

The Grave of William Penn

Some Problems of History

IN the course of every year thousands of visitors, from all walks of life and from all parts of the world, make their way to Jordans, Bucks., with its charming Meeting House, built 1688, and simple Quaker burial ground where William Penn, most of his family and the Peningtons and Ellwoods lie buried in a truly sylvan setting. Because of this width of contact between Quakerism and the outside world, Jordans is unique.

When the present writer became Warden of the Meeting House in 1957, the thing which struck him was the sparsity of evidence that the group of 12 headstones in the Old graveyard mark the actual spot where the bodies were interred. Many Friends will know that between 1766 and 1850 grave-stones were definitely, as well as "officially," taboo in Quaker grounds, and existing ones were removed. The present stones at Jordans were set up in 1862-3, and an inquiry into the reasons for their being placed in their present position has led the writer on a far more complex, adventurous and interesting journey than he could have imagined.

In M.M. minutes for July, 1862, we read:

The subject of placing gravestones over such of the graves at Jordans, whose identity has been ascertained, has been before us at this time. This Meeting appoints John Huntley, Daniel Norris and Richard Littleboy to confer together thereon, and to report to this Meeting as to the best course to be pursued.

Except for "the Minute is continued," it is not until June, 1863, that we hear anything more, when we read: "Report is made that the Gravestones are placed in the Jordans Burial Ground. The Minute is continued in order that a slight alteration may be made in two of them." So much for this committee reporting to M.M. "as to the best course to be pursued!"

The minute "is continued" for a few more months, after which nothing more is heard of it. It was not until 1895 that, at the instigation of a local Congregational minister, anything in the way of "slight alteration" to the stones was carried out, when the stone marked John Pennington was replaced

by John Penn, Mary Frame by Margaret Frame (it should be Freame) and Joseph Rule's date altered from 1765 to 1770. William Penn's first wife's stone bore the wrong date till 1952, when, after fruitless agitation for years by Arthur Hayward, Henry J. Cadbury, with difficulty, managed to get our M.M. to admit that it was wrong.¹

The writer believes, however, that a bigger muddle still was made when those stones were set up. He has reluctantly—very reluctantly—come to the conclusion that William Penn was not buried in the spot marked by the stone, but a few feet West of this, though exactly where he would not care to say.

His suspicions were first aroused by a visit of one of the Steevens family, who are descended from the Butterfields. Though still very sympathetic, the Steevens were disowned in Victorian times for marrying out. A Miss Steevens in 1911 gave to Devonshire House the Diary of Rebekah Butterfield on which so much Jordans history is based. Of Prince Butterfield we shall hear in a moment. My visitor told me that when a young man he visited Jordans with a great-uncle who said to him "William Penn isn't really buried under that stone, he's buried out there," pointing to the two sizeable flattish humps about half-way across the ground.

Words occurring in W. H. Summers: *Memories of Jordans and the Chalfonts* (1895), p. 257, are, the writer feels, significant: "the belief [is] still prevalent in the neighbourhood, that William Penn's stone was put on the wrong grave."

Throughout the nineteenth century there were no Quakers living in the district, no regular Meeting for Worship, no telephones, no railway, no tarmac roads or fast cars. Also the grounds were very unkempt. All sorts of things could have happened in that age, which was an uncritical one anyway. Howard Jenkins, in his *Family of William Penn* (1899), page 64, says that the stones were set up by the Founder's great-grandson, and there is other evidence, did space permit, to support this. Certainly, judging by minutes already quoted, it does not seem that Monthly Meeting had much to do with the actual putting of them up.

¹ Readers may care to compare the woodcut in Maria Webb's *Penns and Peningtons* with illustrations in later works, e.g. J. W. Graham's *William Penn* and L. V. Hodgkin's *Guhelma*.

Richard Littleboy, M.M. Clerk, writing 19 years later, does not sound happy about it. He says:

For more than a century a rough plan of the graveyard was the only available clue to the spot where the remains of William Penn and his family were laid. Guided by this plan, about 20 years ago, small headstones were placed over existing mounds, but it is more than doubtful whether they indicate in each case the exact spot of interment.¹

Which hardly ties up with "whose identity has been ascertained" of the M.M. minutes.

The "rough plan" mentioned by Richard Littleboy is, the writer believes, the one that is in the scrapbook of a Jordans member, Elizabeth Sparkes, hereafter referred to as the Sparkes plan. The earliest owner I have so far traced is the late Joshua Lamb of Sibford, who had it in 1936, probably because such things interested him. The reasons for believing that this is the plan referred to are these:

1. Wilson Armistead, to be referred to later, mentions a plan being kept at Jordans Meeting House.

2. The plan is certainly "rough." It is hopelessly out of proportion.

3. The *relationship* of the graves to each other is approximately the same as the present stones.

4. It was, the writer believes, drawn between the years 1812 and 1823. Unfortunately space does not permit going into reasons for this belief.

5. John Penn is shown as John Pennington.

6. Most important of all, Margaret (Margaret Freame) is written in in such a way that it could easily be mistaken for Mary.

Accompanying the Sparkes plan is a written document of which the following is an extract:

"Memorandums of the late B. Anderson of Penn relating to Jordans Meeting House etc.

Some particulars relative to Jordans burial ground from my old School-Fellow—Ady Bellamy, who was in possession of the writings, and Prince Butterfield of Seer Green, an old man who attends the Meeting and his Father before him who have kept a register of many curious particulars; the said P. Butterfield attended me to the Meeting and also the Burial Ground Jany 20—1798."

"No. 1. The grave of the great Wm. Penn. (See the Plan)."

¹ *The Remains of William Penn* by George L. Harrison (Philadelphia 1882), 42.

Adey Bellamy, Rev. Benjamin Anderson¹ and Prince Butterfield are all figures whose history has proved interesting and relevant, but space forbids. Space also prevents dwelling more fully on the "Memorandums" and Plan, obviously written and drawn from an original. What, exactly was this original like?

In Wilson Armistead's *Select Miscellanies*, published 1851, Vol. 6, is a section² on Jordans deserving of more notice than it has received. In it we read: "The following fragment . . . written by one of the vicars of Penn . . . is still preserved in the register of that place and presents a curious record of the occupiers of some of the graves." Alas! neither the present writer nor the present Vicar of Penn have been able to find the original of this "fragment" and it is feared lost. However, there is a plan shown in *Select Miscellanies*, which it seems reasonable to assume is a sufficiently exact copy. It is a far more likely one for a clergyman to have drawn than the Sparkes plan and I believe the Sparkes plan to be merely an orientation of it. The notes explaining the Armistead plan, shown below, are in small print and are obviously copied verbatim from the original Anderson "Memorandums." Unfortunately, I have had to condense them here.

	1	2	3	4	
The Road	5	6	7	8	9
	10	11	12	13	14
					The Meeting House

- "No. 1. Letitia, daughter of William Penn.
 2. Springett, son of William Penn.
 3. Margarett Freame, and her son Thomas, in the same grave, daughter of William Penn.
 4. John Penn, son of William.
 5. The great William Penn, with his second wife, upon his leaden coffin. Prince Butterfield

¹ There is a stone to Benjamin Anderson in the floor of Penn Parish Church, five miles from Jordans.

² This also appeared in a periodical some years earlier (see news cutting in Friends House Library, Spriggs MSS 1/15).

remembers his second wife [Hannah Penn] being buried, and seeing the leaden coffin of William, whose head lies contrary to the rest, with his feet to the north.

6. Gulielma, first wife of William Penn.
7. Isaac Pennington's wife.
8. Isaac Pennington, who married the mother to William Penn's first wife.
9. Joseph Rule.

Nos. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, William Penn's younger children. Seven graves from the hedge, in a line above William Penn lies Thomas Ellwood."

The Armistead plan gives one some idea of the relationship of the graves to each other, also their position North and South, but not East and West. The plan in fact leaves one with the impression that the exact position of some of the graves was only vaguely known by Prince Butterfield.

In the case of William Penn and Thomas Ellwood, on the other hand, there appears to have been no uncertainty. "Seven graves from the hedge, in a line above William Penn, lies Thomas Ellwood." This is staggering, for, while the present state of the ground makes it difficult to say exactly where "seven graves" might be, it certainly would not bring Thomas Ellwood's grave where the present stone is—or William Penn's! In the case of Penn's grave, there is nothing on the Sparkes plan to contradict the evidence in *Select Miscellanies*. Ellwood's grave is not shown on the Anderson sketch, used by Armistead, itself, and this probably accounts for the person who drew the Sparkes plan placing it, in misunderstanding, in a position which does not tally with Anderson's written evidence. A point is that it was Penn, not Ellwood, who has been the focus of interest at Jordans, to visitors anyway.

From whence, however, came the notion of placing the stones in the neat but unlikely-looking group we see today? The writer believes the answer is to be found in Hepworth Dixon's *Life of William Penn*, published in 1851, the same year as *Select Miscellanies*. On page 436 will be found a drawing showing the graves marked as at present. With it is an account of a visit to Jordans by Dixon with Penn's great-grandson. They found a hopeless mess and it seems obvious from the account that they had not been there before

and did not know which grave was William's. What the present writer believes happened was that they were handed the Sparkes plan by the caretaker, a farm-labourer's wife, and seeing five lines in a row drawn on it, counted five graves across and assumed, in error, it was Penn's.

This Dixon plan does, however, seem to have misled future generations, including the producers of a little 1853 guide to Jordans, as well as whoever set up those stones. The plain fact is that this does not square with the Hannah Penn-Prince Butterfield-Benjamin Anderson link with William Penn's interment, as given in *Select Miscellanies*, which is the only one having the stamp of authenticity.

JACK CAUDLE.

George Fox to Margaret Fox

More Swarthmore Documents in America

ATTENTION was called in this *Journal* in 1914 to five letters of George Fox to his wife, from Worcester and London, 1673-4.¹ They were printed *verbatim* and *litteratim*, with one exception. That was a holgraph manuscript formerly owned by Sir Joseph Cockfield Dimsdale and then recently sold at auction to "a gentleman residing in Philadelphia." Requests to copy it or photograph it were declined.² It has now been traced to the Autograph Collection of Simon Gratz of Philadelphia, which contained some 66,000 items, and came after his death in 1925 to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, with whose permission it is now transcribed and published.

Since it was once at Swarthmore Hall, re-read and endorsed by George Fox, it should have been included in the volume *The Swarthmore Documents in America*, Supplement No. 20 to this *Journal*, 1940, with thirty-five such documents, or with the two papers later published in this *Journal* as nos. xxxvi, xxxvii.³ It is part of a series of letters from George to Margaret

¹ *Jnl. F.H.S.*, xi, pp. 97-103, 157-158.

² *Ibid.*, p. 103, the sale of Walter V. Daniell of London, November, 1913. It had been advertised and sold at Christie's 9th April, 1913. See *The Friend* (London), 53 (1913), p. 265.

³ Vol. 40, 1948, pp. 25-31.