



Celebrating SIR THOMAS BROWNE DAY 19 OCTOBER EACH YEAR

www.sirthomasbrowne.org.uk

Sir Thomas Browne Society Newsletter 2023

Happy birthday Sir Thomas, born in London 19 October 1605*, died in Norwich 19 October 1682. Sir Thomas Browne was an English physician, naturalist, philosopher, wordsmith and polymath who contributed hundreds of words to the English language (such as medical, electricity, migrant, and computer). He lived on the corner of Brigg Street and Gentleman's Walk in Norwich for most of his adult life, practicing as a doctor and writing about the diverse subjects that interested him.

This year's Thomas Browne Day event is a talk and book launch in St Peter Mancroft Church, Millennium Plain, Norwich

Sir Thomas Browne Day: Book launch and talk at St Peter Mancroft Church on Thursday 19 October 2023 at 2pm

A new book, entitled *The Debt of Our Reason* written by Hugh Aldersey-Williams, author of *The Adventures of Sir Thomas Browne in the 21st Century* has been commissioned by the team at St Peter Mancroft Church to help celebrate Sir Thomas Browne Day and to complement the artefacts relating to Thomas Browne and his family already in the church, including his grave and a replica of his skull. This is a new publication, putting Thomas Browne in context with his life from beginning of 17th century. He was born in the year of the Gunpowder Plot and lived through the Great Plague, the Great Blow, the English Civil War and many significant 17th century scientific developments.

The book will be launched with a talk between Hugh and associate priest Fiona Haworth at St Peter Mancroft Church. The talk will be about 45 minutes long and the book will be available to purchase in the church. It is free and all are welcome to attend.

Author: Hugh Aldersey-Williams

Publisher/copyright: Jarrold Publishing and St Peter Mancroft Church, Norwich

ISBN 978-0-85101-661-0 : 40 pages

Purchase price £8, available in the church from 19 October 2023

This year's activities summarised:

Thomas Browne Annual Essay and a talk by Kevin Faulkner

As is customary Browne scholar **Kevin Faulkner** will be publishing a new essay on his blog *the Aquarium of Vulcan*, found at <https://aquariumofvulcan.blogspot.com/>. This essay was delivered as a well-attended talk on Tuesday 3 October at Norfolk Heritage Centre in the Millennium Library at the Forum in central Norwich. The essay, entitled *Sir Thomas Browne : The Theatre of Ourselves - the proto-psychology of Thomas Browne* looks at his self-examination, deep interest in people, use of symbols, fascination with dreams and relationship to Jungian analytical psychology.

The talk was live-streamed from the library and recorded as a podcast which you can hear on the website www.sirthomasbrowne.org.uk. The link to the essay and talk will go live on 19 October on Kevin's blog and on the Thomas Browne website.

*Acknowledging that some people dispute the birth date

SPM St Peter Mancroft Norwich
Thomas Browne Book Launch Event

THE DEBT OF OUR REASON
Science, Religion, and Thomas Browne

St Peter Mancroft has collaborated with author Hugh Aldersey-Williams to create a new book on Sir Thomas Browne.

Author Hugh Aldersey Williams and St Peter Mancroft associate priest Revd Dr Fiona Haworth will be in conversation for the launch.

Thursday 19th October at 2pm
St Peter Mancroft Church
Free to attend



FREE Event Heritage Hour
In Person and Livestreamed
Tuesday 3 October 1pm
NORFOLK HERITAGE CENTRE at the
Norfolk & Norwich Millennium Library

HERITAGE
in partnership with
Norfolk Record Office

**SIR THOMAS BROWNE:
THE THEATRE OF OURSELVES
WITH KEVIN FAULKNER**

Publication of Volume One of the new edition of the Complete Works of Sir Thomas Browne

The [ongoing project](#) to edit a new *Complete Works of Thomas Browne* has reached a significant landmark with the publication of Volume One *Religio Medici in three distinct versions*, edited by Reid Barbour and Brooke Conti. Chief editor of the project **Professor Claire Preston** took early retirement from her full-time role at Queen Mary University in 2020, to concentrate on her research, writing, editing and overseeing the new Browne edition.

We are hoping to bring Claire and fellow editor Dr Kevin Killeen to Norwich in the new year to talk to us about the editing process and the new volume so please keep an eye out for details of when and where this will be. Volume One is priced at just under £200 but the Norfolk & Norwich Millennium Library has purchased a copy for general reference. For more information about the project follow this link <http://www.thomasbrowne.qmul.ac.uk/>

Talk by Edinburgh GP Dr Gavin Francis as part of the Norfolk & Norwich Festival's Literary weekend

On Sunday May 28 as part of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival, bestselling writer and doctor Gavin Francis came to Norwich to talk about his new book *Sir Thomas Browne : The Opium of Time*, published by Oxford University Press. It turned out to be the most popular event of the literary festival with over 100 people attending in the Spiegel tent in Chapelfield Gardens, programmed by the National Centre for Writing.

Gavin was in conversation with Dr Anna Wyatt, now also based in Edinburgh, who researched and wrote about Sir Thomas Browne's son, Edward and his travels for her PhD at UEA.

Through the conversation and his book, Gavin has drawn on his own experiences as a modern day doctor and writer to illustrate that although many centuries separate him from Browne, they share a fundamental curiosity about the world and about people. In the book, Gavin examines the extraordinary life and work of Norwich-based physician, writer, and polymath Thomas Browne through a personal, 21st century lens.

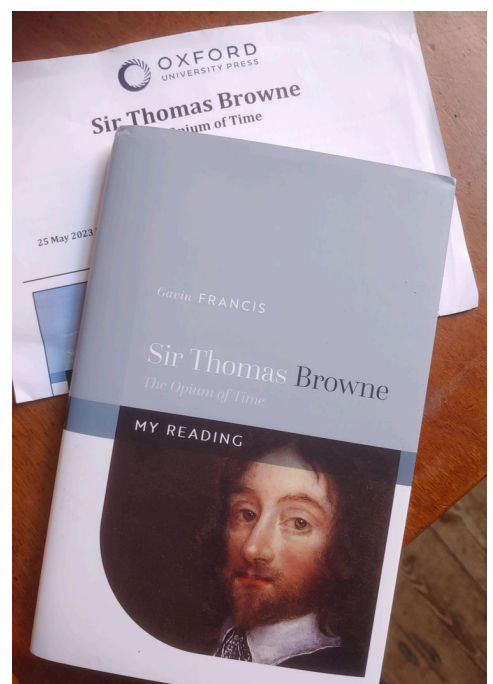
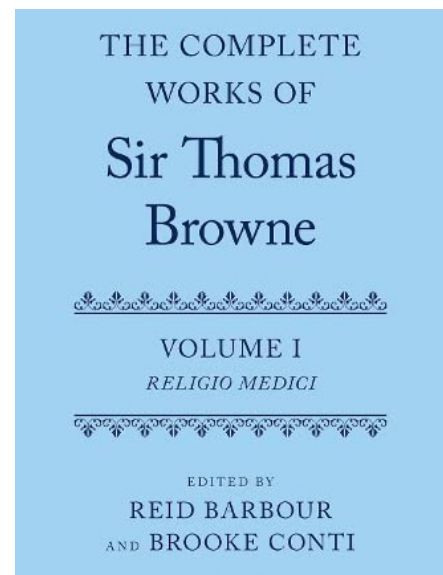
He argues that Browne's work has lost little of its power and wisdom, and none of its beauty. The book is neatly portioned into themed chapters, to be read consecutively or dipped into one by one. The themes relate to Browne's character and interests; ambiguity, piety, misogyny, mobility, curiosity and explores in tandem, Browne's experience in life alongside Gavin's, and so side-by-side we learn about both men and their ways. Gavin has spoken before about how the written works of Dr Browne have influenced him as a medic in the 21st century.

This is a neat, attractive and very readable book of modest proportions and available from the Book Hive in London Street as well as other bookshops.

Dr Gavin Francis is also the author of several other books including *Recovery : The Lost Art of Convalescence*, *Adventures in Human Being* and *Island Dreams*, and most recently *FreeFor All: Why the NHS Is Worth Saving* - a compelling defence of our National Health Service in paperback form.

For details of Gavin and his books go to <https://www.gavinfrancis.com/>
Read Kevin Faulkner's review of the book <https://aquariumofvulcan.blogspot.com/2023/07/compassion-is-physicians-teacher-gavin.html>

***Sir Thomas Browne : The Opium of Time* is published by Oxford University Press as part of the My Reading series, published 25 May 2023 in hardback, £18.99, 176pages ISBN 9780192858177.**



Visitors from across the globe

The event above, the talk by Dr Gavin Francis and Dr Anna Wyatt drew visitors from across the globe including Canada and Australia. Milton Roxanas, a neuro-psychiatrist and his wife Vivien Lane-Roxanas (doctor of nursing and originally from Taverham) came from Sydney Australia and Pam and Rolando Del Maestro came from Canada. Rolando is a professor of neurosurgery with many titles/hats and has a very special link to STB. He oversees the Sir William Osler library in McGill University Montreal, which includes rare books and from memory about 10-15 editions of STBs.

As well as a deep interest in Browne, they are involved with the William Osler Society and visit Norwich whenever they can.



Hay Hill, April 2023 *Photo Damian Street*

Re-siting of the public artwork 'Homage to Thomas Browne' from Hay Hill, Norwich – an update

Earlier in 2023, Norwich City Council started to refurbish Hay Hill, a square in the centre of Norwich which commemorates Browne, set as it is between the site of the house that he lived in for most of his adult life as a physician and the church, St Peter Mancroft, where he is buried. Hay Hill would have been his 'patch', the place that he wandered his way out to visit a patient or back home to rest, write and experiment, a space he would have crossed to go to church to worship and pray for his family and patients.

In 2007, a set of sculptures were installed, commissioned from artists Anne & Patrick Poirier, which celebrated Browne and his works. Because of the refurbishment, the sculptures have been removed and are now in storage whilst the Council try to find a new home for them. Hay Hill has been closed for the summer while the work is carried out. The statue of Browne by Henry Pegram which was erected in 1905 to celebrate his tercentenary has thankfully been retained, albeit its position moved slightly, and we are hoping that there will be some commemoration of the Poirier work and of Browne's relationship to Hay Hill.

There is a plan to make a short film to document Hay Hill and the Poirier sculptures as photos and film footage were taken before it was removed - more news about that in due course. We haven't had an update from the council about when Hay Hill will re-open but hopefully soon.

Norwich Book Benches

In the summer of 2023, a series of book benches appeared in Norwich, celebrating 5 historic and 60 contemporary writers, including Julian of Norwich and Anna Sewell. Some are stone stacks and some take different sculptural forms. Though we are happy for the chosen writers, sadly, Thomas Browne was not amongst them this time round. However, there is one set of stone benches yet to be inscribed so the Thomas Browne Society is embarking on a mission to rectify this by raising some funding to pay for the stonemason artist to return to Norwich and inscribe one for Thomas Browne, though we also have to persuade Norwich BID who commissioned them. See <https://www.visitnorwich.co.uk/book-benches/>



Hay Hill, Henry Pegram statue 1905
Photo Sarah Cocke



Book bench stack outside St Giles Church, Norwich dedicated to Anna Sewell

Remembering our champions

The Thomas Browne Society is relatively new, but efforts to celebrate and promote Browne have been sustained for many years by people who have gone before us. This year we are missing **Barbara Miller OBE** who was a long term parishioner of St Peter Mancroft and a Thomas Browne Champion, delivering a tour and talk of St Peter Mancroft Church and its Browne artefacts every year. Sadly she passed away on 1 December 2021 and is greatly missed, although she made excellent use of her long and active life. You can read an article about her [here](#).

Right: Barbara Miller OBE conducting a tour of Browne artefacts in St Peter Mancroft Church



111-211, hence from the very outset of certain Browne was certain. "All things began in order, as about three and a half that they began again according to the manner of the world, and the world would not have been in 1682 that would have been the matter of the world. The Garden of Cyrene is a weekly to the matter would be in the 18th a week or more in the 19th, to the first of the 18th century had written.

and Edward Green pictures him as quiet, leaning against a window sill, while reading his remarkably open notes. George Manaster says that the whole first chapter of Cyrene for The Cambridge History of English Literature.



Browne statue in St Thomas Browne by Henry Payne.

Browne 300: Festival at Norwich
STEPHEN LOCK

Volume 4 of the *BMJ* in 1982 contained no fewer than 10 entries devoted to Sir Thomas Browne to commemorate the centenary of his birth. However among these was an address given at Guy's Hospital by none other than Sir William Osler, the first Surgeon-General at Guy's Hospital, who had been a student of Browne's at the University of Cambridge. In his address, Osler, who had been a student of Browne's at the University of Cambridge, spoke of his admiration for Browne's work and of his own admiration for Browne's work.

of commemorative papers—by no means a 'Tennysonian' feat even in the days of Sir Philip Marsden, that masterpiece of a parish church with its tower and steeple.

St Peter Mancroft Church

Thomas Browne's home was on Gentleman's Walk more or less where Prêt a Manger stands now in 2022 and he worshipped in St Peter Mancroft Church, adjacent to Hay Hill (see photo on last page). His house was demolished many years ago but there are still a number of artefacts in the church including a replica of his skull which was reburied after being accidentally dug up by workmen many years before and sold to a local doctor who kept it until it was finally reunited with Browne on 4th July 1922. The church is open every day and you are welcome to go and see his portrait, memorial plaque, his wife Dorothy's stone as well as books and documents related to Browne. You can also pick up information for Thomas Browne in Norwich so please visit soon!

A walk with Sir Thomas Browne in Norwich

Writer and science journalist **Hugh Aldersey-Williams**, also author of *The Adventures of Sir Thomas Browne in the 21st Century*, (ISBN 978-1847089021) a really good primer for anyone wanting to know the Browne basics as well as the relevance to contemporary living. In 2020, Hugh was commissioned by the National Centre for Writing to create a walk in Norwich as part of a series of literary walks called *Walking Norwich*. It takes you on a route from Hay Hill to Pull's Ferry in the Cathedral Close passing spots that would have been of interest to Browne including Browne's Meadow where he used to grow medicinal plants. You can download a map and find out more here: <https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/residencies/walking-norwich/a-walk-with-thomas-browne/>

A Quincunx for Sir Thomas Browne - a film

In case you haven't seen it, there is a very lovely and informative film about Browne made by the **Royal College of Physicians** to accompany an exhibition, 'A cabinet of rarities': the curious collections of Sir Thomas Browne' in London in 2016. It is a very good source of accessible basic information about the man, his life and his works and how he fits into both 17th century and contemporary living.

'A cabinet of rarities': the curious collections of Sir Thomas Browne' explores RCP physician, philosopher, collector and polymath Thomas Browne's curious approach to the world through his writing and his collection. Browne (1605–1682) saw the extraordinary in the ordinary, and introduced over 700 new words to the English language, while inspiring literary greats such as Virginia Woolf and Edgar Allan Poe. His collection reveals a fascinating perspective on 17th-century scientific and medical research.

Newsletter written October 2023 by Marion de Mello Catlin, founder of the Sir Thomas Browne Society and web editor. If you have anything to report about Browne, please send it to me at info@theshiftnorwich.org.uk and I will add it to the website www.sirthomasbrowne.org.uk where there is a wealth of information about Browne.



Browne's house on Gentleman's Walk and Brigg Street

Coleridge on Browne

He looked at his own Soul with a Telescope. What seemed all irregular, he saw and shewed to be beautiful Constellations: and he added to the Consciousness hidden worlds within worlds.



Unveiling of the Henry Pegram statue on Hay Hill 19 October 1905



Portrait of Thomas Browne who had a tendency to blush!