



Robert Hooke and the English Renaissance

by Paul Kent & Allan Chapman
(Eds.)

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15.99 (hbk).

The tragedy of Robert Hooke is that he lived at the same time as Isaac Newton, who has cast a shadow over all others of his time. Hooke had to wait for over 250 years before becoming the subject of a biography (Margaret Espinasse's *Robert Hooke: New Studies*, 1956, reviewed in the *Journal* vol. 67), and with one exception in the 1980s, almost another 50 years passed before he attracted more.

The tercentenary of his death in 2003 has led to the appearance of a number of volumes devoted to Hooke and his work. Hooke was without doubt one of the most important figures of his time, and even under the shadow of Newton he was and still is one of the giants of science during the late 17th century. It is therefore very difficult to imagine how so much detail could be packed into such a small number of pages, as has been achieved by the authors of the book now under review. Written (and, almost as importantly for a multi-authored work, edited) in a clear and succinct style, well illustrated and presented, the fact that the various chapters complement each other with little duplication is a clear indication of the careful and expert editing that has gone into this work. This book is probably the best (a comment which given the quality of the other works, is not easily made) of those on the subject that I have read.

The book is divided into nine chapters, each dealing with an aspect of Hooke's interests, and with only one exception, free of mathematics. Each chapter is written by a specialist in their field; the authors include Allan Chapman, Sir John Enderby (Physical Secretary of the Royal Society), Ellen T. Drake, Gerard L. E. Turner, Edmund C. Hambly (former president of the Royal Acad-

emy of Engineering), M. A. R. Cooper, A. A. Mills and P. W. Kent, with a preface by Sir Arnold Wolfendale, the former Astronomer Royal. Naturally, as an astronomer, I found the chapter by Allan Chapman on Hooke's astronomical work of particular interest, but equally the other chapters, covering his life as a whole (also by Allan Chapman), his early life in Oxford, his relationship with the Royal Society, his ideas on the Earth in space, his work with the microscope and the writing of his *Micrographia*, his inventiveness and mechanical ability and finally his role in the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire, were all as engrossing. What is brought out very clearly is the complex nature of Hooke's character, and why he acquired a reputation for rarely completing projects, due to the sheer volume of work he undertook.

The book is well referenced and illustrated throughout, and although no known likeness of Hooke exists, a conjectured likeness using descriptions of him by his contemporaries (drawn by Rachel Chapman) appears opposite the title page. I can thoroughly recommend this book, and at the price stated it is without doubt value for money.

Anthony Kinder

Tony Kinder is Director of the BAA Historical Section.

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