

Aubrey's Life of Sir William Petty (1632–1687)

⟨ *His coat of arms*¹: MS Aubr. 6, fol. 12. ⟩

Ermine, on a bend gules, a ⟨magnetic needle⟩ needle, pointing to the Polar star, or, for Petty: impaling, sable three walnut leaves, between 2 bendlets, or, for Waller².

The crest is a beehive, or, with bees about it: the motto is

Ut apes Geometria.

⟨ *His horoscope*³: MS. Aubr. 6, fo. 12 ⟩

Monday, Maii 26to, 1623: 11h 42' 56" P.M., natus Gulielmus Petty, miles, sub latitudine 51 ° 10' (tempus verum), at Rumsey in Hants.

This was donne, and a judgement⁴ upon it, by Charles Snell, esq., of Alderholt neer Fordingbridge in Hampshire — 'Jupiter in Cancer makes him fatt at heart.' John Gadbury also says that vomitts would be excellent good for him.

Sir William Petty, knight, was the [eldest, or only,] son of . . . Petty, of Rumsey in Hampshire, by . . . his wife.

His father was borne on the Ashwednesday, before Mr. Hobbes, scil. 1587; and dyed and was buried at Rumsey 1644, where Sir William intends to sett up a monument for him. He was by profession a clothier, and also did dye his owne cloathes: he left little or no estate to Sir William.

He⁵ was borne at his father's house aforesaid, which is . . . , on Monday, the twenty-sixth of May 1623, eleven houres 42' 56" afternoone (vide Scheme⁶): Xtned on Trinity Sunday.

Rumsey is a little haven towne, but hath most kinds of artificers in it. When he was a boy his greatest delight was to be looking on the artificers, — e.g. smyths, the watchmaker, carpenters, joyners, etc. — and at twelve years old could have worked at any of these trades. Here he went to schooole, and learn't by 12 yeares a competent

¹Given in colors by Aubrey.

²He married Elizabeth Waller.

³The technical figure omitted.

⁴In MS. Aubr. 23, fol. 11, is an 'astrological judgment' on Petty's nativity made by Charles Snell, July 10, 1676.

⁵Sir William.

⁶i.e. of his nativity: above.

smattering of Latin, and was entred into the Greek. He haz had few sicknesses. About 8, in April very sick and so continued till towards Michaelmas. About 12 (or 13), i.e. before 15, he haz told me, happened to him the most remarkable *accident of life* (which he did not tell me), and which was the foundation of all the rest of his greatnes and acquiring riches.

He enformed me that, about 15, in March, he went over into Normandy, to Caen, in a vessell that went hence, with a little stock, and began to merchandize⁷, and had so good successe that he maintained himselfe, and also educated himselfe; this I guessed was that most remarkable *accident* that he meant. Here he learn't the French tongue, and perfected himselfe in the Latin, and had Greeke enough to serve his turne. Here (at Caen) he studied the arts. Memorandum: — he was sometime at La Flesshe in the college of Jesuites. At 18, he was (I have heard him say) a better mathematician then he is now: but when occasion is, he knows how to recurre to more mathematical knowledge. At Paris he studyed anatomie, and read Versalius with Mr. Thomas Hobbes (vide Mr. Hobbes life), who loved his company. Mr. H. then wrot his Optiques; Sir W.P. then had a fine hand in drawing and limning, and drew Mr. Hobbes's optically schemes for him, which he was pleased to like. At Paris, one time, it happened that he was driven to a great streight for money, and I have heard him say, that he lived a weeke on two peniworth (or 3, I have forgott which, but I thinke the former) of walnuts. Quaere whether he was not sometimes a prisoner there?

Anno Domini 164- he came to Oxon, and entred himselfe of Brasen-nose college. Here he taught anatomy to the young scholars. Anatomy was then but little understood by the university, and I remember he kept a body that he brought by water from Reding a good while to read on, some way preserv'd or pickled.

Anno Domini (1650) happened that memorable accident and experiment of the reviving Nan Green⁸, which is to be ascribed and attributed to Dr. William Petty, as the first discoverer of life in her, and author of saving her. Vide and insert the materiall passages in the tryal, and anatomically experiment of Nan Green at Oxon: vide the narrative.

Here he lived and was beloved by all the ingeniose scholars, particularly Ralph Bathurst of Trin. Coll. (then Dr. of Physique); Dr. John Wilkins (Warden of Wadham Coll.); Seth Ward, D.D., Astronom. Professor; Dr. (Robert) Wood; Thomas Willis, M.D., &c. — Memorandum: — about these times experimentally philosophy first budged here and was first cultivated by these veruosi in that darke time.

Anno Domini . . . (quaere) he was chosen musique professor at Gresham Colledge, London, v. page 2.

Anno Domini . . . (quaere Edmund Wyld, esq., when) the Parliament sent surveyors to survey Ireland; vide page 2.

Dr. Petty was resident in Oxon 1648, 1649, and left it (if Anthony Wood is not mistaken) in 1652. He tooke his degree of Dr. of Physique anno Domini . . . at . . . (quaere).

He was about 1650 (quaere) elected Professor of Musique at Gresham Colledge, by, and by the interest of , his friend captaine John Graunt (who wrote the Observations on

⁷Aubrey adds the interpretation of this word— 'To begin to play the merchant.'

⁸Clark's Wood's Life and Times, i. 165.

the Bills of Mortality), and at that time was worth but fourtie pounds in all the world.

Shortly after (scil. anno Domini 1652 in August, he had the patent for Ireland) he was recommended to the Parliament⁹ to be one of the surveyors of Ireland, to which employment capt. John Graunt's interest did also helpe to give him a lift, and Edmund Wyld, esq., also, then a member of Parliament, and a great fautor of ingeniose and good men, for meer meritt sake¹⁰ (not being formerly acquainted with him) did him great service, which perhaps he knowes not of.

To be short, he is a person of so great worth and learning, and haz such a prodigious working witt, that he is both fitt for, and an honour to, the highest preferment.

By this surveying employment he gott an estate in Ireland (before the restauration of King Charles II) of 18000 li. per annum, the greatest part wherof he was forced afterwards to refund, the former owners being then declared innocents. He hat yet there 7 or 8000 li. per annum and can, from the Mount Magorton in the com. of Kerry, behold 50000 acres of his owne land. He hath an estate in every province of Ireland.

The kingdome of Ireland he hath surveyed, and that with that exactnesse (quaere Sir J.H.de modo), that there is no estate the⟨re⟩ to the value of threscore pounds per annum but he can shew, to the value, and those that he employed for the geometricall part were ordinary fellowes, some (perhaps) foot-soldiers, that circumambulated with their *box and needles*, not knowing what they did, which Sir William knew right well how to make use of.

Anno Domini 1667 (vide his Scheme), he married on Trinity Sunday . . . the relict of Sir ⟨Maurice⟩ Fenton, of Ireland, knight, daughter of Sir Hasdras Waller of Ireland by . . . , a very beautifull and ingeniose lady, browne, with glorious eies, by whom he hath . . . sonnes, and . . . daughters, very lovely children, but all like the mother. He has a naturall daughter that much resembles him, no legitimate child so much, that acts at the Duke's playhouse, who hath had a child by . . . about 1679. She is (1680) about 21.

I remember about 1660 there was a great difference between him and Sir . . . , one of Oliver's knights, about . . . They printed one against the other: this knight was wont to preach at Dublin. The knight had been a soldier, and challenged Sir William to fight with him. Sir William is extremely short sighted, and being the challengee it belonged to him to nominate place and weapon. He nominates, for the place, a darke cellar, and the weapon to be a great carpenter's axe. This turned the knight's challenge into ridicule, and so it came to nought.

He can be an excellent droll (if he haz mind to it) and will preach extempore incomparably, either the Presbyterian way, Independent, Cappucin frier, or Jesuite.

He received the honour of knighthood Anno Domini. . .

He had his patent for earle of Kilmore and baron of . . . 166- which he stifles during his life to avoyd envy, but his sonne will have the benefitt of the precedency. — [I expected that his sonne would have broken-out a lord or earle: but it seemes that he had enemies at the court at Dublin, which out of envy obstructed the passing of his patent.]

⁹Quare annum. E. W. esq. respondet circiter 1651.' (Aubrey)

¹⁰Several made offers to the Parliament to survey it (when the Parliament ordered to have it surveyed) for 4000 li., 5000 li., 6000 li.; but Sir William (then Dr.) went lower then them all and gott it. Sir Jonas More contemnd it as dangerous, loving to sleepe in a whole skin: he was afrayed of the Tories.— From Edmund Wyld, esq. (Aubrey)

Anno 1660 he came into England, and was presently recieved into good grace with his majestie, who was mightily pleased with his discourse.

Anno Domini 1663 he made his double-bottom'd vessell (launched about new-yeere's tide), of which he gave a modell to the Royall Societie made with his owne hands, and kept it in the repository at Gresham College. It did doe very good service, but anno 16— happened to be lost in an extraordinary storme in the Irish sea. (Memorandum:— there is yet a double bottomd vessell in the Isle of Wight, made by one Mr. . . . which, they say, sailes well: quaere capt. Lee.)

Anno Domini 167 $\frac{5}{6}$ (vide the yeare of T. Deer's lettres), March 18, he was corcepted by the Lord Chancellor Finch, when the patent for the farming of Ireland was sealed, to which Sir William would not seale. Monday, 20th March, he was affronted by Mr. Vernon: Tuesday following Sir William and his ladie's brother (Mr. Waller) Hectored Mr. Vernon and caned him.

He went towards Ireland in order to be a member of that Parliament, March 22, 16 $\frac{79}{80}$ — God send him a prosperous journey.

1680 . . . he went to Rumsey to see his native country, and to erect a monument to his father.¹¹

He is a person of an admirable inventive head, and practicall parts. He hath told me that he hath read but little, that is to say, not since 25 aetat., and is of Mr. Hobbes his mind, that had he read much, as some men have, he had not known so much as he does, nor should have made such discoveries and improvements.

I remember one St. Andrewe's day (which is the day of the generall meeting of the Royall Society for annuall elections), I sayd, 'methought 'twas not so well that we should pitch upon the Patron of Scotland's day, we should rather have taken St. George or St. Isidore' (a philosopher canonized). 'No,' said Sir William, 'I would rather have had it on St. Thomas day, for he would not beleeve till he had seen and putt his fingers into the holes,' according to the motto Nullius in verba.

He haz told me that he never gott by legacies in his life, but only x li. which was not payd.

He has told me, that whereas some men have accidentally come into the way of preferment, by lying at an inne, and there contracting an acquaintance; on the roade; or as some others¹² have donne; he never had any such like opportunity, but hewed out his fortune himselfe — quod N.B.

He is a proper handsome man, measured six foot high, good head of browne haire, moderately turning up: vide his picture as Dr. of Physique. His eies are a kind of goose-grey, but very short sighted, and, as to aspect, beautifull, and promise sweetnes of nature, and they doe not decieve, for he is a marveillous good-natured person, and eßplagcno\$. Eie-browes thicke, darke, and straight (horizontall). His head is very lardge, makrokšfalo\$. He was in his youth very slender, but since these twenty yeares and more past he grew very plump, so that now (1680) he is abdomine tardus. This last March, 16 $\frac{79}{80}$, I perswaded him to sitt for his picture to Mr. Loggan, the graver, whom I forthwith went for myselfe, and he drewe it just before his goeing into Ireland, and 'tis

¹¹Aubrey excised this sentence.

¹²E.g. my cosen Rowland Plattes, whom the lord Cottington never having seen before, liked so well, that he made him his gentleman of the horse when he went his embassy into Spaine (in 1631). This was on shipboard. (Aubrey)

very like him. But about 1659, he had a picture in miniature drawn by his friend and mine, Mr. Samuel Cowper (prince of limners of his age), one of the likeliest that ever he drew.

Scipsit:

1. W.P.'s advice concerning the Education of Youth, sticht, 4to, printed.
2. [A contest and controversie between him and Sir . . . : about which Sir William printed a little discourse in 8vo: *quaere nomen libri.*]
3. Historie or Discourse of Taxes, 4to.
4. Duplicate Proportion, 8vo., printed.
5. Politique Arithmetique, MS.
6. Politique Anatomie of Ireland, MS.
7. A treatise of building shippes, which he presented to the Royall Societie about 1661; which the lord Brouncker was pleased to keepe to himselfe, and never returned it; a MS.

Observations on the Bills of Mortality were really his.

Translation of . . . Psalmes in Latin hexameter, sticht't, folio, printed, London, 1677 (*quaere*).

Since his death I have seen, in his closet, a great many tractatuncli in MS. — e.g. *Religio Christiana Puerilis*; *Via brevis ad Medicinam*; An Essay to know or judge the Value of Landes; His owne life in Latin verse; *De Connubiis*; Severall Epigrammes and Verses by him; *Of Mills*; An Engine very usefull for raising of water; *cum multis aliis* that have slipt out of my memorie. Memorandum: his 2 last printed tracts were comparisons or paralleling of London and Paris, sticht, 8vo.

I have heard Sir William say more than once, that he knew not that he was purblind till his master¹³ (a master of a shippe) bade him climbe-up the rope ladder, and give notice when he espied such a steeple (somewhere upon the coast of England or France, I have forgot where), which was a land-marke for the avoyding of a shelve; at last the master sawe it on the deck, and they fathom'd and found they were but . . . foot water, wherupon (as I remember) his master drubb't him with a cord.

Before he went into Ireland, he sollicitated, and no doubt he was an admirable good sollicitator. I have heard him say that in sollicitating (with the same paines) he could dispatch severall businesses, nay, better than one alone, for by conversing with severall he should gaine the more knowledge, and the greater interest.

In the time of the warre with the Dutch, they concluded at the councill-board at London, to have so many sea men out of Irland (I thinke 1500). Away to Irland came one with a commission, and acquaints Sir William with it; sayes Sir William, 'you will never raise this number here.' 'Oh,' sayd the other, 'I warrant you, I will not abate you a man.' Now Sir William knew 'twas impossible, for he knew how many tunne of

¹³He was first bound apprentice to as sea-captaine. (Aubrey)

shipping belond to Ireland, and the rule is, to . . . tunnes so many men. Of these shippes halfe were abroad, and of those at home so many men unfit. In fine, the commissioner with all his diligence could not possibly rayse above 200 seamen there. So we may see how statesmen may mistake for want of this Politique Arithmetique.

Another time the councell at Dublin were all in a great racket for the prohibition of coale from England and Wales, considering that all about Dublin is such a vast quantity of turfe; so they would improve their rents, sett poor men on worke, and the city should be served with fuell cheaper. Sir William prima facie knew that this project could not succeed. Sayd he, 'If you will make an order to hinder the bringing-in of coales by foreigne vessells, and bring it in vessells of your owne, I approve of it very well: but for your supposition of the cheapnesse of the turfe, 'tis true 'tis cheap on the place, but consider carriage, consider the yards that must contayn such a quantity for respective houses, these yards must be rented; what will be the chardge?' The⟨y⟩ supputated, and found that (everything considered) 'twas much deared then to fetch coale from Wales, or etc.

Memorandum:— about 1665 he presented to the Royall Societie a discourse of his (in manuscript, of about a quire of paper) of building of shippes, which the lord Brounker (then president) tooke away, and still keepes, saying ' 'Twas too great an arcanum of state to be commonly perused'; but Sir William told me that Dr. Robert Wood, M.D., aforesayd, has a copie of it, which he himselfe haz not: quaere Dr. Wood for it.

Sir William died at his house in Peccadilly-street (almost opposite to St. James church, on Fryday, 16th day of December, 1687, of a gangrene in his foot, occasioned by the swelling of the gowt, and is buried with his father and mother in the church at Rumsey in Hampshire. See his will.

My lady Petty was created baronesse of Shelburn in Ireland, and her eldest sonne baron of the same, a little before the comeing-in of the Prince of Orange.

Sir William Petty had a brother. . . , like him, who dyed sine prole: he has his picture. —Quaere if I have mentioned Nan Green out of the printed narrative?

His picture by Fuller in his Dr. of M⟨edicine⟩ gowne, a skull in his hand; then a spare man; ⟨with a⟩ little band; Veslingius' Anatomie by him. 'Twas he (Sir William) that putt Fuller to drawe the muscles as at Oxon gallery.¹⁴

Quaere nomen of the knight his antagonist, Sir . . .? Resp. — 'Twas Sir Hierome Sanchy that was his antagonist: against whom he wrote the 8vo booke, about 1662. He was one of Oliver's knights, a commander and preacher and no conjuror. He challenged Sir William to fight with him. Sir William being the challengee named the place, a darke cellar, the weapon, carpenter's great axe; so by this expedient Sir William (who is short-sighted) would be at an equall tourney with this douty knight.

Sir W. Petty was a Rota man, and troubled Mr. James Harrington with his arithmetical proportions, reducing politie to numbers.

Sir W.P. 18 March ⟨167 $\frac{5}{6}$ ⟩ correpted by the Lord Chancellor when the patent was to be sealed, which he would not seale. Monday, 20th, he was affronted by Mr. Vernon; Tuesday, he hectored him.

Sir William Petty scripsit A Politicall Anatomie of Ireland. He assured me by letter

¹⁴The picture gallery at the Bodleian.

from Dublyn, July 12, 1681:— 'I am not forward to print this Politicall Arithmetique but doe wish that what goeth abroad were compared with the copie in Sir Robert Southwell's hand, which I corrected in March 1679.' He told me some yeares since, before the copie was dedicated to the Royal Societie, that 'the doeing of it would cost 50,000 li., but Ireland will be donne.'

⟨In MS. Aubr. 22 is a printed tract, 26 pages (besides prefatory matter), 'The advice of W.P. to Mr. Samuel Harlib for the advancement of some particular parts of learning,' Lond. 1648: the preface signed 'W.P., London, 8 Jan. 164 $\frac{7}{8}$,' i.e. W. Petty.⟩

⟨In MS. Aubr. 26, at p. 24, are 'Directions from Sir William Petty to me heretofore, scil. 1671,' for collecting national statistics.⟩

⟨In MS. Aubr. 8, fol. 62, are 4 folio printed pages containing the evidence of Sir William Petty, as sole surviving trustee for 900 soldiers commonly called the three Regiments, given on 25 July, 1681, before Henry Hen, Lord Chief Baron of Ireland, about lands in the baronies of Iveragh, Dunkeron, and Glanoroght in county Kerry.⟩

Sir William Pety — his eldest sonne is baron of Shelbrooke in Ireland; and his lady (widow) is baroness by patent from king James the 2nd, anno 1668.

In the *Paris Gazette* about January, 168 $\frac{7}{8}$, 'Monsieur Coussin travaille pour faire éloge de Sir W. Petty which will be inserted in the *Journal de Scavans*'— which see.

Sir William Petty had a boy that whistled incomparably well. He after wayted on a lady, a widowe, of good fortune. Every night this boy was to whistle his lady asleepe. At last she . . . marries him . . . This is certeyn true; — from himselfe and Mrs. Grant.¹⁵

From '*Brief Lives,*' chiefly of Contemporaries, set down by John Aubrey, between the Years 1669 & 1696. Edited by Andrew Clark. Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1898.

¹⁵Perhaps wife of Major John Graunt.