

John Wilkins

John Wilkins, FRS (1614–1672) was an Anglican clergyman, natural philosopher and author, and was one of the founders of the [Royal Society](#). He was Bishop of Chester from 1668 until his death.

Wilkins is one of the few persons to have headed a college at both the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge. He was a [polymath](#), although not one of the most important scientific innovators of the period. His personal qualities were brought out, and obvious to his contemporaries, in reducing political tension in Interregnum Oxford, in founding the [Royal Society](#) on non-partisan lines, and in efforts to reach out to religious nonconformists. He was one of the founders of the new natural theology compatible with the science of the time. He is particularly known for [An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language \(1668\)](#)↗ in which, amongst other things, he proposed a universal language and an integrated system of measurement, similar to the metric system.

Wilkins lived in a period of great political and religious controversy, yet managed to remain on working terms with men of all political stripes; he was key in setting the Church of England on the path toward comprehension for as many sects as possible, "and toleration for the rest." Gilbert Burnet called him "the wisest clergyman I ever knew. He was a lover of mankind, and had a delight in doing good."

His stepdaughter married John Tillotson, who became Archbishop of Canterbury.

In 1648 **Wilkins** became Warden of Wadham College, in Oxford and under him the college prospered. He fostered political and religious tolerance and drew talented minds to the college, including Christopher Wren. Although he was a supporter of Oliver Cromwell, Royalists placed their sons in his charge. From those interested in experimental science, he drew together a significant group known as the [Oxford Philosophical Club](#), which by 1650 had been constituted with a set of rules. Besides some of the London group (Goddard, Wallis, Ward, Wren who was a young protégé of Scarborough), it included (in the account of Thomas Sprat) Ralph Bathurst, [Robert Boyle](#), William Petty, Lawrence Rooke, Thomas Willis, and Matthew Wren. [Robert Hooke](#) was gradually recruited into the **Wilkins** group: he arrived at Christ Church, Oxford in 1653, working his way to an education, became assistant to Willis, became known to **Wilkins** (possibly via Richard Busby) as a technician, and by 1658 was working with Boyle. [Wikipedia, John Wilkins](#)↗