

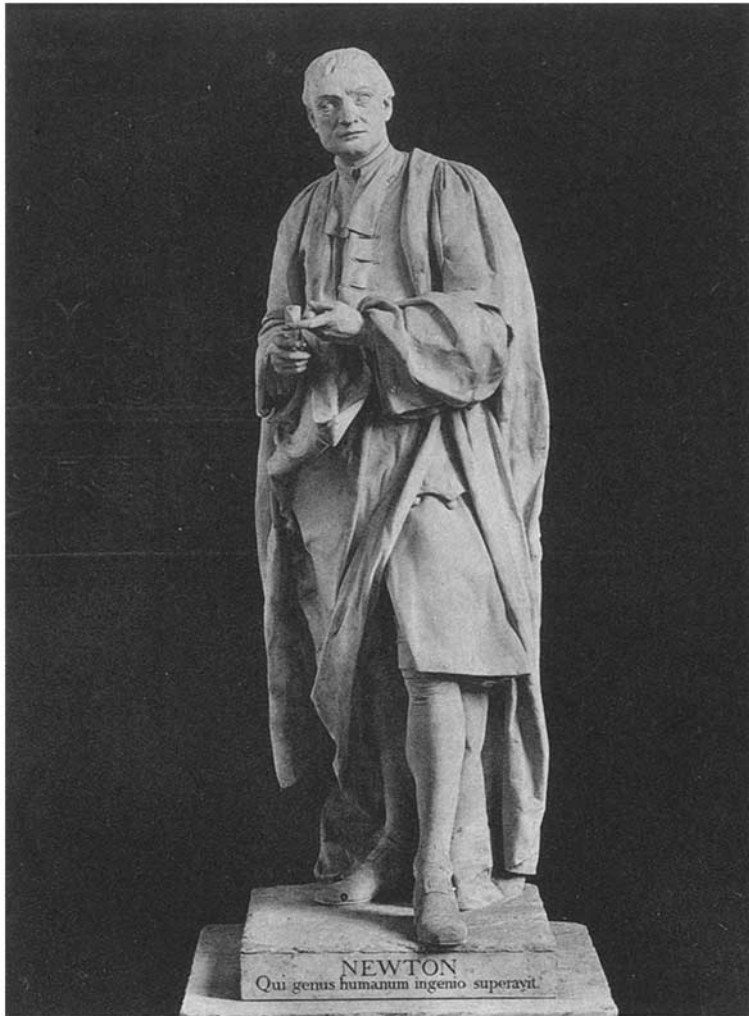
Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00231-8 - Roubiliac's Work at Trinity College Cambridge

Katherine Ada McDowall Esdaile

Excerpt

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[More information](#)*Plate I*THE STATUE of SIR ISAAC NEWTON
in the ANTE-CHAPEL*Inscription:* NEWTON. *qui genus humanum ingenio superavit. Posuit Robertus Smith S.T.P. Collegii hujus S. Trinitatis Magister. MDCCLV.**Signature:* L. F. ROUBILIAC *inv^{it} et sc^{it}*¹.*"The noblest, I think, of all our English statues"*².—CHANTREY

ROBERT SMITH, D.D. (1689–1768),

Black Smith of Trinity; on Christian ground

For faith in mysteries none more renowned,

as the poet Churchill termed the donor, was an extremely able and learned man, Bentley's right hand in his struggles with the College, and his worthy successor. As a young man, he was particularly interested in astronomy, and as Plumian Professor constructed the Observatory over the great gate of Trinity. He held the Professorship from 1718–1760, in succession to his cousin Roger Cotes, and his many benefactions to the College fully entitled him to the honour of Scheemakers' bust in the Library already referred to, with its inscription *Praesenti tibi maturos largimur honores*. Many further particulars of his life will be found in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, but though his gift of Cotes's bust as well as of that learned man's monument is duly recorded, his incomparably greater gift, the statue of Newton, is not mentioned. The choice of sculptor is, as already said, easily explicable after Roubiliac's previous work for the College; and as the donor of the statue, the owner of the shrill nasal voice and Aristotelian personality which impressed Bentley's grandson, Richard Cumberland, in his youthful days takes high rank among the patrons of the century, and is imperishably associated with the name of Newton.

¹ It is perhaps worth noting that this rather unusual form of signature is used by the sculptor for his more important statues, busts and monuments.

² There is a small version of this grand work in plaster by H. J. Jones in the possession of the Royal Society, Burlington House.

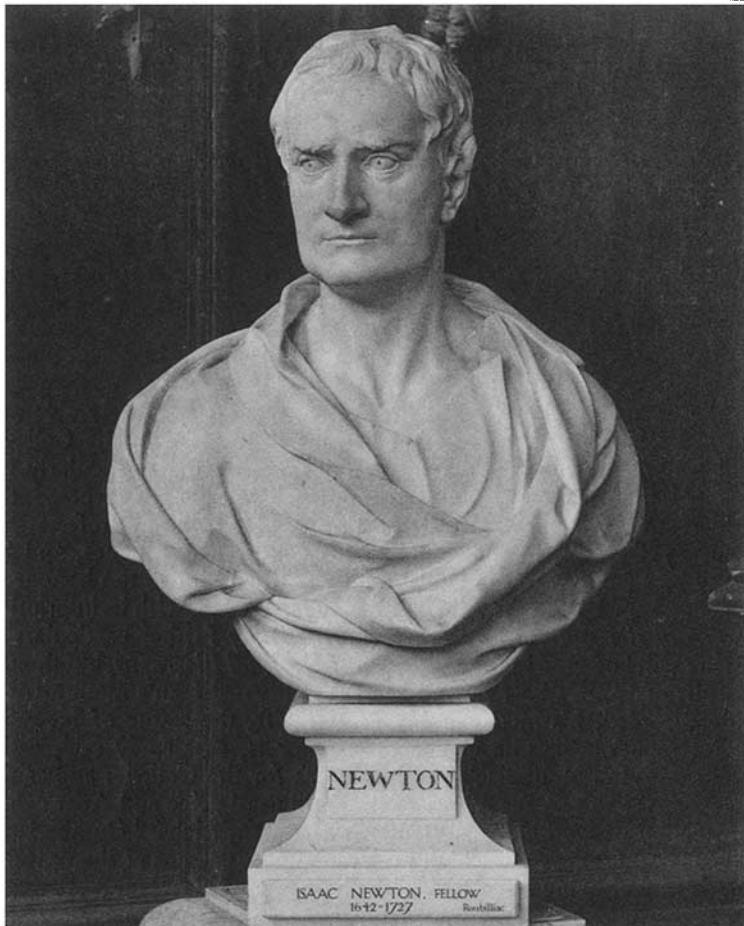
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[More information](#)*Plate II*

NEWTON

*Inscription: Ex dono Danielis Lock hujus Collegii A.M. 1751.**Signature: L. F. ROUBILIAC sculp^t. 1751.*

This very powerful bust, the earliest probably of Lock's benefactions, is virtually a marble transcript of Thornhill's portrait of Newton in the Master's Lodge. Whether it actually preceded the two other portraits of the same year is uncertain, but it is here placed at the head of the busts for comparison with the statue of Newton. Admirable as it is, the classical drapery, a legacy from Roubiliac's earlier Newton type, makes us rejoice that in the greater work the sculptor did himself justice by representing Newton in Academic dress; but to appreciate Roubiliac's classical draperies we have only to turn to the marble copy of the bust by E. H. Baily, R.A., in the National Portrait Gallery¹, when the incredible inferiority in the handling and modelling of the marble and the representation of texture will be fully apparent. The later sculptor, for some reason best known to himself, has omitted the inner drapery; the action is a curious commentary on the fidelity with which Roubiliac himself, in the non-classical portraits, reproduced the contemporary costumes of the portraits which formed his authorities for the busts. There is a very fine cast of the Newton, possibly from the lost terracotta, in the Library at Wilton.

¹ Baily's bust of Whewell in Trinity Library shows the classicising nineteenth century bust at its best; that best may profitably be compared with Roubiliac's Newton, when the scanty drapery of the later sculptor, the ugly form of the bust and the hideous circular foot all but universal at the time will bear out what has been said in the Introduction of the elder sculptor's superiority in these points.

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Plate III

FRANCIS WILLOUGHBY

Inscription: FR^{US} WILLOUGHBY. *Posuit Edm. Garforth A.M. 1751.*

Signature: L. F. ROUBILIAC sc^t 1751.

This superb bust of the great naturalist, who died at the age of 37, was commissioned, like that of Ray (Pl. vi) by a Fellow who thereby immortalised his own interest in scientific studies. Flanking the door of the Library on either side, the pair cannot escape the attention of the most casual visitor, and they are perhaps the grandest of the whole series. Roubiliac's skill in historical portraiture is nowhere more nobly displayed. Hair, features, the great tasselled collar turned back at one edge, are all magnificently wrought, and the bust keeps green the memory of a pioneer in the scientific study of living creatures whose name might otherwise be known only to the student.

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Plate IV

FRANCIS WILLOUGHBY

BRITISH MUSEUM

Terracotta model for the Trinity bust. This grand work is one of the models referred to in the Introduction as coming from Roubiliac's studio in the Museum after his death on January 11th, 1762. The sculptor's friend Dr Maty, then Sub-Librarian and afterwards for a short time Principal Librarian of the British Museum, bought this and the other busts before the Sale of the bankrupt sculptor held on May 12th, 1762, and generously presented them to the infant Museum, then not three years old. They were received on May 2nd¹, and the donor was evidently permitted by the creditors of the dead sculptor to make his own selection from the works on view in the studio; how well he chose, the photographs of the four Trinity models will show, but we may well regret that he omitted to buy the fifth, that of Lord Whitworth. The series are bracketed in the unique copy of the Sale Catalogue generously placed at my disposal by Mr and Mrs Finberg as Lots 77-81 on the third day's Sale with the note: "*These were executed in Marble for Trinity College, Cambridge,*" which shows that the Catalogue was printed some weeks before the Sale and advance buying permitted, since the whole of the busts bought by Dr Maty were in fact received at the Museum ten days before the Sale was held.

¹ Information kindly sent me by Mr A. R. Dryhurst, late Assistant Secretary of the British Museum.

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Plate V

BACON

Inscription: BACON. *Ex dono Danielis Lock hujus Collegii A.M.* 1751.

Signature: L. F. ROUBILIAC *Sculp^{it}.* 1751.

The Bacon, like the Newton the gift of the patriotic Lock, is, despite its incredible technical skill, the least interesting of the series. The undercutting of the ruff, the rendering of the hair and the varying materials of the doublet are skilful to a degree, but Bacon's countenance inspired no artist of his own day to produce an interesting portrait, nor has Roubiliac succeeded where they failed. There is a very fine cast in the Library at Wilton, and another in the Hutchinson Museum at Haslemere, and an engraving—the best of a poor series—in the *Cambridge Portfolio* (1840, p. 79), which also prints a “Sonnet on seeing the Bust of BACON in Trinity College Library” by S., *i.e.* Charles Lesingham Smith, Fellow of Christ's. The first line, “Prophet of Arts! Illustrious Bacon, hail!” does not suggest that Christ's in 1840 was a nest of singing-birds, and the sestet is little better:

I would not gloss thy crimes, but while I scan
 Thy stately lineaments, and forehead high
 Here sculptured well, the failings of the man
 Shrink out of contemplation, I descry
 Only the sage. Within how brief a span
 How much thou thoughtest that will never die!