

# The Family and Connections of John Wilkins, 1614–72

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## SUMMARY

*John Wilkins was a leading protagonist of the new science in the middle years of the 17th century, prominent in the 'Experimental Philosophy Club' in Oxford in the 1650s and its successor, the Royal Society, in the 1660s. This article provides the personal background to his intellectual and institutional career. Son of an Oxford goldsmith originating from Hook Norton, he was influenced in his early years by his maternal grandfather, the formidable Puritan John Dodd, ejected rector of Hanwell. He attended both school and university at Oxford, where his intellectual interests eventually distanced him from Dodd's religious and political environment. Wilkins spent the Civil War years in London, becoming chaplain to the exiled Elector Palatine before being appointed warden of Wadham by the Parliamentary Visitors in 1648. Drawing largely on wills, this article explores his relations with his siblings, including his brother Timothy, soldier, university bedel, and tavern-keeper; and with his half-kin, most notably the writer Walter Pope, son of his mother's second marriage, to the chaplain of All Saints, Oxford. A (hitherto unknown) marriage in the 1640s is investigated. Much better known is Wilkins's subsequent marriage in 1656 to the widow Robina French, sister to Oliver Cromwell. After the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660 Wilkins was to try to explain away his marriage, but however embarrassing it may have been, he treated Robina's three children by her first husband and possibly Robina herself decently. He also protected other members of the Cromwell family and tried to arrange for his nephew Richard Cromwell, briefly Lord Protector, to return quietly to England. Wilkins's cousin, meanwhile, continued the goldsmith tradition in Oxford. While Wilkins was an ambitious man, his personal relationships show a basic decency which helped to win him friends in a variety of circles.*

John Wilkins, intruded Warden of Wadham (1648–59), Master of Trinity College, Cambridge (1659–60), Bishop of Chester (1668–72), is a well-known figure in 17th-century intellectual history. He wrote popular scientific works. He was the first person to expound in English Galileo's development of the Copernican theory of the earth as a planet, circling the sun. He suggested that the moon was a world, like the earth, complete with life, and explored the possibility of flying there. He explained cryptography and the practicalities of mechanics. He was the principal host for the informal scientific meetings in Oxford in the 1650s, which were one of the roots of the Royal Society. As warden of Wadham he took a lead in defending the intellectual independence of the University against radical reformers. He married Oliver Cromwell's sister Robina in 1656, and was influential with Oliver's son Richard, Oliver's successor first as Chancellor of the University, then as Lord Protector. He chaired the meeting of 28 November 1660 which effectively inaugurated the Royal Society, and, as one of its two secretaries until 1668, took a leading role in its organisation. There was 'scarce any invention which this Nation has produced in our Age' but 'it has in some way or other been set forth by his assistance' wrote Robert Hooke. He was heavily involved in abortive schemes in 1668 for the 'comprehension' of some, at least, of the religious Nonconformists into the established Church, and for greater liberty for those still left outside. He published in 1668 *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*, an attempt to create a universal language on a systematic basis which also, by avoiding ambiguity, would help towards the solution of philosophical problems. He figures as one of the founding fathers of Anglican latitudinarianism.

Unsurprisingly, studies of Wilkins have concentrated on him as an intellectual, a politician and a facilitator of science.<sup>1</sup> His private life has been neglected. However, various pieces of evidence, especially testamentary evidence, cast a good deal of light on Wilkins's personality and family circumstances. He came from an Oxford and Oxfordshire family. His grandfather, John Dodd, the ejected rector of Hanwell and best-selling religious author, was an important influence on him in his early years, and the connection played its part in the making of his career. His relatives continued to pay a role in the City and the University after his departure from Oxford in 1659. John Aubrey described him as a 'lusty, strong grown, well set, broad shouldered person, cheerful and hospitable'. Anthony Wood, on the other hand, apparently under pressure from John Fell, while acknowledging his intellectual gifts, purported to find nothing 'deficient in him but a constant mind and settled principles'; by implication he had married Robina Cromwell to further his career.<sup>2</sup> I hope to show that his assistance to various members of the protectoral family after the Restoration, including his nephew Richard Cromwell, shows him in good light. More generally his family life provides a fuller picture of his personality, and helps to set his public persona in context.

### EARLY YEARS

John Wilkins's father was Walter Wilkins, who had been an apprentice of the Oxford goldsmith William Wright. Walter gained his freedom of the city in 1610. He may not have confined his work to precious metals. A 'Wilkins the smith' was paid 9s. in 1613–14 for 'chaining of 152 volumes in folio' for the new Bodleian Library. Walter came from a well-established Hook Norton family. Walter's father John, evidently a substantial weaver, made his will in March 1605, mentioning six sons, one of them Walter, an apprentice. Another son, Gerard, an unbeneficed clergyman and graduate of Magdalen Hall, drew up his will in September, 1606.<sup>3</sup> In 1611 Walter Wilkins married Jane Dodd at Hanwell, the parish of which her father John Dodd had been rector until he had been suspended in 1604 and was deprived, for Nonconformity, in 1607. Dodd's successor as rector, Robert Harris, was very much a man in Dodd's mould, indeed a close friend of his, and Dodd remained a presence in his old parish. Walter and Jane had a daughter, Mary, born in 1612, baptised at Hanwell. John was born on 14 February 1614 (i.e. 1613 Old Style) and is said to have been baptised at Fawsley, just over the Northamptonshire border, where his grandfather had taken refuge.

<sup>1</sup> See especially Barbara J. Shapiro, *John Wilkins, 1614–1672: An Intellectual Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969); Hans Aarsleff, in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, ed. Charles C. Gillespie (1970–80), xiv, 361–81; Blair Worden, 'Cromwellian Oxford', in *The History of the University of Oxford iv: The Seventeenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (1997), 733–72; Rhodri Lewis, 'John Wilkins's *Essay* (1668) and the Context of Seventeenth-Century Artificial Languages in England' (Oxf. Univ. unpubl. D.Phil. thesis, 2003); R.L. Helps, 'Some Aspects of the Life of Bishop John Wilkins, 1614–1672' (Exeter Univ. unpubl. M.A. thesis, 1975; additional copy in Wadham College Muniments). In spite of its title Mr Helps's thesis ends at the start of Wilkins's career in 1638, but is exhaustive to that point. I am very much indebted to his pioneering work, though unable to accept his systematic disparagement of Wilkins's intellectual gifts. The quotation from Robert Hooke is from the preface to *Micrographia* (1665).

<sup>2</sup> John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Andrew Clark (1898), ii, 299–302; Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* (1813–20), iii, 967–71. For the controversy, see Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 251–3.

<sup>3</sup> H.E. Salter (ed.), *Oxford City Council Acts, 1583–1626* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxxvii, 1928), 200. Gwen Hampshire (ed.), *The Bodleian Library Account Books, 1613–1646* (Oxf. Bibliog. Soc. new series, xxi, 1983), 6.

Oxfordshire Record Office (O.R.O.), MS. Wills Oxon 194.41 (John), 193.230 (Gerard). Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses, 1500–1714* (1891–2), iv, 1633. Gerard was presumably a godson and perhaps a protégé of the local landowner, Sir Gerard Croker; see Margaret Dickins, *A History of Hook Norton* (1928), 60. For William Wright, see W.G. Hiscock, *A Christ Church Miscellany* (1946), 135–6.

Further children were Timothy, born in 1617, Peter, 1619, Martha, 1621, and Jane, 1623, the last three baptised at All Saints, Oxford.<sup>4</sup> In 1618 Walter took a 41-year lease from the city of what is now 118-19 High Street; he may have been responsible for commissioning the still-surviving wall paintings on the first floor. In 1618 he became a Common Councillor, and went on to hold various civic offices, rising to chamberlain. John Aubrey records Francis Potter of Trinity College speaking of Walter as 'a very ingenious man and [one who] had a very mechanical head; he was much for trying of experiments, and his head ran much upon the perpetual motion'. Walter, however, was already a sick man when he made his will in February 1622. He left £40 to his eldest son John, just 8 years old, to be paid when he reached the age of 21; £20 each to his other children, 40s. each to a nephew and niece, Samuel and Margaret Wilkins, 10s. to the poor of All Saints, and another 10s. to improve the seating in the church. His wife Jane was to be his executrix, assisted by Walter's brother Thomas Wilkins and Jane's brother Timothy Dodd, described as of Hanwell. After what was presumably a protracted illness Walter was buried at All Saints on 6 December 1623.<sup>5</sup>

His widow Jane remarried, probably in 1627. Her new husband was Francis Pope, *capellanus* (in effect the officiating parish minister) at All Saints. Pope, from Wiltshire, son of a plebeian, was educated at Winchester and New College (B.A. 1619, M.A. 1622), and had since (1623) incorporated at Cambridge. He is mentioned briefly by Anthony Wood as 'a puritan preacher at Allhallowes' [All Saints], responsible for stirring up the unseemly habit among Brasenose undergraduates of sneering at their betters, most notably at William Chillingworth of Trinity, rising hope of the Arminian party: 'an ounce of Popery is better than a shillingsworth of Arminianism'. A son, Walter Pope, was baptised at All Saints on 30 November, 1628; a daughter, Sarah, on 23 July 1630. Francis himself was buried there on 20 November 1631. He left no will, but Jane was given the administration of his estate. An inventory attached to the administration papers shows the family still occupying the house leased by Walter Wilkins, the lease (presumably now with some twenty-eight years to run) reckoned to be worth £120. The house was modestly furnished; the inventory mentioned Pope's books in his study, worth £30.<sup>6</sup>

Jane herself died in June 1635, and was buried in her turn at All Saints. Her will made her father, John Dodd, the sole executor, with power to dispose of her estate to her children severally at his discretion; if he were unwilling to act, her brother Timothy Dodd was to take charge. John Wilkins may well have felt aggrieved at these arrangements. Now 21, he might have expected to act as executor, and, as eldest son, to receive a designated legacy to supplement the £40 he would now have received from his father, rather than depending on his grandfather's discretion. Once again there was an inventory. The value of the lease had

<sup>4</sup> Aubrey and Wood, presumably relying on information from Wilkins's sister Martha, gathered in 1673, give John's date of birth as 14 February 1614, at Fawsley, but there is no baptism entry for him in the surviving Fawsley registers, or apparently in any other parish registers; see the exhaustive discussion in Helps, *Some Aspects*, 1-24, and Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 254-5. Neither does there seem to be documentary evidence for Timothy's baptism. For the other children see O.R.O. All Saints, Oxford, par. reg. For Walter Wilkins's marriage to Jane Dodd, O.R.O. Hanwell par. reg.

<sup>5</sup> For Walter Wilkins's civic career, see *City Council Acts*, index. Catherine Cole, 'The Wall Paintings at No. 118 High Street, Oxford: A Possible Attribution', *Oxoniensia*, xxxvii, 1972, 205-8. Potter on Walter Wilkins, Aubrey, *Lives*, ii, 299-300. Walter Wilkins's will, O.R.O. MS. Wills 197.78.

<sup>6</sup> O.R.O. All Saints, Oxford, par. reg. for Jane's remarriage. *V.C.H. Oxon.* iv, 371 for the chaplaincy at All Saints, appointed by the rector of Lincoln College, who was *ex officio* rector of the church. J. Foster, *Alumni*, iii, 1180, and J. and J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses to 1751* (Cambridge, 1922-7), iii, 380, for Pope. A. Wood, *Life and Times* (ed. A. Clark) (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xix, xxi, xxvi, xxx, xl, 1891-1900), ii, 96. For administration of Francis Pope's estate and inventory, Oxf. Univ. Archives, Wills Proved in the Court of the Chancellor (available on microfilm); cf. John Griffiths, *An Index to Wills in the Court of the Chancellor* (1862), 49.

now fallen to £100. Francis Pope's books had disappeared; Jane's own books, kept in the great chamber, were reckoned worth only £1, and her 'wearing apparell' at £6 13s. 4d. Interestingly, given Walter Wilkins's trade, neither inventory mentions any metal more valuable than silver. John Dodd evidently took up the burden of the executorship, in spite of being by now well over 80, since in May 1637 he renewed the lease of the property for a further forty years. The house was rented to Walter Wilkins's former apprentice, the goldsmith Thomas Berry, who presumably bought out the family when he took out a further lease for himself in 1652.<sup>7</sup>

John Wilkins attended Edward Sylvester's private school in All Saints parish. This was a remarkable institution. Sylvester, a Balliol graduate, was a distinguished classical scholar, 'the common drudge of the university either to make, correct or review the Latin sermons of certain dull theologians' according to Anthony Wood. In later years he would preside at an annual dinner for old pupils, who included Wilkins's near contemporary, colleague and rival, John Owen, dean of Christ Church and vice-chancellor, Henry Wilkinson, principal of Magdalen Hall, and a bevy of doctors and other distinguished scholars. Sylvester would 'feed their minds with learned discourses and criticisms in grammar'. In May 1627, aged 13, Wilkins matriculated at New Inn Hall at Oxford, at about the time of his mother's remarriage. Interestingly, when Wilkins registered his family at a heraldic visitation in London in 1664 he was unable to recall the Christian name of his stepfather, which may suggest that while he was living only a few hundred yards from the family home, he may have kept his distance.<sup>8</sup>

Wood suggests that Wilkins spent a good deal of his childhood with his grandfather, John Dodd, who by 1627 was functioning as the resident minister (though not the vicar) at Fawsley. Quite soon, but at an unknown date, Wilkins moved from New Inn Hall to Magdalen Hall. The reason is unknown; the connection with Magdalen Hall through Wilkins's long-dead uncle Gerard was presumably fortuitous. Both halls were noted for their Puritanism, and were therefore appropriate for John Dodd's grandson; John Wilkinson, the principal of Magdalen Hall, was severely reprimanded in 1631 for stirring up anti-Laudian preaching. For part of Wilkins's time there his tutor was John Tombes, later famous as a committed Baptist; but it seems unlikely that Tombes had adopted Baptist views as early as this. Wilkins took his B.A. in October 1631, a year later than normal, perhaps because of the departure of Tombes in 1630. He took his M.A. in June 1634, and stayed on for a while as a tutor. Among his pupils was the future physician and philosopher Walter Charleton: he 'profited much beyond his years' from Wilkins's teaching in logic and philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

In March 1637 Wilkins was ordained deacon, in February 1638 priest, in both cases by the Bishop of Oxford, John Bancroft. The long-absentee vicar of Fawsley (in Peterborough diocese), John Spicer, died in March 1637, and Wilkins was appointed by the patron, Richard Knightley, as his successor in June 1637. Probably this was a nominal appointment, to provide Wilkins with a 'title' for ordination, while allowing Dodd to continue his ministry there. Possibly Knightley was nervous of objections if he were to try to appoint Dodd himself

<sup>7</sup> Jane's will, Oxf. Univ. Archives, as above. H.E. Salter (ed.) *Oxford City Properties* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. lxxxiii, 1926), 127 for the lease.

<sup>8</sup> Wood, *Athenae*, iii, 967; Aubrey, *Lives*, ii, 299–302. For Sylvester's school, see Anthony Wood, *Fasti* (3rd ed. 1815–20), ii, 34–5. For the 1664 heraldic visitation, see J.B. Whitmore and A.W. Hughes Clarke (eds.), *London Visitation Pedigrees, 1664* (Harleian Soc. main series, xcii, 1940), 149–50.

<sup>9</sup> Tyacke (ed.), *History of the University*, iv, 64, 200. For Tombes, see *Dictionary of National Biography*, and the entry for Wilkins in *Biographica Britannica* (1747–66), vi, pt. ii, 4266–75. For Charleton, Wood, *Athenae*, iv, 752.

to the living. If so, they were overcome, and Dodd soon succeeded his grandson as vicar, at a date unknown, remaining there until his death in 1645, aged at least 94. Wilkins became private chaplain to Lord Saye and Sele, of Broughton Castle. By 1640, at the latest, he had moved to a chaplaincy with George, Lord Berkeley. He had also, in 1639, been incorporated as M.A. in Cambridge.<sup>10</sup>

Wilkins's move to Berkeley's service, out of the circle of Dodd and Saye and Sele, was a turning point in his life. Dodd was a revered patriarch, a renowned preacher, author of best-selling books and pamphlets on practical religious topics, including an exposition of the Ten Commandments which earned him the nickname 'Decalogue Dodd'. Fawsley lay at the heart of the connection of Puritan nobles and gentlemen from the Oxford-Northampton-Warwick border area who were leading opponents of Charles I's religious and financial policies. John Pym took refuge at Fawsley in 1637. A meeting of the Providence Island Company held at Preston Copes (adjoining Fawsley, and also owned by Richard Knightley) saw the formulation of concerted tactics to challenge the legality of the king's levy of ship-money. There were present, among others, Lord Saye and Sele, Lord Brooke, Richard Knightley and John Pym. The result was the celebrated challenge to the royal writ by John Hampden, and the resulting law case. Two years later, in April 1639, Saye and Sele and Brooke reluctantly enrolled in the king's army against the Scots, refused an oath of allegiance and were sent home. In 1640 they headed the peers who advocated solidarity with the Commons in the Short Parliament, and went on to play a similar role in the Long Parliament. Had he remained with Saye and Sele Wilkins would have been in the eye of the political storm.<sup>11</sup>

Instead he devoted himself to popularising the current debate on astronomy, firmly supporting the Copernican-Galilean position. His *The Discovery of a World in the Moone* appeared in March 1638. A new edition (February 1640) included *A Discourse Concerning a New Planet*, which argued that the earth itself was a planet orbiting the sun. Both these books were published anonymously, and without a dedication, an indication that such views were still dangerous. Although Wilkins claimed that the *Discovery* was 'the fruit of some lighter studies, being first thought of and finished in the space of some few weeks', the books showed an impressive grasp of the learned European controversy about Galileo's theories. A principal theme of both was the claim that the words of the Scriptures were of no authority in 'philosophy' (i.e. natural science). 'The phrases which the Holy Ghost uses concerning these things are not to be understood in a literal sense, but rather as vulgar expressions'; 'the Holy Ghost, in many places of scripture, does plainly conform his expressions unto the errors of our conceits'.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ordinations, O.R.O. Oxford Diocesan Papers, Subscription Book 1628-46, e 13, 376, 399. H.I. Longden, *Northamptonshire and Rutland Clergy from 1500* (1938-43), iv, 107. Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 19-21, 257-8. Venn, *Alumni Cantab.* iv, 410.

<sup>11</sup> For Dodd see, most conveniently, *Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *D.N.B.*) and William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, 1938), 54-63; his personal connections provide a roll-call of Puritan leaders from Elizabeth's reign onwards. For Fawsley and Saye and Sele, A.P. Newton, *The Colonising Activities of the English Puritans* (1914), 240-3; Conrad Russell, 'The Parliamentary Career of John Pym', in his *Unrevolutionary England* (1990), 205-28; Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (1992), 717-28, 744-5, 822-3, 868, 877, 918; J.T. Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry* (1984), 178-83. Interestingly Dodd himself, if Wilkins's later testimony can be trusted, disapproved of taking up arms against the king in 1642; William Lloyd, *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of John, Bishop of Chester* (1672), 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Revised Short Title Catalogue, English Books, 1475-1640* (1986-91), nos. 25640-1. See Alexander Rosse's [Ross] riposte *The New Planet No Planet* (1646), dedicated to Berkeley, in which he expresses surprise that 'the Gentleman, who came down a while ago from the Moon, with news of a late discovery there ... is one who hath relation to your lordship'. On Scripture, see Wilkins's *Discovery* (1638), Prop. II, *Discourse* (1640), Prop. III, and *Mercury, or the Secret and Swift Messenger* (1641).



In 1641 Wilkins produced under his own name a new work, *Mercury, or the Secret and Swift Messenger*, about cryptography and means of communication, which was important in foreshadowing his later interest in linguistics. This was dedicated to Berkeley. It also included five commendatory poems. One was by Sir Francis Kynaston, a courtier who in 1635 had tried to establish an 'academy of learning' for young nobles. One was by Richard West, a student of Christ Church who was a regular contributor to those books of poems produced by the university in honour of royal visits, marriages and births. Three were by brothers-in-law, Richard Hatton, Tobias Worlrich [Wolrich] and Anthony Aucher, all with a Cambridge background; Aucher was to fight for the king in both civil wars. Berkeley himself had court connections and was the recipient of a large number of dedications, including those for Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* (1623), and Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1630). Wilkins had escaped from the orthodox Puritan world of Dodd into a literary-intellectual sphere for which his own interests had prepared him, and which lay athwart the developing political and religious divide. Does this represent some degree of self-assertion against a dominating grandfather?<sup>13</sup>

Fortunately, perhaps, for Wilkins, Berkeley, though clearly no Puritan, chose to remain in London through the civil wars, implicitly if inactively supporting the Parliamentary cause. Indeed, in spite of falling foul of the New Model Army in 1647, he attended the House of Lords, somewhat spasmodically, until it effectively abolished itself by voting against the trial of the king on 2 January 1649.<sup>14</sup> Wilkins spent the war in London. He may have been responsible for the education of his brother Peter and of his half-brother Walter Pope (see below), especially after the death of John Dodd in 1645. He did not serve as a chaplain in the Parliamentary army. He was not a member of the Westminster Assembly, called to thrash out a new religious settlement; as yet he had no reputation as a theologian. He was at least briefly a preacher at Grey's Inn, and in 1647 was elected by the congregation to be minister of the Savoy Chapel. More important was his becoming chaplain to Charles-Louis [Karl-Ludwig] the Elector Palatine. Charles-Louis was the eldest son of Frederick, the Elector whose election to the throne of Bohemia in 1618 had precipitated the Thirty Years War, and of his wife Elizabeth, Charles I's sister (the 'Winter Queen'). Frederick had been ejected both from Bohemia and from the Palatinate, and had become the symbol of the Protestant cause against Habsburg domination of the Empire and of Europe. Charles-Louis succeeded him in this role, and installed himself in London from September 1644, in receipt of a large subsidy from Parliament and holding considerable court, even while his younger brothers

<sup>13</sup> For Kynaston, see *D.N.B.* Aucher and Worlrich were both sons-in-law to Sir Robert Hatton, so it is probable that Richard Hatton was the Cambridge man of that name, Sir Robert's son; see Venn, *Alumni Cantab. sub nominibus*. For Sir Robert Hatton, also an active Royalist during the Civil War, M.F. Keeler, *The Long Parliament, 1640-1: A Biographical Study* (Philadelphia, 1954), 208-9. For Aucher see B.D. Henning, *The Commons, 1660-1690* (History of Parliament Trust, 1983), i, 569-70. Franklin B. Williams, *Index of Dedications in English Books before 1641* (1962), 16, for dedications to Berkeley.

<sup>14</sup> Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 20-1, confuses Lord Berkeley with his son and namesake who succeeded him in 1658. For Berkeley's attendance at the Lords, see *Lords Journal* vols. iv-x *passim* (q.v. index volume). His principal recorded activity was to try to win compensation for the damage inflicted on Berkeley Castle during the first Civil War. He was one of seven peers impeached under pressure from the army in September 1647 for colluding with the invasion of Parliament by the London 'peace party' on 26 July. After the impeachment was dropped in June 1648 he became fairly assiduous in attendance in a very depleted House.

Rupert and Maurice fought for their uncle, the king. Some thought Charles-Louis had hopes of becoming king himself.<sup>15</sup>

The suggestion that Wilkins's expertise in mathematics and perhaps especially in cryptography might have been a recommendation for the Elector's service is plausible. By 1645 he was one of a group which met weekly in London to consider scientific theories and to conduct experiments, and which has a good claim to be considered the first manifestation of the eventual Royal Society. Significantly, the prime mover was Theodore Haak, himself an exile from the Palatinate. Wilkins's talents were not confined to mathematics. He had a gift for writing accessibly on a range of subjects. In 1646 there appeared *Ecclesiastes, or a Discourse Concerning the Gift of Preaching*, a handbook for preachers, including lists of biblical commentaries and concordances, and of recommended reading representing a wide range of theological schools, not excluding medieval schoolmen, more modern Catholicism, and Arminianism, as well as the Calvinist classics to be expected from his own background. *Mathematicall Magick* (1648), dedicated to the Elector, expounded the practical application of mathematical principles through mechanical appliances such as leverage and gearing as well as going on to discuss the feasibility of flying machines, submarines and perpetual motion. Wilkins explained that he had begun to collect these notes 'some years since at my spare hours in the University'. In 1649 there followed *A Discourse Concerning the Beauty of Providence*, expounding in a traditional manner God's greater purpose even amidst the confusion of human history; but with more originality instancing the evidence newly provided by microscopes for God's purpose in even the smallest details. Publication, he claimed, had been solicited by 'divers persons (and some of eminent quality) ... before whom he had occasionally preached'. There was to follow in 1651 another practical handbook *A Discourse Concerning the Gift of Prayer*. All of Wilkins's books went into multiple editions.<sup>16</sup>

#### WARDEN OF WADHAM AND MASTER OF TRINITY

Meanwhile, in April 1648, the Parliamentary Visitors who were engaged in purging Royalist Oxford appointed Wilkins to be warden of Wadham College. He was decidedly younger than the other new heads intruded at the same time, many of them established Oxford fellows from the pre-war period and subsequently members of the Westminster Assembly. No doubt John Wilkins had become known as a rising man, helped by his connection with the Elector. But it seems probable that his selection owed something to Robert Harris,

<sup>15</sup> C.H. Firth, *Cromwell's Army* (1902, new ed., 1962), 313, lists Wilkins as a chaplain at the battle of Edge Hill in October 1642, but this is a mistake for William Wickens; see Anne Lawrence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains, 1642-51* (1990), 188 and sources quoted there. R.J. Fletcher (ed.), *The Pension Book of Grey's Inn, 1569-1669* (1901), 357. Robert Somerville, *The Savoy* (1960), 247. For the Elector, see biographies in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig, 1875-1912), xv, 326-31; and *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin, in progress, 1952-), xi, 246-9; and numerous collections of his letters cited there; also a useful overview by J.H. Clapham, 'Charles Louis, Elector Palatine, 1617-80', *Economica*, new series (1940), vii, 381-96.

<sup>16</sup> Lisa Jardine, *On a Grand Scale: Christopher Wren* (2002), 65 for the suggestion about cryptography. Jardine is, however, mistaken in describing Wilkins as 'a committed royalist'. For the London group see the testimony of John Wallis, written to correct Thomas Sprat's emphasis on the subsequent Oxford meetings, discussed in Margery Purver, *The Royal Society: Concept and Creation* (1967), 161-82. For Haak see Pamela R. Barnett, *Theodore Haak, FRS (1605-90)* (The Hague, 1962). For Wilkins's claim about the composition of *Mathematicall Magick*, see the dedicatory epistle.

former rector of Hanwell, his grandfather's old friend and collaborator, who was one of the Visitors, and who himself became president of Trinity.<sup>17</sup>

Soon after his appointment a new career apparently beckoned. The conclusion of peace treaties in Germany in 1648 allowed the Elector to return to the Palatinate. Setting off with Parliament's blessing (and with some embarrassment vis-à-vis his own family, following the trial and execution of his uncle the king in January) in March 1649, the Elector was accompanied by Wilkins. Possibly Wilkins hoped for some sort of important position at the Elector's court, or in the rebuilding of the devastated university at Heidelberg. If so, he was to be disappointed. He was back in Oxford and taking an active role in university and college by July 1649. For the next decade he was to play a major role in university politics, as well as emerging as the principal organiser of the 'Experimental Philosophy Club', which carried on the work of the London group in Oxford.<sup>18</sup>

Tantalisingly, there survives one letter from Wilkins from the period before his appointment at Wadham. This was offered for sale in 1984. Unfortunately I have been unable to trace what happened to the letter, and am dependent on a summary in the sale catalogue. The letter, dated 1 December 1645, is to Sir Gregory Norton 'at his house almost against Charing Cross'. It asks him 'to speak to Captain Falkenbridge to pay unto my wife' £6 13s. 4d. owing to Wilkins. 'Mr Cosen whom [*sic*] is secretary to the Committee for the King's Revenue' promised to speak. 'I am gone about the Prince Elector's Receipts this week', a nice reminder that chaplains also acted as secretaries. On the verso there is a receipt by Norton, dated 9 February 1645 (=1646) for the sum received from Falkenbridge.<sup>19</sup>

Wilkins's apparent marriage is frustratingly obscure. Marriages for various John Wilkinses are listed in the International Genealogical Index, which covers, of course, only parishes for which registers survive, and is not, even then, exhaustive. I have examined the Oxfordshire and London entries. A John Wilkins married Margery or Margaret Sims of Swalcliffe, Oxfordshire, in 1636. A John Wilkins married Anne Taler at St Nicholas Acon, London, 30 August 1641; they were presumably the parents of Elizabeth, baptised at St Martin, Ludgate, 18 January 1645. A John Wilkins married Elizabeth Wallis at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, 15 April, 1645. There also exists a London marriage license of 22 July 1642 for a John Wilkins to marry Anne Dobbs. Our John Wilkins was free to remarry by 1656, but I can find no likely entry for a burial of his first wife. However, Wilkins's first marriage might explain a long-standing puzzle, namely a ruling by the Parliamentary Visitors on 20 January 1652 abolishing the statutory requirement that wardens of Wadham should be unmarried. This might suggest that Wilkins was still married during his first three years at Wadham, although if he were it is odd that this is nowhere mentioned. The decree coincides with the restoration of autonomy to colleges by the Visitors. There may have been

<sup>17</sup> Wilkins seems easily the youngest of fifteen intruded heads of colleges and halls, with the possible exception of Garbrand of Gloucester Hall; see T.E. Reinhart, 'The Parliamentary Visitation of Oxford University, 1646-52' (Brown Univ. unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, 1984), 408-10. For Harris, see W[illiam] D[urham], *The Life and Death of Robert Harris*, D.D. (1660).

<sup>18</sup> For Wilkins's dispensation from taking his D.D. in March 1649 because he was accompanying the Elector, see Montague Burrows (ed.), *The Register of the Visitors of the University of Oxford, 1647-58* (Camden Soc. new series, xxix, 1881), where Wilkins had dispensation 'to wait upon His Highness for six months' in spite of his obligations in Oxford. He was however appointed to committees at Oxford from 9 July 1649; Oxf. Univ. Archives, Register of Convocation, 1647-59, 58-9; Burrows, 258-60. Aubrey and Wood record his visit to Heidelberg, calling at The Hague going and returning: *Brief Lives*, ii, 299-300 and *Athenæ*, iii, 971. Aubrey goes so far as to have him 'well preferred' in Germany. The Elector himself did not reach Heidelberg until September 1649; it may be that Wilkins did not get much further than The Hague.

<sup>19</sup> Winifred A. Myers (Autographs) Ltd, *Catalogue of Autograph Letters*, no. 12, 1984, item 288.



a fear that Wilkins's appointment in 1648 might be retrospectively challenged as unstatutory; or conceivably the Visitors were merely trying to bring the Wadham statutes into line with those of other colleges.<sup>20</sup>

Less mystery attaches to Wilkins's marriage to Oliver Cromwell's sister in 1656. Robina was the youngest of the ten Cromwell children, born after 1607, so eight years or so younger than Oliver.<sup>21</sup> By 1646 she was married to Peter French, roughly a contemporary of Wilkins. French was a graduate of Emmanuel, Cambridge, well known as a Puritan college. Intriguingly, he was also an Oxfordshire man, apparently the son of Thomas French of Wardington, near Banbury. After Cambridge he was appointed to the very rich (£250) rectory of Cottenham in Cambridgeshire on the sequestration of the Royalist incumbent in 1644. Malicious gossip had it that the appointment was in Robina's hands and that she used it to get herself a husband; perhaps not implausible, given that she was about 37 at the time, and Peter French 29. In 1651 French was installed as canon of Christ Church by the Parliamentary Visitors. When Oliver became Protector in 1653 he became an official preacher to the Council, with state lodgings in Whitehall. A sermon he preached at St Mary's in 1654 – on true wisdom being found in the Scriptures rather than 'the books of the philosophers' – may not have pleased Wilkins, who was busily engaged in defending the traditional university syllabus against the attacks of fundamentalist biblicists. French died on 17 June 1655. He bequeathed his lands at Temple Cowley, Church Cowley, 'Haymann Streete' and Ifley to Robina for the benefit of his son Robert and daughters Elizabeth and Rebecca. The provisions seem elaborate, attempting to cover (but unsuccessfully) a host of contingencies. Three prebendaries of Christ Church, all, like himself, intruders, were to be trustees. There were also gifts to various members of the Whateley family, namely: George, of Tower Street, London; Thomas, clerk, of Sutton-under-Brailes; Joyce, a widow; and Cressell, rector of Tadmorton. Thomas was the son of the famous William Whately, Puritan preacher and writer, vicar of Banbury 1610-39, known as the 'roaring boy of Banbury': a reminder once again of the importance of the Banbury 'Puritan connection'. French left a hardly munificent 40s. to the poor of his old parish of Cottenham. He forgave his brother Samuel a debt of £20, directing it be used for apprenticing his children. Finally he left his *Magna Biblia* in five volumes to Emmanuel, or, if the college already had a set, £5 to buy books.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> I.G.I. microfiches at O.R.O. The intriguing possibility that Elizabeth Wallis might be a sister to John Wallis, the celebrated mathematician and Wilkins's colleague in the 1645 scientific meetings, can be discounted: see Arthur Ruderman, *The Personal Life and Family of Dr John Wallis, F.R.S.* (LRR Publications, no. 5, Folkestone, 1997), 5-6. The John Wilkins who married Anne Taler in 1641 was from St Martin's Ludgate. Wadham College Muniments MS. 4/102 for the change of statute. Although the document is endorsed in a contemporary hand 'Wilkins's dispensation for marriage', and contemporaries referred to it in those terms, the document itself is an outright change of the statute, without reference to any individual. By 1656 the story went that it was Peter French who 'through his interest in the Protector, procured a dispensation, long since, for Dr Wilkins to marry if he pleased; and now you see what it is come to': J.R. Magrath (ed.), *The Flemings in Oxford* (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xlv, lxii, lxxix, 1902-24), i, 101. This seems a story too good to be true, but does suggest that Wilkins was believed to be single in 1652.

<sup>21</sup> Oddly the date of marriage is not recorded, but Evelyn believed it had taken place by February 1656: E.S. de Beer (ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn* (1955), iii, 165. For Robina see W.C. Abbott, *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (Cambridge Mass., 1937-47), i, 10, 32, 84, derived from Mark Noble, *Memoirs of the Protectoral House of Cromwell* (3rd ed., 1787), i, 90, ii, 300-1.

<sup>22</sup> Foster, *Alumni*, ii, 535; Venn, *Alumni Cantab.* ii, 178. O.R.O., Wardington, par. reg. Although frequently described as an army chaplain, he does not appear in Lawrence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains*. For Cottenham, see V.C.H. Cambs. ix, 65-6. For the allegation against Robina, see Noble, *Protectoral House*, i, 90. Tyacke (ed.), *History of the University*, iv, 310, 737-8. Peter French's will: P.R.O. PROB 11/244, ff. 300-1. For William Whately see D.N.B. I am grateful to the anonymous reader for the suggestion that 'Haymann Streete' (sic in the original) may be 'Hockmore Street, an outlying part of Ifley parish in Cowley'.

Wilkins's motives for marrying Robina inevitably excited a certain amount of derision. One lampoon ran:

Wadham's warden with great strife  
Hath lost eaton and got a wife  
Shee's nasty, we may gather hence  
Twas not loue but christian Prudence

His half-brother Walter Pope (though very much retrospectively) thought the marriage 'gained him a strong Interest and Authority in the University, and set him at safety and out of the reach of his Adversaries, and also preserved the University from running into Disorder and Confusion'. Evelyn thought his motive was to 'preserve the Universities from the ignorant'.<sup>23</sup> Wilkins himself, as we shall see, was to advance a similar excuse.

Certainly about the time of Wilkins's marriage the fortunes of the vice-chancellor, John Owen, a degree to the radical side of Wilkins in university politics, began to decline. Owen ceased to be vice-chancellor in mid-1657, and at the same time Richard Cromwell, over whom Wilkins had great influence, became chancellor. Wilkins was a keen supporter of the plan to make Oliver Cromwell king. His friend Matthew Wren dedicated both his *Considerations on Mr Harrington's Oceana* (1657) and his *Monarchy Asserted* (first edition January 1659) to Wilkins. Wren, son of the still-imprisoned Laudian Bishop of Ely, was a Royalist by inclination, but his works prudently confined themselves to abstract theory in favour of rule by a single person, and their argument could be read as indifferently Cromwellian or Royalist. One Cambridge source, Robert Creighton, went so far as to claim that Wilkins himself was a secret Royalist, even sending money to Charles II in exile; he alleged that Oliver would accuse his 'Brother Wilkins' of coming 'to ask something or other in favour of the Malignants'. Creighton was writing after the Restoration, and his story seems unlikely. Wilkins put his hopes in Cromwellian monarchy, although possibly keeping his lines open to the Stuart court as insurance. Richard Cromwell's brief period as Protector represented the height of Wilkins's political influence. Edmund Ludlow went so far as to describe him as one of three members of the 'Cabinet Council' during Richard's protectorate (with Robert Boyle's brother Roger, Lord Broghill, and Philip Jones) although I have found no other evidence for his holding such a heady if precarious position. Wilkins's standing with his nephew presumably lay behind the petition by the fellows of Trinity, Cambridge, for Wilkins to become their Master in March 1659, although his actual installation there was not until September, after Richard's ejection from power.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Bodl. Tanner MS. 306, pt. ii, no. 96, f. 371. Hartlib hoped to see Wilkins become Provost of Eton and president of 'a standing council of universal learning' in December 1658; Michael Hunter et al. (eds.), *The Correspondence of Robert Boyle* (2001), i, 294–6. The provostship became vacant on the death of Francis Rous in January 1659: D.N.B. Walter Pope, *Life of Seth [Ward]*, ed. J.B. Bamborough (Luttrell Soc. xxi, Oxford, 1961), 47 (Pope's book was originally published in 1697). For Wilkins's 'Adversaries' even within his own college, see Burrows, *Registers*, 394–7 (for complaints by fellows to the Protector's Council in 1654). *Diary of John Evelyn*, iii, 165; other references in Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 283.

<sup>24</sup> Blair Worden in Tyacke (ed.), *History of the University*, iv, 745–8. Matthew Wren's works, very much derivative of Hobbes, were directed against the republican theories of James Harrington; see Charles Blitzer, *An Immortal Commonwealth; the Political Thought of James Harrington* (New Haven, 1960). For Wilkins in 1659, see Edmund Ludlow, *Memoirs, 1625–72*, ed. C.H. Firth (1894), ii, 61. W.W. Rouse Ball, *Notes on the History of Trinity College Cambridge* (1899), 96–100, both for Wilkins's election, and for Robert Creighton on his alleged Royalism.

## RESTORATION

Wilkins had to leave Trinity in 1660, with the Restoration, in spite of attempts by the fellows to keep him; he had to give way to a prior claim by Henry Ferne based on a patent for the next vacancy which had been issued by Charles I. Presumably as compensation he was appointed dean of Ripon and a prebendary of York, in the summer of 1660. Next year Lord Berkeley, son of his earlier patron, presented him as rector of Cranford in Middlesex, while he was also appointed once more preacher at Grey's Inn. In April 1662 he succeeded his old friend Seth Ward (see below) as vicar of St Lawrence Jewry in London, presented by Charles II, probably at Ward's instigation. Meanwhile he was active in the inauguration and organisation of the Royal Society.

Following the fall of Lord Clarendon in 1667, Wilkins played a leading part under the aegis of the Duke of Buckingham in an attempt to broaden the official basis of the Church, only to be foiled by the strong Anglican feelings in the House of Commons. His vicarage had been burnt down during the Fire of London in 1666, with the loss of his books and household stuff. In 1667 he sold 60 acres of arable land in the North Field at Garsington to Wadham College for £400. (He had bought the land in January 1657 for £355.) His letters emphasised his need for speedy payment because of his losses in the fire. As a result of the fire he was induced in 1668 to publish his *magnum opus* in incomplete form as *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language*. Later that year, following his involvement in the 'comprehension' scheme, he was, to the annoyance of Archbishop Sheldon and the other more high-flying bishops, made Bishop of Chester. True to his principles, he was one of four bishops to oppose the repressive Conventicle Act of 1670.<sup>25</sup>

His marriage to Robina was now a distinct handicap to the ecclesiastical careerist. According to Wilkins's own account, Sheldon teased him as having married 'too near unto you know who'. Wilkins replied: 'I never sought the match. Being proposed to me, I excused myself, which was interpreted a flat denial. When the same matter had been oft solicited, and as often repulsed; I was at last given to understand that to persevere in that resolution would not well consist within the safety of my person, as the posture of affairs stood at that time.' Less than gallant, this sounds very much an *ex post facto* rationalisation. It is difficult to get much sense of Wilkins's relations with Robina. She was some seven years older than he was, almost 50 at the time of their marriage. They had no children but Wilkins seems to have been a good stepfather to her two daughters and her son by her previous marriage. In his will he left his 'dear wife' '£700, two of my best beds' and their furniture, and 'my household goods as my executor shall think convenient for her use'.<sup>26</sup>

His executor was his 'dear friend' John Tillotson, dean of Canterbury (and future archbishop). Tillotson had been a lecturer at St Lawrence Jewry under Wilkins and had married Elizabeth French, Wilkins's elder stepdaughter, on 23 February 1664, Wilkins himself officiating. A *ben trovato* story has Wilkins persuading her: 'you shall have him Betty,

<sup>25</sup> *Cal. State Papers (Dom) 1660-1*, 161, nos. 96-7; interestingly Ferne also claimed that Wilkins as a married man was thereby statutorily disqualified from the mastership: Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 151-2, 161-2. Fletcher (ed.), *Pension Book of Grey's Inn*, 435-6. For his involvement in politics and his relations to the Duke of Buckingham, see, *inter alia*, Douglas R. Lacey, *Dissent and Parliamentary Politics in England, 1661-1689* (New Brunswick, 1969); Alan Cromartie, *Sir Matthew Hale, 1609-76: Law, Religion, Natural Philosophy* (1995); Jon Parkin, *Science, Religion and Politics in Restoration England: Richard Cumberland's 'De Legis Naturae'* (1999). For the effects of the fire, Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 165-9. For Garsington, Wadham College Muniments, MSS. 73/1-73/6D. Publication of *Essay*, see Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 213-4 and Rhodri Lewis, thesis, 220-2.

<sup>26</sup> Bodl. Tanner MS. 314 f. 50 (wrongly referenced in Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 302). For Wilkins's will, P.R.O. PROB 11/341 f.15.

for he is the best polemical divine in England'. Wilkins left £400 to his sister Martha (Thacker) and her children; £400 to the Royal Society; and £200 to Wadham. All his manuscripts were to go to Tillotson, who was to decide on which should be published. The poor of Chester received £20, as did those of Wigan. He was generous to his servants, and mentioned a string of distinguished friends. He also left to his 'son-in-law' [stepson] Robert French £40-worth of books from his study. Wilkins took the waters at Scarborough in July 1672 in an attempt to remove a stone from his kidney. Back in Chester, he entertained Lord Berkeley on 10 August. He died at Tillotson's house in London on 19 November 1672 of what was thought to be a stoppage of the urine due to a stone in the kidney, and was buried at St Lawrence's on 12 December 1672. He claimed to be 'prepared for the great experiment'. An autopsy suggested that the diagnosis had been mistaken, and that Wilkins died from his medication.<sup>27</sup>

Robina lived on until 1689, apparently at her son-in-law Tillotson's house. She drew up a will in February 1685, in which her daughters Elizabeth Tillotson and Robina Cox were left £200 each. (The names Robina and Rebecca seem to be interchangeable; both mother and daughter feature under both names.) A grandchild, Mrs Mary Chadwick, received £400. Tillotson himself, who was once again sole executor, was granted the £100 he had earlier paid Robina for the household goods left her by Wilkins. She evidently possessed some £250 in the hands of Richard Hawkins, £200 of which was due to her daughters under the terms of her first husband's will. She had another £900 in the hands of 'Lord Carrendon'. A Jane Dodd appeared as a servant, as she had also done in Wilkins's will – presumably a poor relation on Wilkins's mother's side. (An Edward Dodd also appears as a witness in Robina's will.) Robina was buried near Wilkins in the chancel of St Lawrence's on 17 June 1689. Archbishop Tillotson was also buried there on 31 November 1694 and his widow Elizabeth on 23 January 1702. Robina's younger daughter, Rebecca/Robina, had married, aged 'about twenty', John Cox, gentleman and widower of Southwark, at St Giles-in-the-Fields on 1 February 1668; the consent of her mother is specifically noted. She died in 1692, and was buried at St Lawrence's on 30 November. Her husband, a member of the Soap Company and a London Common Councillor, was noted as a Nonconformist house preacher, 'a teacher among the fanatics'; he died in 1705. Robina's other child, her son Robert French, matriculated at his stepfather's old college, Wadham, in 1663, aged 17, and took his B.A. in 1666. His not taking the M.A. suggests a reluctance to pursue an ecclesiastical or an academic career, in spite of Wilkins's hopeful bequest of books. He, too, was buried at St Lawrence's, on 14 August 1684.<sup>28</sup>

Also buried at St Lawrence's were Lavinia Walton, on 22 January 1667, and Elizabeth Walton, 12 October 1669, noted as kin to Wilkins and his wife. These suggest a wider sense of obligation on Wilkins's part to his Cromwell connections. They were presumably related to, possibly the daughters of, Valentine Walton, who had married Robina's elder sister, Margaret Cromwell. Whereas Wilkins had been a keen supporter of schemes to make Oliver

<sup>27</sup> Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 297; Aarsleff, *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, 374; A.W. Hughes Clarke (ed.), *The Registers of St Lawrence Jewry* (Harleian Soc. Register Section, vols. lxx–lxxi, 1940–1), i, 172; H.W. Robinson and Walter Adams (eds.), *The Diary of Robert Hooke, 1672–80* (1935), *passim*, see index (I am grateful to Allan Chapman for this reference). Bodl. Lister MS. 3 ff. 193–8 for Scarborough; Lister MS. 34 f. 76 and *Diary of Robert Hooke*, 13–4 for cause of death, and for 'Great Experiment'.

<sup>28</sup> P.R.O. PROB 11/397 f. 364. Can 'Lord Carrendon' be Henry Hyde, second Earl of Clarendon, high in favour with James II in 1685? *Registers of St Lawrence*, ii, 181, 186, 190, 192, 200. J.L. Chester and G.J. Armytage (eds.), *Marriage Licenses issued by Dean and Chapter of Westminster and Vicar-General of Canterbury* (Harleian Soc. xxiii, 1886), 145; J.R. Woodhead, *The Rulers of London, 1660–89* (1965), 53; *Registers of Wadham College, 1613–1719* ed. R.B. Gardiner (1889), 247.

Cromwell king, Walton was a fierce republican who had opposed even his brother-in-law's becoming Protector, and was out of favour from 1653. Active during the brief republican revival of 1659, he was excluded from the 1660 Act of Indemnity, but had already fled abroad to Hanau in Germany. He is said to have worked as a gardener in Flanders, and died before November 1662. He had married, after the death of Margaret, a second wife, daughter of a gentleman called Pym, of Brill, and widow of a Brill gentleman called Austin. Her Christian name is unknown. She retired to Oxford and 'died a little better than in an obscure position' in a house in Catte Street on 14 November 1662. Wilkins must have offered Robina's distressed and prospectless nieces a home. He also kept in touch with his nephew Richard Cromwell in exile, trying unsuccessfully in 1666 to arrange for his quiet return to England; meanwhile Wilkins advised Richard on how best to live inconspicuously in Europe. However awkward his Cromwell connections were to him after 1660, Wilkins seems to have behaved decently by his in-laws.<sup>29</sup>

One of Wilkins's own brothers, Timothy, may also have been something of an embarrassment to him. Timothy, John's junior by some three years, was a drinking friend of Anthony Wood. He fought in the Civil Wars as a Parliamentary captain, but in 1648 was on the Royalist side at the siege of Pontefract. In spite of this he was selected in 1657 (no doubt by his brother's influence) for the university position of superior (or esquire) bedel in Divinity. This part-time ceremonial post was to net him no less than £100 in fees in 1660, when the university celebrated the Restoration by a mass creation of Doctors of Divinity. Wood claims that this happy event prevented the bankruptcy which threatened as a result of his trade as a beer-brewer. He continued to keep a tavern or cook-shop, with a reputation as an epicure, and to be known as 'Captain Wilkins'. He died at his house in Holywell on 4 October 1671, and was buried in St Cross church. His will seems somewhat sparse. His sister Martha Thacker, of London, was his sole executrix. She and her three children were also residuary legatees. His 'brother Dr Pope' [Walter Pope, his half-brother] and his 'brother' [brother-in-law] Gilbert Thacker were left gold to buy rings. His faithful servant Thomas Watson got £10 and 'the bed and bedstock wherein I lay, with a pair of sheets and two blankets'. The poor of St Cross received £5, to be distributed by three servants of Wadham College (Richard Paine, Richard Billingsley and William Stanton). To his 'dear brother the Lord Bishop of Chester' he left 'my silver tankard ... which I desire him to adopt as an acknowledgement of my respect to him'.<sup>30</sup>

Their sister Martha seems to have been a favourite of both John and Timothy. She was presumably the sister visited by Aubrey to provide information on John Wilkins in October 1673. She was married, as we have seen, to Gilbert Thacker of London. He, of St Mary's, Islington, died intestate in 1682. I have traced nothing further of Martha, nor have I knowledge of the fate of Wilkins's eldest sister, Mary. The youngest, Jane, was buried at All

<sup>29</sup> *Registers of St Lawrence*, i, 169, 170. *D.N.B.* sub Walton, Valentine. Noble, *Memoirs of the Protectoral House*, i, 89, ii, 221-8; Wood, *Life and Times*, i, 462. The St Mary's parish register, O.R.O. St. Mary's, Oxford, par. reg., gives her Christian name as Valentine, which is presumably an error. John A. Butler, *A Biography of Richard Cromwell*, (Lewiston, New York, 1994), 147, citing *Cal. State Papers (Dom.) 1665-6*, 299.

<sup>30</sup> Wood, *Life and Times*, i, 215, 329, 444, ii, 185, 231; *Cal. of the Clarendon State Papers* (1869-1932), i, 458-9 lists a Captain T. Wilkins among those surrendering Pontefract to Parliament on 17 December 1648. Pontefract had been won for the Royalist cause by an internal coup on 3 June 1648, so it is possible that Wilkins had been serving there as a Parliamentarian; see Robert Ashton, *The Counter-Revolution: the Second Civil War and its Origins, 1646-8* (1994), 405. For his will see Oxf. Univ. Archives, Wills Proved in the Court of the Chancellor, as above (note 6).



Saints, Oxford, on 14 November 1633, aged 10.<sup>31</sup> Another brother, Peter, evidently a lawyer, represented the university in a lawsuit against the City of Oxford in 1649–50, and again in 1654–5. I have been unable to trace further information.<sup>32</sup>

John Wilkins's half-brother, Walter Pope, on the other hand, was a prominent intellectual figure. Born in 1628 he attended Westminster School, then became a 'pensioner' of Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1645, soon becoming a scholar there on the Westminster foundation. In 1648 he was made a scholar of Wadham by the Visitors, when John Wilkins became warden. Possibly Wilkins wanted his 20-year-old brother under his eye, and perhaps Robert Harris acted once again to do a favour to a grandson of John Dodd. Pope took his B.A. in 1649, his M.A. in 1651, and was appointed a fellow of Wadham by the Visitors in July 1651. He went on to occupy various college offices, including the sub-wardenship. He was junior proctor in 1658, in which capacity he successfully resisted a move to abolish academic caps and gowns. In 1659 he went as tutor to Charles Boyle, Viscount Dungannon, and Richard Boyle on a tour of France; the young men were nephews of Robert Boyle (of 'Boyle's law'), friend and associate of Wilkins in the 'Oxford Club'. Like his brother, Pope made an adroit transition to the new situation in 1660, retaining his fellowship, and being created Doctor of Medicine on the chancellor's (Clarendon's) nomination in September 1661. (Wilkins's friend Matthew Wren had become Clarendon's secretary at the Restoration, while Matthew's cousin Christopher had been at Wadham in 1650–1, and remained very much a protégé of Wilkins.) In June 1662 Pope succeeded Christopher Wren as Professor of Astronomy at Gresham College in London, retaining the chair until 1687. Although usually performing his duties by deputy, he did sometimes lecture, and contributed observations of natural phenomena to the Royal Society, with which he was involved from 1661, before its formal incorporation. He was in Italy in 1664–5, reporting back to Wilkins on, for instance, the mercury mines at Friuli. His main gifts, however, were as a satirical writer, wielding, thought John Aubrey, 'a devilish sharp pen'. He wrote several satirical ballads, and a 'memoir' of Claude Duval, which apparently initiated the genre of celebration of the 'gentlemanly' highwayman. His main work was his *Life of Seth* [Ward], published in 1697.<sup>33</sup>

Ward, a Royalist from Cambridge, had become a fellow-commoner of Wadham while holding the Savilian Chair of Astronomy from 1649 to 1661. He was also briefly (1659–60) president of Trinity College, Oxford, and went on to be successively dean and bishop of Exeter and bishop of Salisbury after the Restoration. Although remaining a friend of Wilkins, Ward's stand in ecclesiastical politics was a good deal closer to the orthodoxy of archbishops Sheldon and Sancroft. The *Life* contains a lively and favourable account of Wadham in Wilkins's time. In 1669 Walter Pope, on Wilkins's nomination, became registrar of the diocese of Chester. Oddly, he is not mentioned in Wilkins's will; possibly his brother

<sup>31</sup> Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 254. Marc Fitch, *Index to the Testamentary Records in the Commissary Court of London*, iv, pt. iii (British Rec. Soc. Index Lib. iii, 1998), 668. O.R.O. All Saints, Oxford, par. reg.

<sup>32</sup> Wood, *Life and Times*, iv, 61. Oxf. Univ. Archives, Convoc. Reg., 1647–59, 73, records an intention to make him the official university solicitor. A Peter Wilkins of London was admitted to the Inner Temple in November 1646: *Students Admitted to the Inner Temple, 1547–1660* (1877), 323. He is not mentioned in the 1664 return by John Wilkins to the heraldic visitation: *London Visitation Pedigrees* (see above, note 8).

<sup>33</sup> Pope, *Life of Seth*, ed. Bamborough, introd.; A.B. Dugan, 'Walter Pope, 1628–1714: A Study of his Life and Work' (unpubl. Oxf. Univ. B.Litt thesis, 1935); D.N.B.; Gardiner, *Registers of Wadham College*, 177; Shapiro, *Wilkins*, 184, 305; Venn, *Alumni Cantab.* iii, 380; G.F. Russell Barker et al., *The Records of Old Westminsters* (1928–92), ii, 753; Nicolas K. Kiessling (ed.), *The Library of Anthony Wood* (Oxf. Bibliog. Soc. third series, v, 2002), nos. 691–6, 3047, 5305. For Duval memoir, see James Sharpe, *Dick Turpin: The Myth of the English Highwayman* (2004). Aubrey's comment is in Maurice Balme, *Two Antiquaries* (2001), 79–81 (my thanks to Allan Chapman for this).

thought he had already done enough for him. He was to live until 1714, aged 85. He never married. He left no will. I have been unable to trace what happened to his younger sister Sarah, the youngest child of Jane Dodd, beyond the record of her baptism in her father's church of All Saints, on 23 July, 1630.<sup>34</sup>

The Wadham College accounts for 1658 include payments to 'Wilkins Goldsmith' (18s. 6d.) and to 'Mr Wilkins his bill for mending plate' (£1 4s. 0d.). None of Walter Wilkins's children had carried on his business as goldsmith. After his death his widow sublet, as we have seen, 119 High St to Thomas Berry, Walter's former apprentice, who was still there in 1637. He bought the lease in 1652, and passed it on to another goldsmith, David Porter, in 1674. Walter's brother Thomas, 'husbandman' of Hook Norton, had a son, Samuel, mentioned in Walter's will, who seems to have become 'Wilkins goldsmith'. Samuel was an assiduous member of the city council from 1651, living in 'a lane with a door below the Checquer [tavern]', between High St and Blue Boar Street. He made his will in September 1688, apparently dying in early 1689. His son John carried on the business, and indeed two John Wilkinses, goldsmiths, worked for various colleges from 1685 to 1728 and from 1728 to 1757.<sup>35</sup> While John Wilkins had risen from an Oxford city childhood to intellectual and social eminence, it was left to his cousin Samuel to put down lasting roots in the city.<sup>36</sup>

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#### NOTE

This article was submitted before the publication of the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* in October 2004. References to *D.N.B.* should be checked against the new edition.

<sup>34</sup> O.R.O. All Saints, Oxford, par. reg. for Sarah Pope.

<sup>35</sup> Wadham College Muniments, 16/1, 172, 182. Cole, 'Wall Paintings', op. cit. (note 5), 206. Salter (ed.), *Oxford City Properties*, 127. Anthony Wood, *City of Oxford*, ed. A. Clark (Oxf. Hist. Soc. xv, xvii, xxxvii,