



Nathaniel Hooke (1664-1738)

Period and Area of activity at TCD: 1679-1680: Student of Arts and Divinity & 1690: Military officer billeted in College



Rationale for memorialisation:

Trinity has its own 007. The name was not Bond, but Hooke, Nathaniel Hooke. A career as a spy was an unlikely outcome for a student of theology and would-be pastor. Hooke arrived at Trinity after grammar school at Kilkenny College, then the finest (and most expensive) school in Ireland for young gentlemen. Jonathan Swift and William Congreve were contemporaries at Kilkenny, and of course also attended Trinity. Nathaniel Hooke was the son of a good Dublin family, which included minsters and merchants. His grandfather Thomas Hooke was Mayor of Dublin in 1654.

Whatever hopes his family had however, Nathaniel disappointed them. Instead of the destined career as a man of the cloth, he took a different path. Evidently he was deeply marked by his time at Trinity and by what he learned in his studies – indeed his passions seem to have been inflamed to such an extent by the lectures he attended that he sought to put his new knowledge into practice without delay. Like many a student today he was eager and impatient to spend time abroad. Unlike them, Hooke's 'Erasmus' adventures would include radical politics, riots and rebellion.

Leaving Trinity during the summer of 1679, he became caught up in the fringes of violent religious strife in Scotland, and then anti-Royalist protests in London in 1680. He even signed a 'monster' petition calling for King Charles II to exclude his brother, James Stuart, duke of York and a Catholic, from the throne. Fleeing to Amsterdam to avoid arrest, he was the only Irishman to fight with the Duke of Monmouth in his doomed rebellion against the newly crowned King James II in 1685.

Thereafter Hooke had a remarkable transformation. Disillusioned by failure, by the absence of Providential favour he had cleaved fast to since Trinity, he sought and received pardon from the very king he had tried to overthrow. In 1688 James II made Hooke a Royal Messenger, an early form of secret service agent. Following the Dutch invasion – or Glorious Revolution – led by William of Orange later in 1688, Nathaniel Hooke finally returned to Trinity in 1690. He came back in very and to very changed circumstances. Hooke was now a Catholic military officer; Trinity closed as a university, serving instead as an army barracks. It must have been one of the strangest visits in the strangest circumstances ever by a former student of the College to his alma mater.

After a brief period in the Tower of London, Hooke joined the service of King Louis XIV of France. He became a successful and much decorated spy, diplomat and analyst. Hooke died as a Major General and Knight Commander of the Order of St Louis in 1738, perhaps the only person ever associated with Trinity to boast those achievements. He might also perhaps be said to be an exemplar of the benefits of studying at TCD – even a short time at College prepares the way for success in life, no matter what the future may hold!