A Penn Portrait at Holker?

Holker Hall, the Lancashire home of the Cavendish family, lies below Lake Windermere on the peninsula which forms the northern side of Morecambe Bay. The present house, an early home of Lady Dorothy Macmillan, daughter of a former owner, the ninth Duke of Devonshire, is in large part a modernized Elizabethan-style structure with high roofs, high chimneys, and stone dormers. Sitting in its deer park on a wooded ridge not far from the onetime Augustinian priory at Cartmel, to which Holker originally belonged, it enjoys an extended view to an immense chain of the distant Lake district mountains.

Like many other English stately homes, most of Holker is open to the public; the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Cavendish, occupy the Old Wing. The chief room at Holker, the Main Hall, now appears as rebuilt in 1873 by the seventh Duke of Devonshire after a disastrous fire had destroyed the entire southwest wing. In the Main Hall, panelled in oak cut and carved on the estate, is a series of portraits which the Holker guidebook states, somewhat loosely, were brought from Bolton Abbey, Yorkshire, following the rebuilding. One of the portraits here displayed is described as “William, son of William Penn (the founder of Pennsylvania) of Swarthmoor, near Ulverston.”

1 Anne Collins, Holker Hall (Norwich, n.d.). Not all the portraits in the Main Hall came to Holker after the fire; the Duchess of Cleveland, by Lely, was there in 1772. Thomas Pennant, A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides MDCCCLXXII (Chester, 1774), I, 24.
It is no great surprise to find the name Penn associated with the house when its history is considered. Three families have held Holker since the suppression of Cartmel Priory: the Prestons, the Lowthers, and the Cavendishes, and the property passed from one to the other by marriage or inheritance. Nine days after receiving his baronetcy in 1697, Sir William Lowther (1675-1705) of Marske, in Yorkshire, married Catherine Preston, heiress of Holker. Lowther, himself a Pennsylvania landowner, was a nephew of William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, being the third son of Penn’s sister Margaret and Anthony Lowther. In 1756, when the male Lowthers died out in the person of another William, the third baronet, Holker was inherited by his mother’s relations, Lords George Augustus and Frederick Cavendish.

But who is the subject of the presumed Penn portrait? The canvas, 29” x 24”, portrays a brown-eyed boy of about twelve or thirteen, with fair, curly hair worn shoulder-length, dressed in his shirt with a distinctive lace collar fastened by a jeweled clasp, a brown cloak draped over his left shoulder. The subject is turned three-quarters toward the front. Of bust size, the likeness is drawn within a heavy cartouche. The picture dates from the seventeenth century, is in a contemporary frame, and can be attributed without any doubt to the brush of Mary Beale. No identification of the subject appears on the face or reverse of the picture. Why is it called a Penn? How and when did it come to Holker? What is known of the portrait to authenticate its presumed identification?

To determine who the portrait does not represent is easy. To start with, it is an inaccuracy to refer to any member of the Penn family as of Swarthmore Hall (to use its more usual spelling), the home of another leading Quaker family, the Fells. In fact, this part of the identification is only a recent, printed error.

2 Victoria County History of the County of Lancaster (London, 1914), VIII, 270-272. To the present owners of Holker, the author is indebted for much kindness and help in the preparation of this article.

3 The Yorkshire manor of Marske (Maske) came to William Lowther, but was always administered by his widowed mother Margaret (Penn) Lowther, who survived him. Her accounts for Marske are with the Cavendish of Holker Papers in the Lancashire Record Office. R. Sharpe France, Guide to the Lancashire Record Office (Preston, 1962), 95. The third Lowther baronet left Marske not to the Cavendishes but to friends. Victoria County History of the County of York: North Riding (London, 1923), II, 399-400.
The picture could not represent any son of William Penn of Pennsylvania; of his sons born prior to 1700, both Springett and William attained the age of twelve (in 1687 and 1692 respectively), but the portrait is too early in date to be either. Could the picture be, from evidence of date, a likeness of the founder of Pennsylvania as a boy? He was also, of course, “William, son of William Penn.” What reasonable date can be put on the canvas?

Mary Beale painted in London for some forty years following 1654. An imitator of the fashionable artist Sir Peter Lely, she never developed his hard brilliance or achieved Lely’s assurance of color or tone. Like other painters of the period, both were fond of putting their subjects within ovals or cartouches and this conceit persisted, confusingly, for decades. Lely and Gerard Soest used ovals as early as 1651; the cartouche was popular by at least, 1665. A portrait by Mrs. Beale dated in the 1660’s is similar in composition to the picture in the Main Hall at Holker.

It is impossible to date the picture closely from reference to the artist’s style, for Mary Beale’s work became stiffer but otherwise changed little between 1655 and 1680. The Holker portrait resembles other work by Beale of the 1660’s in the brownish tinge to flesh colors, the drapery which lies in heavy ridges, and in its general monochrome character; these points probably also characterized her work in the years before 1660. Expert opinion of the canvas ventures that it “probably dates from about 1665 but could be ten years earlier.” Costume thus becomes a key factor in dating.

It is disappointing that the youth painted by Mrs. Beale appears in “undress” rather than in a tunic or coat which would aid in pinpointing the date. Nothing about the shirt or the brown cloak in the “Penn portrait” can verify a date of 1656–1657 (when William Penn of Pennsylvania would have been twelve or thirteen years old), or a date somewhat later to make his younger brother Richard a likely

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6 Dr. Roy Strong and Mr. John Kerslake of the National Portrait Gallery, London, have given patient and expert help with the difficult problem of dating the portrait in question.
candidate. The sole lead is the collar. This is of Italian lace, and of a style adopted for men’s shirts in England just before the Restoration, roughly from 1655–1660. If we tend toward the beginning rather than the end of the 1655–1665 decade, leaning on the collar evidence, the portrait at Holker Hall could, on the basis of probable date alone, be a likeness, from life, of William Penn the Quaker. If we lean heavily on the period when the cartouche was more usual, the “about 1665” dating would appear more reasonable and would point toward the portrait being Richard, if a Penn. Judgments of likeness are largely subjective, but some resemblance between the lad painted by Mrs. Beale and twenty-two-year-old Penn, the Founder, in the “armor” portrait of about 1666 could be suggested.

There is no record that any member of the Penn or Lowther of Marske families sat for Mrs. Beale. However, her more competent and renowned contemporary Lely in 1666 painted Admiral Sir William Penn in his series of robust portraits of the victorious flag officers in the Battle of Lowestoft. It seems likely that Lely or his studio produced other versions of his Admiral Penn. A canvas of the admiral, “dressed in black, with a cravat and sash, long hair, and of a good honest countenance,” was ascribed to Lely by the traveler, Thomas Pennant, who saw it at Holker in 1772. If the Lowthers—always allied by ties of friendship with their Penn cousins—inherited and hung a picture of Sir William Penn, it would appear not unreasonable that a portrait of one of the admiral’s two sons would

7 The date of birth of William Penn’s younger brother Richard is not known. He was of age when he died in 1673, so was born between 1644 and 1652.

8 The Costume Department of the Victoria & Albert Museum has kindly assisted with the dating of the costume. A similar shirt and hair style, but without the Italian collar of the 1650’s or earlier, is seen on the younger boy in Lely’s Hales family group. Collins Baker, I, plate opposite p. 162.

9 The portrait now in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania is one of several copies made from a lost original in the late eighteenth century.


12 Pennant, 25.
descend in their possession and have been inherited by the Cavendishes.\textsuperscript{13}

Having determined from artistic and costume evidence that a slight case can be made for the portrait of "William Penn" as a hitherto neglected portrait of the Founder of Pennsylvania as a youth, it is necessary to examine the Holker Hall muniments for whatever light they may shed on the matter. The Cavendishes, fortunately, seem always to have been interested in pictures and kept inventories of them, although these are not as precise as modern scholarship would wish. Despite heavy losses in the fire of 1871 (103 out of a total of 162 canvases were burnt), a gaggle of Lelys, Knellers, Vernets, Poussins, and Reynolds, with many others, still hang in the house, including the amusing caricature of four young milords at Rome, one being the third Lowther baronet, painted by his friend Sir Joshua Reynolds.\textsuperscript{14}

Of the family inventories, the earliest is a tripartite list entitled [a] "A Catalogue of the Late S.t W.m Lowther's Pictures at His House near the Horse Guards White Hall," [b] "Pictures at Mrs. Lowthers in Scotland Yard," and [c] "Pictures at Mr. Vander Guchts in Bloomsbury Square." This list details fifty-four canvases divided among the three houses. In the accounting of the Scotland Yard house, the former residence of the baronet's spinster sister Elizabeth, there appears, as number 33, "A three Quarter Portrait of Adm Penn's Son."

No other Penn portrait is listed, not even that of the Admiral known to have been at Holker sixteen years later. It evidently was in the country and not at any of the family town houses in 1756; no parallel list of the contents of Holker Hall is preserved. A rough second list, titled "Pictures at Holker when Sir Wm Lowther died," has entries identical with the more carefully written inventory cover-\textsuperscript{13} The friendship is demonstrated in a letter written by Hannah Penn in 1720. Howard M. Jenkins, \textit{The Family of William Penn} (Philadelphia, 1899), 116.

\textsuperscript{14} Reproduced in \textit{Country Life Annual}, 1956, 115. A formal portrait of Lowther by Reynolds also hangs at Holker. (Reynolds painted yet another Sir William Lowther, Bart., i.e. the M.P. for Pontefract, who d.s.p. in 1763, a distant cousin of William of Holker.) The fire at Holker destroyed portraits of the first and second baronets Lowther of Marske and Holker. A copy of the second baronet's picture was owned in 1905 by H.F.C. Cavendish, demonstrating that Lowther pictures were inherited by branches other than the one which has retained Holker Hall.
ing the Bloomsbury Square establishment and is obviously mis-
headed, for yet another manuscript, carefully docketed “Pictures of
the Late Sir W: m Lowther Sent to Holker by the Lancaster Carrier
Octo.\textsuperscript{b} 14\textsuperscript{th}: 1756 in Ten Cases,” includes every entry on the three-
part inventory.

Two other late eighteenth-century lists survive. The first covers
only one room: “Portraits in the Brown parlour at Holker.” It gives
“Admiral Penn's Daughter Married to Sir William Lowther Bart.
\textit{sic}, Anthony Lowther, Esqr.] of Marsk,” and “Miss or Lady Lowther
Married to—Nicholls Esqr. Daughter to Sir Wm. Lowther Barrt.
\textit{sic}, Anthony Lowther] of Marsk by Admiral Penn's Daughter.”\textsuperscript{15}

The second of these later manuscripts was prepared by the house-
keeper for the estate agent, probably at the death of Lord George
Augustus Cavendish in 1794.\textsuperscript{16} It includes references to portraits of
Mr. Lowther of Marske and wife,\textsuperscript{17} Mr. Anthony Lowther, and,
again in the brown parlor, Mrs. Lowther of Marske, Admiral Penn,
and Mrs. Pool [\textit{sic}].

A slightly later list places in the Hall—and no longer in the brown
parlor—“Lady [\textit{sic}, Mrs.] Lowther, Daughter of Admiral Penn, in
weeds,” and the familiar one of the Admiral. Thus, by 1800, the pic-
ture of the Admiral, long in the house, and a canvas of his daughter
Margaret Penn Lowther, as well as likenesses of Margaret’s hus-
band, and of many of their descendants are still listed as hanging at
Holker Hall. These later lists do not mention the three-quarter
length picture of Admiral Penn’s son, which was in Elizabeth
Lowther’s house in Scotland Yard and was sent to Holker in October,
1756, with all the other London pictures.

There is no subsequent inventory of pictures until that of 1869,
made probably by the seventh Duke of Devonshire. Included in it
are the same portraits of Admiral Penn, Anthony and Margaret
Lowther, and Mrs. Pole \textit{[sic]}, as well as other familiar names among
the Lowthers of Holker and their neighboring kinsmen and bene-

\textsuperscript{15} This note was written by someone (a servant?) unfamiliar with the nomenclature of
titles. The names are also confused. Margaret, only daughter of Anthony Lowther, married
Benjamin Poole and was probably the subject of the portrait, not her daughter Margaret
Poole who married John Nicol as her second husband.

\textsuperscript{16} “A Catalogue of Pictures at Holker made out from the memory and description given by
Mrs. Humble to Mr. Richardson.” The latter was agent 1788–1797.

\textsuperscript{17} Probably Robert and Elizabeth (Holcroft) Lowther, parents of Anthony.
factors, the Lowthers of Whitehaven. Apart from that of the Admiral, no Penn picture is listed.

One night in March, 1871, a fire broke out in the chimney of Lord Frederick Cavendish's dressing room. Spreading rapidly, it largely defeated the rescue efforts of Lord Frederick, working in night-clothes, his father, the Duke of Devonshire, and a household retinue. Canalettos, Memlings, Dürers, and other valuable old masters were lost in the complete destruction of the New Wing.

In his *Annals of Cartmel*, published the following year, James Stockdale, a local historian, printed a detailed list of the art treasures destroyed; fifty-nine were saved out of a total of "about 162" pictures. Of likenesses of Penn interest, Stockdale enumerates the destruction of the four noted in 1869: Admiral Penn, his daughter and son-in-law, and Mr. Pole [sic, Mrs. Poole], the Admiral's granddaughter.

After the fire and rebuilding, the seventh Duke brought from Bolton Abbey, his Yorkshire shooting box, a lot of pictures to help fill the Hall and other rooms at Holker. The Devonshires had some dozen houses at the time—several inherited from the Lowthers—and their possessions were widely scattered. It is not known fully what pictures came in this move, or if some canvases were brought from yet other houses to furnish the favored abode at Holker, but the family today believes that the Penn lad was one of these replacements.

Lady Louisa Egerton, the seventh Duke's daughter, who had grown up at Holker and Chatsworth and knew all the other family houses, made yet another "Memorandum of Pictures" in September, 1893. She placed in the Hall "Portrait of a youth, believed to be the son of Admiral Penn," noting beside it that "a good portrait of Ad-

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18 "Some of the Old Portraits in Holker Hall, 1869." This, and earlier inventories, mention paintings of the Lowthers of Whitehaven, who held yet another baronetcy and descended from another first cousin of Anthony Lowther of Marske. Upon the death in 1755 of childless Sir James Lowther, fourth baronet of this creation, his property was inherited by the squire of Holker who, however, died the next year. This bequest brought to the Lancashire estate a series of early and important Lowther pictures; some of these remain in the house today.

19 James Stockdale, *Annals of Cartmel* (Ulverston, 1872), 426-427. The canvases not destroyed are also specifically mentioned.

20 Among these were Cartmel Manor and the Dalton-in-Furness estate. The Marquess of Zetland, descendant of the family which subsequent to the Lowther ownership held Marske for many generations, reports that no Lowther documents or pictures remained there.
miral Penn was destroyed in the fire.” Thus the picture has been known since at least Lady Louisa’s time; the reference to the boy as a son of Penn of Pennsylvania is merely a recent carelessness.

If the bust-length Penn portrait is indeed that of a son of the Admiral, it would seem not to be the three-quarter-length likeness of the Admiral’s son known to have been in the possession of the family in 1756. There is no account of what happened to that early picture. As the housekeeper’s list of about 1794 closely follows the 1756 inventory and entirely omits the “three-quarter” Penn boy, that canvas had certainly left Holker and was probably taken to one of the other Cavendish houses. Is it extant today? If so, which of the Admiral’s two sons does it represent?

Seventeenth-century portraits of the Penns are scarce; in fact, the Greenwich Hospital picture of the Admiral has been thought to be the only Penn portrait from life extant from before 1700. So it is tempting to think that the Holker Hall canvas may indeed be a portrait of William Penn of Pennsylvania, or, more likely, of his younger brother Richard. It was perhaps at Holker Hall and not in London in 1756, taken later to another Cavendish house and returned to Holker at some time after the fire.

Whenever and from wherever it came, the portrait carried with it a tradition of identity which the family scribe knew and believed to be a strong possibility. Right or wrong, the tradition still adheres today.

The American Museum in Britain
Claverton Manor, Bath

Francis James Dallett

21 The Duke of Devonshire’s pictures, still dispersed in a number of immense houses, including Chatsworth, constitute one of the great private art collections of England not yet studied. An important collection also belongs to the Earl of Lonsdale, the present head of the Lowther family, who descends from a first cousin of Anthony Lowther of Marske.