Another Child to William and Gulielma Penn

It has commonly been supposed that William Penn and Gulielma Maria Springett had seven children.¹ The charts in Hull’s William Penn: A Topical Biography, and Hodgkin’s Gulielma, Wife of William Penn agree with this listing,² as do all other accounts known to me.³ It will be observed that only Springett, Letitia, and William, Jr., grew up; the other four died in infancy.

1. Gulielma Maria, b. January 23, 1673  
   d. March 17, 1673
2. William, b. February 28, 1674  
   d. May 15, 1674
3. Mary Margaret, b. February 28, 1674  
   d. February 24, 1675
4. Springett, b. January 25, 1676  
   d. April 10, 1696
5. Letitia, b. March 6, 1679  
   d. April, 1746
6. William, Jr., b. March 14, 1681  
   d. June 23, 1720
7. Gulielma Maria, b. November 17, 1685  
   d. November 20, 1689

L. V. Hodgkin, however, quotes the letter book of James Claypoole in London writing to William Penn in Pennsylvania (the date of the letter should be 2nd mo. (April) 1, 1683) as referring to four children.⁴ Describing a visit that he and his wife, together with Bridget Ford and George Fox, had paid at Worminghurst, March 20–26, 1683, he

In spite of some discrepancies, I follow H. M. Jenkins, The Family of William Penn (Philadelphia, 1899), 56, 66, 252, virtually reprinted from The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, XX (1890), 379, 389 f., XXII (1898), 349. Where the Quaker registers give dates between 11 mo. 1 and 1 mo. 25, I have translated them to dates between Jan. 1 and Mar. 25 of what we should call the following year. For example, 11 mo. 23, 1672 (or 1672/3) becomes Jan. 23, 1673.


See Dictionary of National Biography, XLIV, 316, and James Coleman, A Pedigree & Genealogical Notes, from Wills, Registers, and Deeds, of the Family of Penn . . . (London, 1871), 8. But for many years, the editions of the Encyclopedia Britannica, including the current one, have carried the statement in the biographical sketch of William Penn that in addition to the three children who survived Gulielma, “two other daughters, Mary and Hannah (sic), died in infancy.” See also William J. Buck, William Penn in America (Philadelphia, 1888), 223.

⁴ Hodgkin, 185.
says: "We were kindly entertained by thy dear wife and stayed there
till the 26th, then came away; and that morning she and thy four
children were in good health." Hodgkin's note on this is as follows:

Penna. Magazine, X (1886), p. 271. "Four children" is surprising. There were
only three to have farewell letters in 1682. Possibly Gulielma gave birth to another
short-lived babe soon after her husband's departure? That a "daughter of Penn" is
said to have been buried at the Blue Idol near Thakeham rather supports this con-
jecture. (See Sussex Archaeological Collections, XXX [1880], 237.)

This conjecture now has more convincing support. Isabel Ross in
her Margaret Fell publishes (for the first time?) a letter of Guli Penn
to Margaret Fox written on August 21, 1683. She acknowledges re-
ceiving a letter from the latter "long since when I lay in," and she
continues:

I was very weak a long time after my lying in and it pleased the Lord to take
away my little one, when it was about three weeks old. It was a mighty great child
and it was near dead when it was born, which I think it never got over. Dear George
Fox came a-purpose to see me. . . .

Fox's itinerary confirms the date of the visit as March 20–26, 1683,
but neither he nor James Claypoole indicates that a baby had just
arrived in the family. It must have been born shortly before, if it was
still one of the four children alive and well when they left. In an
earlier letter, however, written to Benjamin Furly on March 13,
James Claypoole says: "Guly Penn is safe delivered of a daught: and
its like will be ready to go for Pennsylvania in ye 7th. or 8th. month."7

We shall, therefore, have to insert in the list above (between nos. 6
and 7) another child born in March, 1683, thus making eight children
in all, and five who died in infancy. This event occurred less than
seven months after William Penn sailed for Pennsylvania on the
ship Welcome in late August, 1682. Unfortunately, neither the exact
dates of birth and death, the name of the infant, nor the place of
burial are yet known. The meeting registers in Bucks and Sussex
supply such data for the other children, most of whom were buried by
the present Friends Meeting House in Jordans. It is true that there is

5 Isabel Ross, Margaret Fell (London, 1949), 323. It is interesting to note how well these
two books by English Quaker women (L. Violet Hodgkin and Isabel Ross) on English Quaker
women (Gulielma Penn and Margaret Fell) supplement each other.
6 Norman Penney, ed., Short Journal and Itinerary Journals of George Fox (Cambridge,
1925), 78.
7 PMHB, X (1886), 269. The original letter book is at The Historical Society of Pennsyl-
vania; see pages 363, 374 f.
a gravestone there for five infant children of William Penn, and this might be thought to imply an additional child. These gravestones may be suspected, however, since they were erected only in 1862-1863, and are incorrect in at least one other matter, namely, the date 1689 for the death of Guliel Penn—the date of death of the last child of that name and not of the mother, who died in 1693/4. But an older chart of burials has also listed five such graves marked for the children of William Penn. Although they are not named, they probably represent nos. 1, 2, 3 and 7 of the list above, and the last child of Penn's second marriage, Hannah, who was born in September, 1708, and died the following January. We know that she, too, was buried at Jordans.

Why the birth of 1683 is not mentioned in the records of Sussex as are the births of 1679, 1681, and 1685, one cannot tell, nor why interment in Jordans was not made, or at least was not recorded. Burial might have been made at a local Friends ground near Worrington, as the Blue Idol tradition suggests. The winter of 1683 was particularly severe. Fox reports that in coming down from London he had to go ten miles out of the way as the roads were so bad. William Penn was in Pennsylvania and Guliel was very weak and later very ill, as her letter reports and as Thomas Ellwood mentions in his journal, when he was summoned to her bedside. As for the tradition of a Penn burial at the Blue Idol, it could only have been while the property was in private hands, for the house and graveyard there seem to have come into Friends' possession well after 1683. At any rate, the first interments at "Thackam," or Shipley, given in the Sussex registers, are after 1691.

This unnoticed event in the private life of William Penn will give the historian new light on the questions why, unlike James Claypoole and other settlers, he went to Pennsylvania without his family, on why they did not promptly follow him, and on why he soon returned to England.

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9 [Sarah Littleboy], A Visit to the Grave of William Penn (London, 1853), frontispiece; cf. 30 ff.
10 W. H. Summers, Memories of Jordans and the Chaljonts (London, 1895), 226; cf. 203, 208.