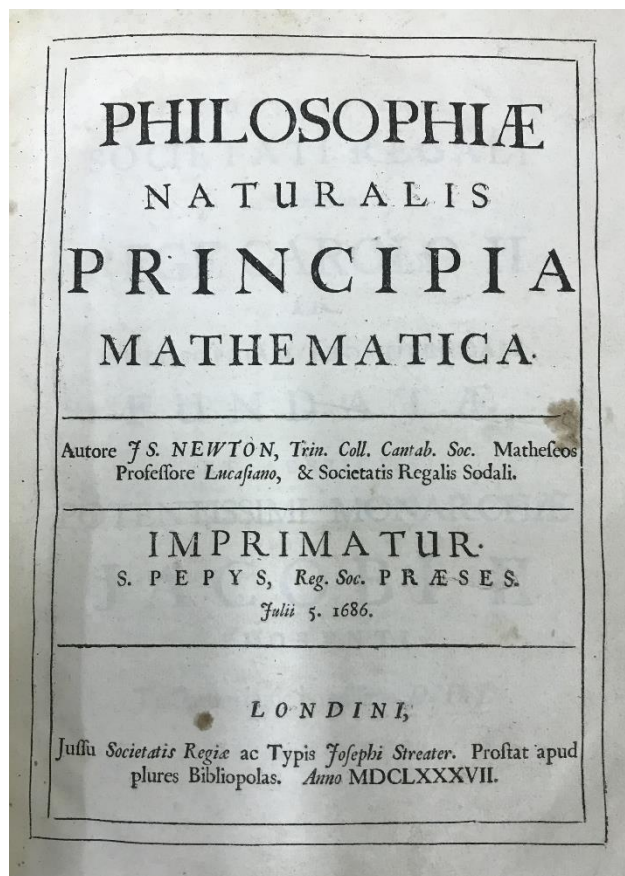


## Bonfoy Trimnell (d. 1691): Birthday Poet, and Donor of Newton's *Principia*

New College's copy of the first edition of Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica* (London, 1687, now BT1.128.26) was donated to the college library shortly after its publication by the otherwise obscure Bonfoy Trimnell (BA 1686, MA 1690).<sup>1</sup> I have often wondered who this jauntily named scholar was, and this note is an answer to that question.

Trimnell's donation was entered into the college library's Benefactors' Book under the year 1688, along with a second book, Cornelis Bontecoe's *Metaphysica* (Leiden, 1688, now BT3.191.12). Newton's book was not exactly easy reading, and alas I think it is quite unlikely that the donor bothered—our copy is clean, other than the careful correction of the errata, a necessity in mathematical books, and it may simply have been acquired for the purposes of donation. If so, it is an interesting, because very early, example of Newtonian prestige.



Trimnell's two donations:

Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica* (London, 1687) New College Library, Oxford, BT1.128.26  
and Cornelis Bontecoe's *Metaphysica* (Leiden, 1688), New College Library, Oxford, BT3.191.12

Who was Bonfoy Trimnell and why is so very little known about him? Unfortunately, the answer to the second question is simply that he died young, in college, in 1691, of some kind of spotted fever. As the Oxford antiquary Anthony Wood wrote in his diary:

---

I am extremely grateful to Stephen Anderson, Rodewald Lecturer in Classical Languages, New College, for setting me right, once again, in my translation of Trimnell's poem below.

<sup>1</sup> New College, Library Benefactors' Book, New College Library, Oxford, BT1.4.6, p. 133. Our copy is #186 in the census of Mordechai Feingold and Andrej Svorencik, 'A Preliminary Census of Copies of the First Edition of Newton's *Principia* (1687)', *Annals of Science* 77 (3) (2020), 253–348.

July 8, W., Trimnell, fellow of New Coll., died of the purples, in the evening about 7 or 8. Buried late that night. His funerall on Sunday night following (July 12); buried in the corner of the north-east cloyster.<sup>2</sup>

If Wood is right about the burial then Trimnell lies quite close to where his books are today stored, but his stone is no longer present, or if present no longer legible.

Trimnell's career, then, never really got started. But the surname was once a well-known Wykehamist one, not least because Bonfoy's brother Charles became the Bishop of Winchester. The father, also Charles, from Bremhill in Wiltshire, had been a scholar of Winchester College, entering in 1643 and progressing to New College in 1647, only to be expelled the next year by the Parliamentary Visitors.<sup>3</sup> He quietly transferred to Cambridge, and completed his studies there. How he came to name one of his sons 'Bonfoy' has its origins, we are told, in his brief period at New College:

... he was one day lolling leisurely out of his window, and observed a party of strangers in the quadrangle, seemingly at a loss what to do. He very good humouredly resolved to go down, and give them information: and accosted them accordingly. They said they had expected a friend to guide them, but he had failed; Mr. Trimnell offered his services, and shewed the Chapel, &c. and proffered his attendance to other Colleges, if they wished, which they accepted. The gentleman (a Mr. Bonfoy) so much pleased with Mr. Trimnell, that he begged him to accompany the party to the inn, where they took refreshment, and the friendship was continued from this circumstance: for Mr. Bonfoy, some time after, wrote to Mr. Trimnell to say, he understood he was intended for the church, and he did not know if he had higher expectations of patronage, but if he would accept the living of Ripton Abbots, he should be happy to present it to him, as it was then vacant, and in his (Mr. Bonfoy's) gift. Mr. Trimnell accepted it, and lived there as Rector forty years.—Thirteen children were born there.

One of the sons was christened Bonfoy; and the descendants of that Mr. Bonfoy have kept up a communication with the family until now.<sup>4</sup>

Charles indeed went to 'Ripton Abbots' (a.k.a. Abbots Ripton) in 1656 and remained there until his death in 1702, so for more than 'forty years'. He is remembered in his own church by a plaque.<sup>5</sup> Charles's eldest son, Charles, went to Winchester College in 1674 and on to New College in 1681; Bonfoy followed him to both locations in 1675, and 1682; and later a third son David in 1686, and 1693.<sup>6</sup> An even younger son, William, took the Eton and King's College route, and ended up as Dean of Winchester.<sup>7</sup> The eldest had a meteoric career as a prominent but moderate Whig churchman, missing out by one vote on the Wardenship of New College after the demission of Warden Traffles in 1703, but becoming Bishop of Norwich in 1708, and achieving Winchester in 1721; younger William's deanship in that diocese from 1723 can hardly have been coincidental.

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, antiquary, of Oxford, 1632–1695, described by Himself*, ed. Andrew Clark, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society, 1891–1900), III, 366. Wood elsewhere (*Life and Times*, I, 349) writes 'the spotted fever or purples'. The annotation in the college register, quoted by Clark in his edition of Wood, is 'exanthematum lue', literally 'by the disease of skin-eruptions'.

<sup>3</sup> Montagu Burrows, ed., *The Register of the Visitors of the University of Oxford, from A.D. 1647 to A.D. 1658* (London: Camden Society, 1881), p. 530; Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses; Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Hyde Cassan, *The Lives of the Bishops of Winchester, from Birinus, the First Bishop of the West Saxons, to the Present Time*, 2 vols (London: C. and J. Rivington, 1827), II, 401.

<sup>5</sup> *The Victoria County History of the County of Huntingdon*, 3 vols (London: St. Catherine Press, 1926–38), II, 202–7.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Frederick Kirby, *Winchester Scholars* (London: Henry Frowde; Winchester: P. and G. Wells, 1888), pp. 180, 199, 201, 208.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Atterbury, *The Miscellaneous Works of Bishop Atterbury, with Historical Notes by John Nichols*, 5 vols (London: Printed for and by the Editor, 1789–[99]), V, 244–53; *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, ed. C. E. Doble *et al.*, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), I (July 4, 1705–March 19, 1707), 218–19; Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*.

Charles died in that year and after an elaborate funeral overseen by his brother he was interred in his cathedral near to Wykeham himself, and a scholar from the nearby college was supplied by the headmaster to deliver a suitable oration. Charles, in fact, is encountered as a young man in our library too, as two pages after the donations of Bonfoy, we find those of his elder brother, also under 1688, comprising thirteen volumes, to his brother's two.<sup>8</sup>

Bonfoy would remain a blank for us were it not for the stray survival of one Latin poem of his composition. It is headed '5° Maij 1689 Ad Eximium Juvenem & Rei Musicæ Callentissimum D<sup>nm</sup> Jacobum Worsley' ('5 May 1689, To the excellent young man, and one most practised in music, Master James Worsley'). This survives as a single sheet in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC. It bears text on one side only, and its three horizontal folds and remains of a seal on the reverse suggest strongly that this is the original gift as passed by Bonfoy to his friend Worsley. It is a birthday present, and comprises eight stanzas in Sapphic metre (the best-known classical example is Catullus 51, 'Ille mi par esse deo videtur'). Now the birthday boy was one of the gilded youth, son of Sir James Worsley of Pylewell Park, Hampshire. In adult life Worsley would assume the baronetcy from his cousin, and sit in ten parliaments stretching over four decades. Young James took no degree, gave no books, and departed for the Middle Temple in 1691.<sup>9</sup>

Carmen Genathliacum

A Birthday Poem

5° Maij 1689

Ad Eximium Juvenem &  
Rei Musicæ Callentissimum  
D<sup>nm</sup> Jacobum Worsley

5 May 1689

To the excellent youth,  
and one most skilled in music,  
Master James Worsley

Te canit vates Lyricen sonori  
Artifex nervi, citharæque vindex,  
Percutis molles bene qui perito  
Pectine chordas.

Of you, lyrist, the poet sings, artificer  
Of the sounding string, champion of the lute,  
You who strike well the soft chords  
With skilful plectrum.

Cùm modis vestros modularis aptis  
Nobiles versus, numerosque dulces;  
Quam susurratur Lyricum subactas  
Murmur in Aures!

When in fit measures you play  
Your noble verses and your sweet rhythms,  
How the lyric murmur is whispered  
In subdued ears!

Te sequor raptus, placidosque cantus,  
Quis movet nostrum Lyra blanda molem;  
Horrido passu velut insecutus  
Orphea truncus.

Rapt I follow you and your gentle music,  
By which the seductive lyre moves our bulk;  
Just like tree-trunk following Orpheus  
With bristling step.

Te sequor Conjux, ut Apollo Daphnen,  
Pulcra tu vati Catherina Virgo  
Nulla formosum superat Jacobum  
Fronte decorâ.

As a spouse I follow you, as Apollo does Daphne  
To the poet you are beautiful, maid Catherine,  
But no maid surpasses handsome James  
With shining brow.

---

<sup>8</sup> He gave many works in English and in Latin by the Cambridge philosopher and theologian Henry More, including More's three-volume *Opera omnia*, as well as recent books by Matthew Hale and Isaac Wake. His Hale donation, a copy of *An Essay touching the Gravitation, or Non-Gravitation of Fluid Bodies, and the reasons thereof* (1673, 1675) is no longer present in the library.

<sup>9</sup> For him see Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, and *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1690–1715*, ed. D. Hayton *et al.*, 5 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), V, 920–21.

Huc scyphos ferte & genijs jocosis  
Vina fundantur celeres ministri,  
Vos odoratos properate circum  
    Spargere flores!

Mense sub verno celebramus ortus.  
Nobiles cunas Iuvenis colendi,  
Amplius qui dat iubar ex ocellis  
    Lumine Maio.

Innocens circum patera irrotetur  
Apta potantes dare nos facetos;  
Labra Natalis recolendus inter  
    Prima Jacobi.

Amovet quisquis cyathum falerni,  
Respuens fauces saturare vino;  
Elibat nigras Acherontis undas  
    Guttare sicco.

Bon: Trimnell

Hither bear the goblets, and with jocund spirits  
Let wines be poured, nimble waiters;  
Haste ye to scatter all round  
    Sweet-smelling flowers!

In a spring month we celebrate your birthday.  
The noble cradle of a youth to be cherished,  
Who gives a greater radiance from his eyes  
    Than Maytime light.

Let the harmless bowl be circulated  
Fit to make us witty as we drink;  
To be resumed amid the first vessels  
    Is the birthday of James.

Whoever removes the cup of Falernian,  
Refusing to soak his throat with wine,  
Pours out black waves of Acheron  
    From a dry gullet.

Bonfoy Trimnell

William Poole  
Fellow Librarian  
New College, Oxford