

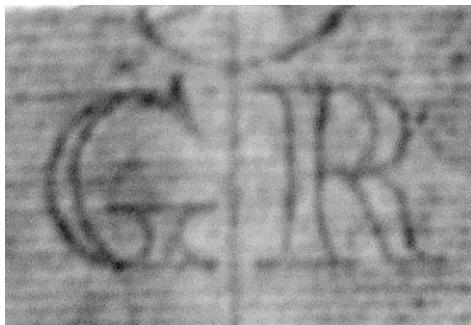
THE BOOKPLATE SOCIETY

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WILLIAM PENN'S 1703 BOOKPLATE – distinguishing the original from the later copy

"I have two Penn plates," writes Tom Boss, "one of which is a print (weak impression) mounted upon yellow card with the notation on the reverse that bookplate dealer Thomas Thorp had sold one, or had sold this one, for \$65. The other Penn is a plate with large margins of proof size except that I think there were none done in a size like this. The paper is watermarked "G R" and is quite wrinkled but surprisingly fresh.



Both of these seem suspect to me, the large-paper one more so. Might you be able to give me your point of view on just what I have here?" A similar enquiry to the Society came from a London bookseller a couple of years ago. This is a question that pops up quite frequently. In 1900, in the pages of the *Ex Libris Journal*, there was a lively, even rather heated, controversy about the Penn bookplates. It was finally resolved by a clear statement clarifying the differences between the original William Penn 1703 bookplate (opposite, to the left) and the second engraving which is now believed to have been created sometime pre-1872 (shown to the right). Whether one

calls it a copy, sham, fake, or forgery is open to discussion, but in this article let it be described as the "second engraving".

The Franks Collection has two examples of the original bookplate, F.23192 and F*288. The second of these was in the Brighton Book, telling us that the copper plate was probably engraved in the workshop of William Jackson, near Red Lion Square, Holborn, London. Charles Dexter Allen was one of those misled by the second engraving when he illustrated this instead of the original in his *American Book-Plates*, 1894, but Franks was well aware of the difference, given that F.23193 is a print of the second engraving. The compiler of the Franks Catalogue (ERJ Gambier Howe) informs us that the inscription on the original 1703

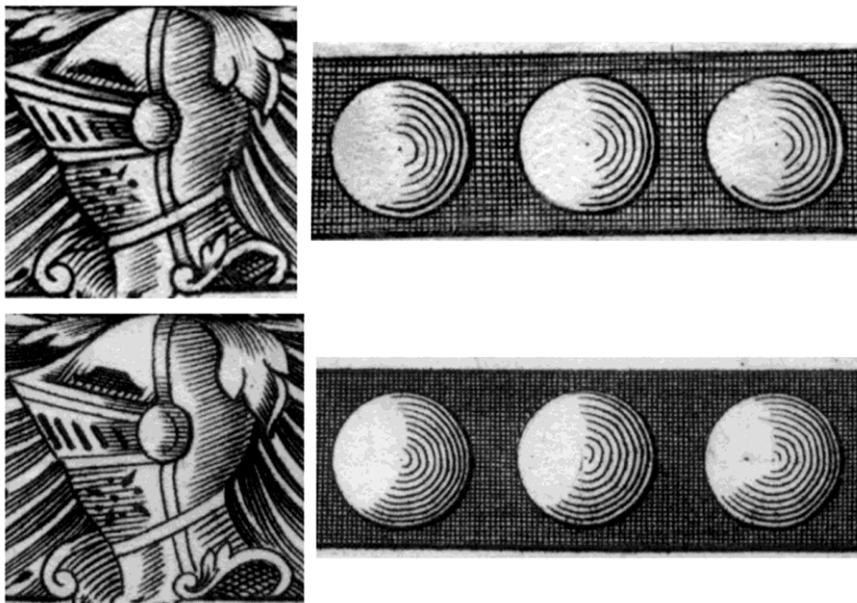


Shown actual size – original to left, second version to right

copper plate was later re-engraved to read “Thomas Penn of Stoke Pogeis in the County of Bucks, First Proprietor of Pensilvania” (F.23191). This was doubtless done in 1760, or shortly after, when Thomas purchased Stoke Poges in Buckinghamshire.

“Dear Jones,” wrote George Viner as he began tapping out upon his old Corona typewriter a letter of 5th December 1939 to Horace Jones, “I am afraid you will write me down a most poisonously unpleasant fellow for there is no doubt that your William Penn is the forgery. You will find the best account of it in Vol. X of the [Ex Libris] Journal pp.56/7, and to help you I’m enclosing my cut off copy of the genuine article pasted over a terribly bad print of the forgery. I’m sorry the inscription is absent, for in it you’ll find very convincing proof indeed of the differences, but a glance at the cross-hatching of the fess (entirely machine ruled in the forgery) will be enough to set your mind at (un)rest.”

As Viner indicated, the re-engraving simply does not have quite the right “feel” of an 18th century production. There are too many differences for anyone to be fooled for long. The copy is mostly found on very large 18thC paper (approx. 212x168mm), with a clear platemark and wide margins, possibly with a GR watermark. Look at the roundels on the fess and note that the inner half-circles extend further clockwise in the copy than in the original. The original has 6 of these half-circles inside the roundel, whereas in the roundels of the copy these number 9, 8 and 9. Count the number of horizontal lines of cross-hatching between the borders of the fess and you will find these to number 27 in the original bookplate, but 37 in the more densely cross-hatched copy. Shown on the next page are enlarged details of the helm and of the fess. The original is the one above, the copy below. These differ in multiple ways. Locating the original copper plates might shed light, but efforts to do so have as yet been unsuccessful.



We do not know whether the original 1703 bookplate was actually commissioned by William Penn or just offered spontaneously or speculatively by the engraver. Penn made his second and last visit to Pennsylvania in 1699, returning in 1701. His last years were overshadowed by illness and financial worries. He suffered two strokes in 1712 and left his wife to take care of his business. At the time of his death six years later he was penniless. These are not circumstances in which a man makes unnecessary expenditures. What then happened to his library?

For a fascinating account of the vicissitudes of the Penn family and its books and historical documents you are recommended to read an excellent article, available online (Note 1), by Nicholas B. Wainwright. Quantities of books and manuscripts were sold at auction, firstly at Sotheby’s in 1851 and 1854 (Note 2) and later at Puttick and Simpson in 1872 (Note 3). This second sale is of particular interest in the story of the second version bookplate, because in the printed catalogue comprising 1,634 lots the 1703 William Penn bookplate is mentioned as present in more than 70 books, all of these printed during William Penn’s lifetime. Three of these books stated to have Penn’s bookplate (Note 4) are now at the Library Company of Philadelphia, whose librarian has confirmed that in each case the bookplate pasted behind the titlepage is the second engraving. Wainwright too was in doubt about the provenance of volumes with the 1703 bookplate (Note 5). Perhaps none of the 1703 bookplates in that sale was a genuine original, but it would be a thankless task to locate every book in order to prove this.

Two of these books turned up in Lot 718 of Sotheby’s 1906 sale of the bookplate collection of Julian Marshall. Gambier Howe catalogued that sale and mentions “a fine impression with autograph” of the

original bookplate and “two impressions of the modern copy on old paper, both of which have been pasted into books”. Another book from the 1872 sale is now in the library of St John’s College, Cambridge (Note 6), the interesting feature here being that the second version bookplate is found pasted behind the title-page but this got no mention in the 1872 catalogue, so it may be there were more second version William Penn bookplates in that sale than the auctioneer troubled to note in the catalogue.

The unresolved question is this: did a member of the Penn family decide to insert the “fake” second version bookplate in William’s books, or was it the auctioneer? If done by the family in or before the first half of the nineteenth century, we might interpret this as a wish to identify unbookplated books as having been in William’s ownership. If done by the auctioneer, we may suspect that the motives could have been to promote sales or to deceive. We shall probably never know.

There must have been a batch of the second engraving, printed on large paper, that was surplus to needs and which led to these unused prints finding their way into circulation among bookplate collectors. Whether or not intended to be fraudulent, this second engraving has a certain curiosity value, and copies turn up in collections quite frequently, so it should command no more than £30, whereas a print of the original is quite another matter, for it must be considered rare. Julian Marshall’s fine impression of the genuine plate with Penn’s autograph (illustrated ELJ 16:72), accompanied by the two impressions of the second version pasted into books, together sold to the dealer Ellis for £7 10s. This same original bookplate & autograph subsequently turned up in 1937 as item 229 priced at 10 guineas in a catalogue of London bookseller and bookplate dealer Gerald Massey of Shepherd’s Market, Mayfair. Dr Henry C Eno possessed prints of both the original and the “restrike” according to his second sale catalogue of 24th/25th January 1921 (not the first sale of 16th/17th November 1916). More recently, in 2005 a print of the original bookplate sold for \$450 (Note 7). Today you may have estimates of £250, £500 or \$1,500, depending on who you ask.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

James N. Green, Librarian at the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107 has given considerable, much appreciated help. Thanks are also due to Ms Lynne Farrington of the University of Pennsylvania and to Mrs Kathryn J. McKee, Sub-Librarian and Special Collections Librarian, St John’s College, Cambridge for checking on Penn bookplates in books.

NOTES

1. Nicholas Biddle Wainwright (1914-1986), "*The Penn Collection*", *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol.87, No.4, October 1963, pp393-419, available to read online and download from <http://journals.psu.edu/pmhb/article/download/41904/41625>
Wainwright’s obituary appeared in the same journal, Vol.111, No.2, April 1987, available at <http://journals.psu.edu/pmhb/article/download/44206/43927>
2. S. Leigh Sotheby & John Wilkinson. 16/6, 30/7 & 28/8/1851; 4/8/1854.
3. A catalogue of an important collection of books, manuscripts, maps, charts, and engravings ...from the libraries of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, and of his descendants, with autographs, bookplates etc. Puttick & Simpson, 29 February 1872 and four following days.
4. Lot 539, Penn, *Frame of Government*, 1682; Lot 817, Penn, *Address to Protestants*, 1678; Lot 888, Silius Italicus, *Second Punick War*, 1661.
5. Footnote 54 on p.415 of Wainwright’s 1963 article.
6. Lot 371 Kempis (Thomas à) *De Imitatione Christi libris quatuor, ex recens. J. Frontonis.*, with autograph of Granville Penn Paris, 1649. See www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/special_collections/early_books/pix/provenance/penn/penn.htm
7. Sale of 8th June 2005 at Alderfer Auction Company, Hatfield, PA 19440. For an image see www.liveauctioneers.com/item/996703.