

*Sir Thomas Browne*

A portrait of Sir Thomas Browne, a man with a full beard and mustache, wearing a dark, high-collared garment. The portrait is centered on a dark, textured background.

*of Norwich*

## Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich

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### Chronology of the life of Thomas Browne, Norwich physician and philosopher, 1605-1682

- 1605 Born in the parish of St Michael-le-Querne, Cheapside, London, on 19 November (until recently, 19 October was the generally accepted date)
- 1613 Death of Browne's father, also Thomas Browne, a liveryman of the Mercers' Company of London
- 1616 To school at Winchester College
- 1623 Entered Broadgates Hall (later Pembroke College), Oxford
- 1626 Admitted Bachelor of Arts, Oxford
- 1629 Master of Arts, Oxford
- 1630-3 Studied medicine abroad, at Montpellier, Padua, and Leiden
- 1633 Graduated as Doctor of Medicine at Leiden
- c.1635 Wrote the first version of his best-known book, *Religio Medici*
- 1637 Doctor of Medicine, Oxford
- 1637 Moved to Norwich
- 1641 Married Dorothy Mileham daughter of Edward Mileham of Burlingham St Peter
- 1650 Moved to a house in the Haymarket, near St Peter Mancroft church
- 1664 Elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Physicians of London
- 1671 Knighted by King Charles II at St Andrew's Hall, Norwich
- 1682 Died at his home in the Haymarket on 19 October; buried in the church of St Peter Mancroft

With a drawing by J. Woodward of a house in the parish of St Peter Mancroft, formerly the residence of Sir Thomas Browne, 1837. The house was demolished in 1842.

Norfolk Heritage Centre: P/BRO/7135 (facsimile)

### **The restoration of the monarchy celebrated in Browne's parish church, 1660**

A man of royalist sympathies, Thomas Browne kept his views largely to himself during the civil war, while deploring the 'profanation' of the Cathedral and other churches. The bells were rung at St Peter's church at the proclamation of Charles II, on an official thanksgiving day and the King's birthday, and the new King's coat of arms were painted on canvas and set up in the church.

*Norfolk Record Office: PD 26/72 (facsimile)*

### **Letter to the Mayor of Norwich asking for the market to be relocated during the plague, 12 July 1666**

Browne was a practising physician in Norwich during periods of plague. In the summer of 1666, 'the present and daily increasing visitation of the plague' was so severe that Justices of the Peace for Norfolk urged Henry Woods, the Mayor of Norwich, to consider holding a market outside the city, so that country people bringing provisions for sale might be at less risk of infection from 'that noisome pestilence'.

*Norfolk Record Office: NCR 10f*

### **Mancroft portrait of Sir Thomas Browne, 17th century**

Photograph of a painting by an unknown artist. The original painting belongs to the parish of St Peter Mancroft.

*Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery photograph (facsimile)*

### **Thomas Browne's house allowed to encroach on the street, 1663**

Entries in a Norwich City Assembly book relating to a clampdown on encroachments on to the streets by householders. On 15 June (left-hand page) a committee was appointed to view and report on encroachments. By the time of the next meeting, on 10 July (right-hand page), Thomas Browne must have heard of this move, and had asked to be permitted to keep six posts which he had recently erected to support his house in St Peter Mancroft. This was agreed, but at a cost to Dr Browne of 6d a year.

*Norfolk Record Office: NCR 16d/6*

### **Plan of the city of Norwich in the 17th century**

A facsimile copy of a city plan by John Speed, from his map of the county of Norfolk first produced in 1610 and revised in the 1660s. North is on the left; the Cathedral (C) and Castle (I) dominate the cityscape.

### **Lease of Browne's meadow, 7 December 1681**

'A meadow I use in this city, beset about with shallows', is how Thomas Browne described the little meadow in the Cathedral precinct which he leased from the Dean and Chapter from at least 1669 onwards. This indenture, signed and sealed by Browne, was made at a renewal of the lease in 1681. It shows that the meadow was on the south side of a causeway leading to the ferry and that his rent of 10 shillings year was to be paid in the Cathedral 'on Doctor Spencer's tomb' every Michaelmas.

*Norfolk Record Office: DCN 48/21/152*

### **Extracts from Thomas Browne's letters to the Le Stranges at Hunstanton, 1650s**

Browne's prescriptions for Sir Hamon Le Strange's palsy, which may have been a minor stroke, included a posset drink containing mercury and herbs, sweetened with honey.

Norfolk Record Office: LEST P20/76 and 82 (facsimiles and extracts)

### **A sick note from Dr Browne c.1666**

This note by Thomas Browne certifies that one John Cromwell had lately been dangerously sick and could not go out of his house without great danger. The convalescent had probably been summoned to appear in the Bishop's court, as the note survives in a file of Norwich Consistory Court papers, 1663-1666.

Norfolk Record Office: DN/CON 21

### **Letters concerning the sickness and treatment of Sir Hamon Le Strange, 1653 and undated**

Diagnoses and prescriptions sent by letter to Sir Hamon and to his wife Lady Alice during one or more periods of Sir Hamon's sickness towards the end of his life. He died in 1654. Sir Hamon had evidently been comparing Dr Browne's methods with those of another physician. In one letter (the topmost letter in front), Dr Browne deals patiently with a request from Sir Hamon to explain how one Dr Dee had secured the recovery of another patient in a similar (but less serious) case, then firmly gives his opinion that 'there is a great disparitie in your constitutions' and the same treatments are not appropriate in Sir Hamon's case.

Norfolk Record Office: LEST P20/73, 76, 79 and 82

### **Medicinal herbs**

Examples of some of the common herbs specified in medicinal recipes by 17th-century physicians. Syrup of violets was an alternative to honey or sugar to sweeten mixtures such as Dr Browne's 'drink for the hooping cough', copied into the Gunton household book.

### **Household book of the Harbord family of Gunton, c.1676-1720**

This volume of medicinal recipes was in use at Gunton Hall for many years, and was presented to the church of St Peter Mancroft 25 years ago because it includes some prescriptions of Thomas Browne. These pages have remedies for stones, including (left-hand page) 'Sir Thomas Browne's drink for the stone in the kidneys & bloody urine'.

Norfolk Record Office: PD 26/TD 2000/6

### **Chronology of Sir Thomas Browne's best-known works**

Including the title page to the first authorised edition of Browne's *Religio Medici* (1643) and two of the urns illustrated *Hydrotaphia or Urn Burial* (1658).

Norfolk Heritage Centre: P/BRO/9294 (facsimile)

c.1635 Thomas Browne wrote the first version of his best-known book, *Religio Medici*, 'the religion of a physician', a witty, humane and reflective self-portrait in words

1642 Unauthorised publication of *Religio Medici*

## Chronology of Sir Thomas Browne's best-known works, continued

- 1643 Publication of the first authorised edition of *Religio Medici*
- 1644 Translation of *Religio Medici* into Latin
- 1646 Publication of *Pseudoxia Epidemica, or Enquiries into very many received tenets and commonly presumed truths*, an encyclopedia of superstition and science which established Browne's reputation as a scholar and a naturalist
- 1655 Translation of *Religio Medici* into Dutch
- 1658 *Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial, or, A Discourse of the Sepulchral Urns lately found in Norfolk* and *The Garden of Cyrus, or, The quincuncial, lozenge, or network plantations of the ancients, artificially, naturally, mystically considered*
- 1668 Translations of *Religio Medici* into French and of *Pseudoxia* into Dutch
- 1680 Translation of *Pseudoxia* into German

With the title page to the first authorised edition of Browne's *Religio Medici* (1643) and two of the urns illustrated in *Hydrotaphia or Urn Burial* (1658).  
Norfolk Heritage Centre: P/BRO/9294 (facsimile)

### Two 17th-century manuscript books from the Simon Wilkin collection and Blomefield's *Norwich*, 1806

Simon Wilkin (1790-1862), who edited a four-volume edition of Browne's works in 1835-6, collected a number of Browne manuscripts and early printed editions, which were presented to the Castle Museum in 1905. The manuscripts, including this early copy of *Religio Medici* and the holograph manuscripts of *Repertorium, or Some account of the tombs and monuments in the Cathedral Church of Norwich*, 1679 and 1680, were later transferred to the Norfolk Record Office. The two books rest on volume 2 of *The History of the City of Norwich* by Francis Blomefield (second edition, 1806), which refers to Dr Thomas Browne as a 'great man' and 'that worthy physician'.

Norfolk Record Office: MS 21267 and MS 21270

### ***Religio Medici*: a 17th-century manuscript copy in the Wilkin Collection**

A finely written copy of the text, by an unknown scribe. The book is open at a passage towards the end of part 1, one of many in which an intelligent scepticism in interpreting Biblical texts ('for unspeakable mysteries in the Scriptures are often delivered in a vulgar and illustrative way') combines with tolerance of those who read them more literally, cheerfully accepting 'different interpretations according to different capacities'.

Norfolk Record Office: MS 21268

### **Memorial to Sir Thomas Browne in the chancel of St Peter Mancroft church**

The main text, in Latin, summarises Browne's career and describes him as 'famed throughout the world. A man of great piety, integrity and learning.' Erected by his widow Dorothy Browne, the marble memorial is surmounted by the arms of the Browne family of Upton, Cheshire arms, which Browne also used on his seal.

### **Sir Thomas Browne's will, 1679**

Written 'with my owne hand' and 'confirmed ...with my hand and seale', this straightforward will left all Browne's property (except for lands he had already given to his son Edward) a to his wife, Dorothy, who was also sole executrix. The document was filed with the records of the Norwich Consistory Court when probate was granted in 1682.

*Norfolk Record Office: Norwich Consistory Court original wills 1682, no. 38*

### **Burial entry for Sir Thomas Browne, 1682**

Browne died on 19 October 1682 and was buried in his parish church of St Peter Mancroft on 24 October. The incumbent left a gap between Sir Thomas Browne's name and the word 'buried', as if he originally intended to add one or two additional words by way of description.

*Norfolk Record Office: PD 26/16 (facsimile)*

### **Photograph of Sir Thomas Browne's skull and coffin plate, c.1850**

Browne's resting place in the chancel of St Peter Mancroft was accidentally disturbed in 1840 by workmen digging a grave for the Vicar's wife, and the skull and coffin plate (which was broken into two pieces) were removed. They were among the subjects chosen for a new photographic process, the calotype, patented in 1841 and popular for the next decade.

*Norfolk Record Office: NNAS, ACC 2005/8 (facsimile)*

### **Bishop's faculty authorising the reburial of Browne's skull, 5 August 1922**

The skull had been presented to the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital in 1845, and remained in the hospital's museum for more than 75 years. It was reburied in the chancel of St Peter Mancroft church following the issue of this faculty in 1922.

*Norfolk Record Office: PD 26/41*

### **Cast of Browne's skull in a glass casket**

The casket was made in 1901 at the instigation of Sir William Osler to house Browne's skull in the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital museum. When the skull was reburied, the original was replaced by a cast.

*Loaned by Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust*

### **Henry Pegram's model for his statue of Sir Thomas Browne, 1905**

An illustration, published in the *Eastern Daily Press* on 20 October 1905, taken from a photograph of Pegram's original clay model.

*Norfolk Record Office: MS 21276 (facsimile)*

**The unveiling of the statue of Sir Thomas Browne on Hay Hill, 19 October 1905**

The ceremony was performed by Lord Avebury: those present included the Lord Mayor and Sheriff of Norwich, the vicar of St Peter Mancroft, Professor William Osler and Sir Peter Eade, who presented the statue to the Mayor and Corporation.

*Picture Norfolk: NP00000934 (facsimile)*

**Minutes of the Sir Thomas Browne MD memorial statue committee, 1897-1905**

Kept by the committee's Honorary Secretary, F. R. Eaton, these minutes record the funding, commissioning and completion of the memorial statue by Henry Alfred Pegram. Towards the end of 1904, work was well advanced on the statue, but some members of the committee wanted to amend Pegram's design by giving Browne boots and cloak. On 9 December 1904, a letter was read from Mr Pegram, who stated that 'The statue is going on beautifully now and the only thing that is likely to mar its ultimate success will be the addition of the boots and cloak'. He asked that the Committee would allow him to execute the figure according to the model without these.' This was agreed, and it was also noted that 'a fragment of an ancient urn' would be placed in the figure's right hand.

*Norfolk Record Office: MS 21275*

**Album of press cuttings relating to the memorial statue of Sir Thomas Browne MD, 1905-1908**

*Norfolk Record Office: MS 21276*

**Necktie of the Browne Society of the City of Norwich School, 20th century**

The Society was formed in 1946 and has since been dissolved.

*Loaned by Dr Anthony Batty Shaw*

**Hay Hill and St Peter Mancroft with the statue of Sir Thomas Browne, mid 20th century**

This undated view, published as a postcard, shows the statue still in its original position, probably in the late 1960s. It was moved closer to St Peter Mancroft in the early 1970s.

*Norfolk Record Office: PD 26/251 (facsimile)*

**Bronze statuette of Sir Thomas Browne by Henry Pegram, 1905**

One of three miniatures of Pegram's life-size statue.

*Loaned by T. C. Eaton*

***Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich* by Anthony Batty Shaw**

This illustrated booklet, published by the Browne 300 Committee in 1982, has been reprinted by the Browne 2005 Committee for the quatercentenary.

**Bronze medallion depicting Sir Thomas Browne, 1982**

A commemorative medallion commissioned by the Browne 300 Committee from the sculptor Nigel Boonham. One of an edition of 25 medallions.

*Norfolk Record Office: ACC 2004/126*

## **Sir Thomas Browne read and remembered**

- 1835-6 Simon Wilkin's edition of *Sir Thomas Browne's works, including his life and correspondence*
- 1840 Browne's coffin in the church of St Peter Mancroft accidentally disturbed and his skull and coffin plate removed
- 1842 Demolition of Browne's house in the Haymarket, Norwich
- 1845 Browne's skull presented to Norfolk and Norwich Hospital
- 1895 Coffin plate returned to St Peter Mancroft church
- 1901 A glass casket presented by Sir William Osler to Norfolk and Norwich Hospital Museum to house the skull
- 1905 Statue of Sir Thomas Browne erected on Hay Hill, Norwich, close to St Peter Mancroft church
- 1922 Skull reinterred in St Peter Mancroft church
- 1964 Geoffrey Keynes' edition of *The works of Sir Thomas Browne*
- 1982 Tercentenary of Sir Thomas Browne's death celebrated in Norwich
- 2005 Quatercentenary of his birth

'...there is no science, in which he does not discover some skill; and scarce any kind of knowledge, profane or sacred, abstruse or elegant, which he does not appear to have cultivated with success.'

**Samuel Johnson**

## **Acknowledgements**

Mr T. C. Eaton  
Dr Anthony Batty Shaw  
Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust  
St Peter Mancroft Church  
Norfolk County Council Library and Information Service (Norfolk Heritage Centre and  
Picture Norfolk)  
Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service

## Appendix

### Additional manuscripts and objects on display on 20 October 2005

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#### **Letter from Sir Thomas Browne to William Dugdale, 6 December 1658**

Browne comments on Dugdale's second volume of *Monasticon* (particularly mentioning the Blackfriars in Norwich as 'more entire than any other in these parts of England'), a fishbone received by Browne for examination, and the works of John Leland.

*Norfolk Record Office: MS 21273*

#### **St Peter Mancroft churchwardens' accounts, 1652-1708**

Doctor Browne appears as an annual ratepayer in these accounts, as does one John Ballistone or Baliston – possibly the same man on whose eyesight Browne was asked for an opinion in 1675.

*Norfolk Record Office: PD 26/72*

#### **The city authorities consult Sir Thomas Browne, 1675**

At the Mayor's Court, on 4 December 1675, it was decided that two aldermen should speak to Browne about the eyes of John Baliston and the prospects for a cure.

*Norfolk Record Office: NCR 16a/25*

#### **Letter to Thomas Knyvett of Ashwellthorpe from his daughter Elizabeth Rous, mid 17th century**

In this undated letter, Elizabeth urges her father not to let his infirmities master him, saying that 'I hope docter browne will find both the cause and remedie'.

*Norfolk Record Office: KNY 775, 372 x 5*

#### **Norwich City Library Book donations book, 1608-1737**

This manuscript register records a gift by Thomas Browne of works of Justus Lipsius, in 1666. A later note refers to the addition of Browne's own works.

*Norfolk Record Office: MS 4228*

#### **Papers relating to the accidental discovery of Sir Thomas Browne's skull and coffin plate 1840**

Newspaper cuttings and letters of Robert Fitch.

*Norfolk Record Office: MS 21279*

#### **Two letters about Sir Thomas Browne's skull, 1893 and 1922**

Both addressed to the vicar of St Peter Mancroft from the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, these letters show a shift in attitude between 1893, when the Hospital's Museum Committee and Board of Management strongly resisted a request for the return of the relic, and 1922, when the Board expressed their satisfaction at the way in which the reburial of the skull was carried out

*Norfolk Record Office: PD 26/138*

**Sir Hamon Le Strange's remarks on Sir Thomas Browne's *Pseudoxia Epidemica*, late 19th or early 20th century**

Sir Hamon Le Strange of Hunstanton, a descendant of his 17th-century namesake who was Browne's friend and patient, died in 1918.

*Norfolk Record Office: MS 21272*

**Catalogue of the works of Sir Thomas Browne formerly in the possession of Simon Wilkin**

The Wilkin Collection was presented to the City of Norwich in 1905; the manuscripts are now in the Norfolk Record Office.

*Norfolk Record Office: MS 21274*

**Minutes of the Thomas Browne Society of the City of Norwich School, 1946-1948 and 1965-1966**

This society of sixth-formers was a debating society which met weekly during school terms.

*Norfolk Record Office: ACC 2003/15 (part)*

**Minutes of the Browne 300 Committee, 1979-1982**

In celebration of the tercentenary of the death of Sir Thomas Browne, a Festival was held at Norwich on 25-27 June 1982. This included a memorial service at St Peter Mancroft, concerts, a series of lectures and exhibitions in the Castle Museum, the Assembly House, the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital and the Cathedral. Other activities included a schools' essay competition and the publication of *Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich* by Dr Batty Shaw.

*Norfolk Record Office: SO 37/1, 522X5*

**Browne 300 album, 1982**

A personal record of the tercentenary celebrations, compiled by Dr Anthony Batty Shaw.

*Norfolk Record Office: ACC 2004/126*

**Flagstone from Sir Thomas Browne's Garden House**

This stone was presented to Dr Anthony Batty Shaw by architect Sir Bernard Feilden when the house was demolished in 1961 and Littlewoods store was built on the site. It is claimed that Browne may have stepped on this stone.

*Loaned by Dr Anthony Batty Shaw.*



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