850*, eds. Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 115-134 (p. 116), and, more generally, *idem*. 'Engraved Portrait Heads and the Rise of Extra-Illustration: The Eton Correspondence of the Revd. James Granger and Richard Bull, 1769-1774', *Walpole Society*, 66 (2004), pp. 1-161.
17. George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox: Being an Historical Account of His Life, Travels, Sufferings, and Christian Experiences* 8th ed. 2 vols. (London: Headley Brothers, 1902), II. pp. 408-9, 18th of the 12th Month 1684-5.
18. Claire Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 35-40, also *idem*. 'Slave Sugar Boycotts: Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture', *Slavery and Abolition*, 17:3 (1996), pp. 137-162, and Charlotte Sussman, 'Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792', *Representations*, 48 (1994), pp. 48-69.
19. Robert R. Wark, 'The Gentle Pastime of Extra-Illustrating Books', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 56 (1993), pp. 151-165.

[Editor: The modern spelling of Haslemere is used throughout the article rather than the 1702 spelling of 'Haselmore' or 'Haselmere']