



Minety And The Penn Family

William Penn, Founder of Pennsylvania, USA

The following is an extract from the book "Quaker and Courtier. The Life and work of William Penn" by Mrs Colquhoun Grant published in 1907.

Chapter I

Ancestry

In the peaceful village of Minety, in Wiltshire, on the borders of Gloucestershire, in the chancel of the old church, lies buried a man whose only title to fame is the fact that he was the ancestor of an illustrious Quaker who bore the same name.

William Penn (or Penne, as it was sometimes spelt in the old chronicles) was the head of a family who had migrated to that part of the country and founded a branch of their own.

The name of Penn is a very ancient one, and dates from the Saxon Conquest. It signifies Top, or Crest, or Summit and is frequently found among the inhabitants of Cornwall and Wales. Most of the very oldest families of England can be traced in the south and western portions of our island, as it was there the population made its last stand against the invaders.

In 1539 ¹ Aubrey writes; "The Penns have been in Wiltshire a long time, but, I think, only yeomen." ²

That they were gentlefolk, and of good position is apparent. No mention is made of the wife of William Penn of Minety, but he had a son and a daughter. The latter married a country gentleman of the name of Green, the former married Margaret, daughter of John Rastall, Esq, and, dying before his father, left six children.³ It is probable that they remained in the charge of their grandfather, and lived in the old homestead, for we learn from William Penn's will that he left his money divided between them. ⁴

The eldest son, George, must have been placed in some appointment at Whitehall, for he was sent as one of the envoys to the court of Spain, in 1623, by Charles I, then Prince of Wales. Probably the Rastall connection was a good one, and he may have had influential friends or relations in London.

There is no record of the second son, William, having married; he was alive at his grandfather's death.

It was left to Giles, the third son, to carry on the family.

The three daughters, Sarah, Susanna and Marie, are mentioned in the will, but there is no account of them.

Old William Penn died in 1591, and as a further proof of his position, and the esteem in which he was held, there is mention made of a monumental inscription to his memory in Minety, which has, however, unfortunately been removed. Also the parish registers were destroyed in 1663.⁵

There have been Penns in many parts of England. At Codicote, in Hertfordshire, was a family of the name, probably descended from John Penne, M.P. for Weymouth, whose will was proved in 1450.⁶ In Worcestershire there have been Penns since the reign of Edward III, and another family of the same name came from Stockton, in Shropshire. In both cases they bore similar arms.

Northampton, Kent, and Sussex all furnish families of the name of Penn, also at Fifehead, in Somerset. These latter are said to be an offshoot of the Wiltshire stock, from which the founder of Pennsylvania descended.

The question then arises, to which branch did William Penn of Minety belong?

The Penns of Penn, Co Bucks, was the most ancient and illustrious family of that name. David, the founder of the branch, had been a monk in the abbey of Glastonbury, and after the Reformation and dissolution of the monasteries, he had been granted land in the forest of Bradon, Wilts. He married Sybil Hampden, said to have been governess to the children of Henry VIII.⁷

It has been alleged that William of Minety was their son. This statement has, however, no foundation, nor do the dates bear it out in any way. No doubt both branches of the family came from the same stock.

In a letter written by John Georges, M.P. for Cirencester in 1638, to Sir W Penn, he urges him to purchase the ancestral place at Minety, "which belonged to your ancestors the Penns for many generations, and is called Penn's Lodge,"⁸ which proves that the family were aware of their descent. "Relations of kindred," writes Granville Penn in his memorials,⁹ "were always claimed, and acknowledged, between the family of Sir William Penn and the Penns of Penn, now represented by Earl Howe, but no genealogical connection appears on record."¹⁰

It is therefore clear that the Penns of Penn could not claim any direct descent, but whatever may be obscure, it is an undoubted fact that William Pen the Quaker was the great-great grandson of the man who lies buried in Minety church.

¹ OPC Note: Should be 1659.

² Aubrey's Wiltshire Collections

³ Genealogical Gleanings, H A Lea.

⁴ Coleman's Registry of the Court of Canterbury.

⁵ The rector of Minety, Rev Mr Edwards, reported that the stone had quite disappeared. 1890.

⁶ Genealogical Gleanings, H A Lea.

⁷ It is stated that David Penn married in 1570, but these old dates are often contradictory, and not to be relief on.

⁸ Pennsylvania Magazine, Essay by Howard Jenkins, Esq.

⁹ Memorials, vol. ii, p 575.

¹⁰ Sir Nathaniel Curson of Kedlestone, 2nd Bart, married Sarah, daughter of William Penn of Penn, Co. Bucks, and died in 1727. From them descended the family of the Earl Howe, and they took the name of Penn-Curson.