



## Before Newton: 17th-century chymical practice at Trinity College, Cambridge

Professor Anna Marie Roos, FSA FLS  
 University of Lincoln, and The Royal Society of London

Lecture date: Monday 13 March 2023

### ABSTRACT:

In the 1650s, Trinity College, Cambridge saw the formation of a community of scholars interested in medicine and its allied fields of chymistry. More specifically, the naturalist Francis Willughby's commonplace book in the Middleton Collection at the University of Nottingham reveals that in the late 1650s, he and the botanist John Ray were engaged in significant chymical experimentation at the College. Ray and Willughby reproduced procedures in Jean Béguin's *Tyrocinium chymicum* and the *London Pharmacopoeia* to learn how to make medicines, and they were also engaged in (al)chymical investigations into the transmutation of matter, aided by foreign chymists paid by Trinity College who tutored fellows in the subject. Although it is now well known that Sir Isaac Newton performed extensive chymical work at Trinity College from 1669 until 1695, it seems there was a well-established chymical culture at Trinity decades earlier. In this talk, Professor Anna Marie Roos will characterise what (al)chymical practice was like in Cambridge at this time, and why it became a subject of intense interest.

### BIOGRAPHY:

Professor Anna Marie Roos is the Professor of the History of Science and Medicine at the University of Lincoln. Roos has been a visiting fellow at All Souls College, Oxford; a Fellow at the Huntington Library; a John Rylands Fellow at the University of Manchester; and Beinecke Fellow at Yale. Roos was the recipient of the John C. Thackray Medal for her work in the history of natural history, and she is the *Editor-in-Chief of Notes and Records: the Royal Society Journal of the History of Science*. Author of 10 books and editions, and dozens of journal

articles and book chapters, her latest book is *Martin Folkes (1690-1754): Newtonian, Antiquary, Connoisseur* (Oxford University Press, 2021). Her work has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the British Academy, the Royal Society of London, the Wellcome Trust, the McKnight Foundation, the Society of Authors, and the Lincoln Record Society.