

The Life and Work of John Wallis

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2016 marks the 400th anniversary of the birth of John Wallis

John Wallis was one of the leading mathematicians of the 17th century. He made significant achievements in mathematics and in other fields such as cryptography, science, speech and hearing, and theology. Highlights of his career included holding the post of Savillian Professor of Geometry at Oxford, deciphering difficult coded letters, and publishing his brilliant treatise *Arithmetica Infinitorum*. He made several important discoveries which would set the foundation for future mathematicians such as Isaac Newton to build upon. He was known to be very controversial because he often criticized the work of other mathematicians. However, his personal work and enthusiasm greatly inspired many of his contemporaries, as well as those in the future, to make significant achievements in several fields.

Wallis was born to John and Joanna Wallis on 23 November 1616 at Ashford in Kent, UK. His father was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, and thereafter became a highly esteemed Minister of Ashford. Joanna was the daughter of the heiress of a wealthy merchant in London. Wallis had two older sisters and two younger brothers.

He lost his father when he was six years old. His mother took it upon herself to give him a 'pious and prudent education', which included English and some Latin. With the arrival of the black plague in Ashford, he was sent to Tenterden and later Felsted in Essex. Up to this



John Wallis, by Sir Godfrey Kneller