Claire Preston argues that Thomas Browne’s work can be fully understood only within the range of disciplines and practices associated with natural philosophy and early-modern empiricism. Early-modern methods of cataloguing, collecting, experimentation, and observation organised his writing on many subjects from medicine and botany to archaeology and antiquarianism. Browne framed philosophical concerns in the terms of civil behaviour, with collaborative networks of intellectual exchange, investigative selflessness, courtesy, modesty, and ultimately the generosity of the natural world itself all characterising the return to ‘innocent’ knowledge, which, for Browne, is the proper end of human enquiry. In this major new evaluation of Browne’s oeuvre, Preston examines how the developing essay-form, the discourse of scientific experiment, and above all Bacon’s model of intellectual progress and cooperation determined the unique character of Browne’s contributions to early-modern literature, science, and philosophy.

Claire Preston is Fellow and Lecturer in English at Sidney Sussex College, and Newton Trust Lecturer in the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge. She is the editor of Sir Thomas Browne: Selected Writings (1996) and author of Edith Wharton’s Social Register (2000) and Bee (2005), and has published widely on early-modern and American literature.
THOMAS BROWNE
AND THE WRITING OF
EARLY MODERN SCIENCE

CLAIRE PRESTON
for
Kevin Jackson
and in memory of
Dick Preston
“Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?”

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854)
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Thomas Browne's horizons were, as Samuel Johnson said, larger than the hemisphere of the world, and although he has had countless imitators, no one writing about his learned imagination can hope to keep up with him except with heroic assistance. Although this book gestated for a long time and was often interrupted by other projects which threatened its completion, a great many generous and alert friends and colleagues remembered it and offered their own reserves of knowledge. I have been very much aided by contributions from David Abulafia, Bill Ashworth, James Basker, Max Beber, the late Bob Boutilier, Douglas Brooks, James Carley, Helen Castor, Anne Dunan, R. J. W. Evans, Elizabeth Flowerday, Daniel Grimley, Sir Gabriel Horn FRS, Richard Humphreys, John Kerrigan, Raphael Lyne, Judith Maltby, Alex Mart, the late Jeremy Maule, Christopher Parrish FRCS, Margaret Pelling, Neil Rhodes, Clare Robertson, Nicholas Rogers, Andrew Rosenheim, James Rosenheim, Keith Straughan, Colin Tite, John Wands, Jonathan Woolfson, and Andrew Zurcher.

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South Bristol, Maine
Christmas Day, 2004
Notes on the text

All quotations from primary works are given in their original spelling and punctuation. In references in the notes, the place of publication is London unless otherwise stated. Subsequent references do not give a title abbreviation unless there is more than one work by that author in the bibliography.
Abbreviations

CM Christian Morals in Keynes i, 243–95 (references are given in the notes as part and section numbers)
GC The Garden of Cyrus in Keynes i, 175–227 (references are given in the notes as chapter and page numbers)
GC. Bacon ‘To my worthy and honoured friend Nicholas Bacon of Gillingham, Esquire’ in Garden of Cyrus
Keynes Sir Thomas Browne: Selected Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes
Selected (London: Faber and Faber, 1968)
LF Letter to a Friend in Keynes i, 101–21
MC Musæum Clausum in Miscellany Tracts in Keynes iii, 109–19
MT Miscellany Tracts in Keynes iii, 3–120
NCB Miscellaneous Notes from Commonplace Books in Keynes iii, 272–330
NE Notes and Experiments in Natural History in Keynes iii, 347–60
NHN Notes on the Natural History of Norfolk in Keynes iii, 401–31
OA Observations in Anatomy in Keynes iii, 333–44
ON Observations and Notes in Keynes iii, 239–71
PE.Reader ‘To the Reader’ in Pseudodoxia Epidemica

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List of Abbreviations

RM  Religio Medici in Keynes 1, 3–93 (references are given in the notes as part and section numbers)

RM. Reader  ‘To the Reader’ in Religio Medici

Robbins PE  Robbins’ Introduction and editorial apparatus, in Pseudo-doxia Epidemica, ed. Robbins


U-B  Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall in Keynes 1, 131–72 (references are given in the notes as chapter and page numbers)

U-B. LeGros  ‘To my worthy and honoured friend Thomas Le Gros of Crostwick, Esquire’ in Urne-Buriall