

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

THE lives of Fellows of the Society, especially of those who have filled any of its administrative posts, may have been so closely interwoven with its history as to shed a new light on the work and activities of the Society. The minutes of the Council and the records to be found in the Journal books usually give but a meagre account of what took place at the meetings so that any additional information which is forthcoming will often be of value.

No record of those whose lives are here described occurs in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and in such cases details are difficult to obtain; much of the information which follows has been gathered from original letters preserved in the Society's archives, from the documents relating to the Mablethorpe estate, from documents which can be consulted at Somerset House or at the British Museum, and from other sources.

Those, whose connexion with the Society are here discussed, are :

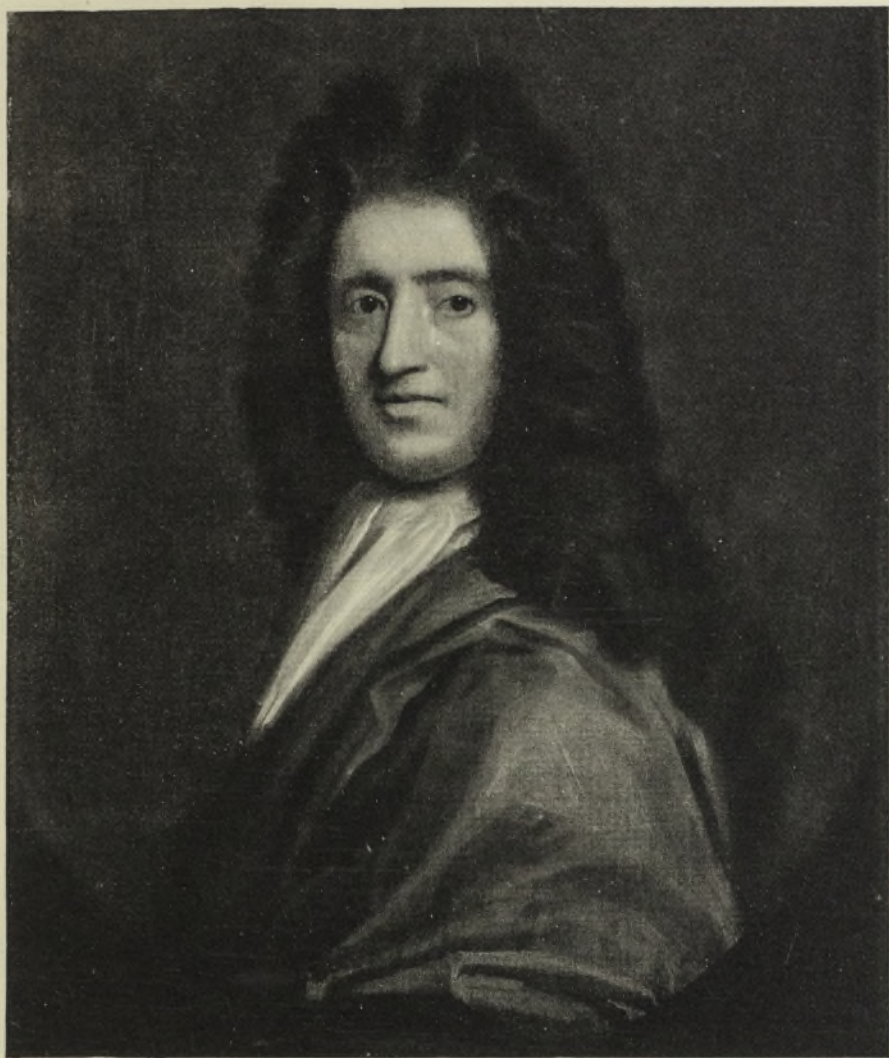
- (a) Francis Aston, a Secretary from 1681 to 1685 ;
- (b) Richard Waller, a Secretary from 1687 to 1709, and from 1710 to the end of 1714 ;
- (c) John Lewis Guillemard, one of the small group of Fellows, who with Dr W. H. Wollaston, founded the Donation Fund in 1828.

FRANCIS ASTON

(1645-1715)

Francis Aston was born in 1644 or 1645. Nothing is known of his parents except that his father died before Francis reached his majority. The earliest reference to the Aston family shows that they were then living in the parish of St Mary-le-Savoy and were maintained by the mother and an elder brother named William. Francis entered Westminster School at the age of twelve and became King's Scholar in

PLATE 6



FRANCIS ASTON
(1645-1715)

1660. He entered Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1661 and was elected Fellow in 1667, having taken his B.A. degree in 1665. Whilst at Cambridge he became a friend of Newton and, when he was about to leave England in 1669 to travel abroad, Newton addressed to him a memorable letter in reply to one from Aston asking for advice 'on the eve of setting out upon my travels.' Newton's letter was a remarkable one in many ways seeing that he was only twenty-seven years of age at the time. The counsels and details of things to be observed which it contains reveal the complete maturity of Newton's ideas. He gave Aston much sound advice on the behaviour necessary to obtain esteem and respect, and told him to observe laws and customs, arts and trades, ships and fortifications, inventions of all kinds, chemical industries, etc.

Aston became a Fellow of the Society in 1678 and was elected a member of the Council on 30 November 1680. On 30 November 1681 he was elected one of the Secretaries of the Society, his colleague being R. Hooke. On 26 May 1683 Sir Thomas Molyneux, a Fellow of the Society, wrote to his brother in Dublin describing a meeting of the Society which he had attended a few days before : ¹

'The President, one Sir John Hoskins, sits in a chair at the upper end of a table, with a cushion before him; the Secretary, Mr Aston, a very ingenious man, at the side on his left hand; he reads the heads, one after the other, to be debated and discoursed of at the present meeting; as also whatever letters, experiments or informations have been sent in since their last meeting. . . .'

Aston was re-elected one of the Secretaries at each successive anniversary, including that of 1685. His colleague in 1682 was again R. Hooke. From 30 November 1682 to the corresponding date in 1684 he was the senior Secretary, with Dr R. Plot ² as his colleague, Aston having taken over the Secretary's key of the chest ³ and the Council Minute books, etc., from R. Hooke at the end of 1682. Dr Plot was replaced by Dr W. Musgrave at the end of 1684 and Dr Tancred Robinson joined F. Aston at the Anniversary Meeting of 1685. On 9 December 1685, ten days after the Anniversary Meeting, Aston

¹ *Dublin University Magazine*, 1841.

² A professor of chemistry at Oxford, and first 'custos' of the Ashmolean Museum.

³ The other two were held by the President and the Treasurer.

brusquely tendered to the Council his resignation of the Secretaryship. This in itself was not a matter of much importance but letters written at that time, in which the causes which led up to his action are referred to and discussed, are very instructive and throw light on some of the Society's administrative difficulties of those years. The Council acted without any delay and met again a week later with the President, Samuel Pepys, in the chair; they elected Sir John Hoskins and Dr T. Gale to be the Society's secretaries, and also resolved that a clerk in place of M. Weeks should be appointed. E. Halley was selected by ballot on 27 January 1685-6 to be the Society's clerk at a salary of £50 per annum. The post was evidently considered to be one worth having for there were three other candidates, Dr Hans Sloane, later a Secretary and President of the Society, Dr Denis Papin, and a Mr Salisbury, an attorney.

On 27 March Halley wrote to his friend W. Molyneux of Dublin telling him what had happened and saying that he (Halley) had been appointed clerk for the Council's business. He attributed Aston's outburst to a desire to obtain 'better terms of reward from the Society than formerly'; and described the resignation as having been made 'after such a passionate manner that I fear he has lost several of his friends by it.' Molyneux replied a few days later saying that he had heard of the disturbance in the Society, and that for his part he had always considered as unsatisfactory the arrangement whereby the Secretaries were annually elective (*sic*), and had no fixed salary to recompense them for their work, which took up a man's whole time if it was to be done properly. The arduous duties of a Secretary and the inadequate assistance were evidently the source of the whole trouble and had long been a cause of discontent, for as early as 1664 Oldenburg prepared a memorandum setting out what was expected from him as a Secretary of the Society, and urging that he ought to have assistance in order to carry it out efficiently. The financial position made this almost impossible.

The Council were evidently of the same opinion for they not only provided a clerk, Mr E. Halley, at once, but they allotted Aston an honorarium of £60 and presented a 60 oz. piece of silver to W. Musgrave, who had been his colleague during the past year. At that

time the Secretary's honorarium, which had to be specially voted each year, was supposed to be £60; it was often less—in 1684, for example, it was only £40. The senior Secretary at this time certainly was very heavily burdened with administrative duties for he had to take note at the meetings and afterwards to write up the Council Minutes and the Journal book. The former were not usually very long but the account of all that took place at the Ordinary meetings together with summaries of communications usually ran into many pages, and after 1674 when the Council decided that forty meetings should be held annually the work must, as W. Molyneux said, have taken up the whole of a Secretary's spare time. Aston was a very zealous and hard-working officer of the Society, taking his secretarial duties seriously. In 1681-82 when he was second Secretary, with R. Hooke as first Secretary, Aston was present at sixteen out of twenty-one Council Meetings; during the next three years, when he was first Secretary, he attended forty-seven out of fifty-six meetings, and was prevented by illness from being at two or three others. The attendances of his colleagues, the second Secretaries, during the same three years numbered only six. In 1684 Council ordered that duplicates of the Register and Journal books as well as a detailed index should be made, and for this the services of a paid copyist were provided; this work would have to be supervised and checked by the Secretary.

Aston served on the Council in seven out of the sixteen years between November 1694 and November 1711; and in March 1712 he was appointed a member of the Committee which was to inspect and report upon the letters and papers relating to the dispute between the supporters of Newton and Leibnitz over Newton's Method of Fluxions.

Aston was never married. He died at Whitehall in June or July 1715 and bequeathed to the Royal Society the whole of his estate at Mablethorpe, amounting to 48 acres, which the Society still possesses, as well as a large number of books and other personal property. His portrait by F. Kerseboom is in the possession of the Society (Plate 6).

It appears that the Mablethorpe estate before passing to the Aston family had belonged to John Harrington, son of Sir Edward Harrington, from whom he had inherited it in 1653. This John Harrington

lodged at Mrs Aston's house from 1665 until his death in 1691. Francis' elder brother, William, acted as agent to Mr Harrington's estate, collecting all the rents and attending to the business associated with the property. It would appear from the correspondence that Mr Harrington was an invalid. He required very little money for his own needs; and he allowed the Aston family to retain and use the remainder of the income. Francis says in a letter that 'my mother and brother William had the full use of Mr Harrington's money for more than twelve years before he died.' Mr Harrington left the whole of his estate and possessions to William Aston, and when the latter died they passed to Francis Aston.

The air pump which is exhibited in the library of the Society was made by Francis Hauksbee (junior) in 1715. Francis Aston had ordered it for himself just before he died, and when it was completed the Council decided to purchase it out of the funds left by him to the Society.

RICHARD WALLER

(about 1650 to 1715)

Richard Waller was born about the middle of the seventeenth century, but the year is not known, nor is there any information about his early years. His education must have been good as he possessed a wide knowledge of the sciences besides being a capable linguist and a fair artist; he was also a keen man of business. It is likely that he was a business man in the city of London, as he had an address in Broad Street. His country estate was at Northaw in Hertfordshire and he also owned a farm at 'Mynty, Co. Gloucester.'

Waller was elected a Fellow of the Society in 1681 and soon became actively interested in its administration. He was elected a member of the Council for the year 1684-85, and again for 1686-87. At the Anniversary Meeting of 1687 he was elected junior Secretary in the place of Sir John Hoskins who had accepted the post on the resignation of Francis Aston, and Dr Tancred Robinson in December 1685, under the circumstances which have already been described. His colleague was Dr T. Gale, an antiquary.