On 1 November 1688 [new style],\(^1\) driven onward at speed by a strong easterly wind, a vast Dutch fleet left its sheltered harbour at Hellevoetsluis and sailed out into open waters. At a signal from Prince William of Orange the great gathering of ships organised itself into prearranged format, ‘stretching the whole fleet in a line, from Dover to Calais, twenty five deep’. The Dutch began their mission, ‘colours flying’, the fleet ‘in its greatest splendour’, ‘a vast mass of sail stretching as far as the eye could see, the warships on either flank simultaneously thundering their guns in salute as they passed in full view of Dover Castle on one side and the French garrison at Calais on the other’. As the great flotilla proceeded magnificently on its way, the Dutch regiments stood in full parade formation on the deck, ‘trumpets and drums playing various tunes to rejoice [their] hearts . . . for above three hours’. ‘We arrived between Dover and Calais, and at midday, as we passed along the Channel, we could see distinctly the high white cliffs of England, but the coast of France could be seen only faintly.’\(^2\)

These colourful details come from the personal diary (in Dutch) of Constantijn Huygens junior, Prince William’s First Secretary, and older brother to Christiaan Huygens, the virtuoso and scientist. Constantijn was at the very forefront of the action throughout the Dutch invasion,

\(^1\) Throughout the seventeenth century the Julian calendar was followed in England, and the revised Gregorian calendar everywhere else in western Europe. The difference between them was ten days in the seventeenth century and eleven days after 1700 (because England observed 1700 as a leap year, but Continental Europe did not).

\(^2\) *Journaal van Constantijn Huygens*, den Zoon 1, 13. Saturday, 13 November: ‘Quamen des morgens tusschen Dover og Calis en passeerden smiddaghs het Canael, konnende de hooghe witte Bergen van Engelandt distinctelijck sien, maer de cust van Vranckrijk duysterlijck.’
so it is hardly surprising that other members of his family, back in The Hague, were particularly keenly interested in unfolding events. On 30 December 1688 Christiaan Huygens wrote to Constantijn, expressing his relief at having at last heard that the invasion and military campaign against the forces of James II of England had resulted in a decisive victory:

> It has been extremely upsetting that there has been no way of getting news of you by letter during your long absence, but thank God things will improve from now on. At least the English roads will no longer be blocked.

You may well imagine with what delight we have learned of the great and happy success of affairs there, after all the anxieties and apprehensions since the beginning of this expedition, both because of the dangers at sea and the uncertain prospect for the war. For even though since your departure the news has always been reasonably good, we continued to anticipate a military engagement as long as the King’s [James II’s] army remained on its feet. And we could not imagine a reversal as sudden as the one which has taken place since the extremely fortunate retreat, which you did not yet know about when you wrote your last letter to Madame your wife.

Now we wait impatiently for news of your arrival in London, and of the reception they will give to Monsieur the Prince which will no doubt be something marvellous to see. What a joy for the nation and what glory for him, to have been successful in such a noble and bold enterprise. We will learn after that how everything is to be established and organised, both over there and back here, which is not a small thing to wait for. We are not sure whether you will return here or stay there where you are, which causes embarrassment for a certain lady of your acquaintance.3

Brother Constantijn was now installed in London in a key administrative position, serving as private secretary to the victorious Prince William, shortly to be proclaimed King William III, joint monarch of England with his wife, Princess Mary Stuart, daughter of the deposed English king. Both Huygens brothers were fluent English-speakers – their father Sir Constantijn Huygens having been a lifelong Anglophile (William III too had had a bilingual upbringing).

3 See Appendix II.
The Dutch success was so sudden and dramatic, and caused such a general political stir, that Christiaan announced it might even tempt him to join his brother in England: ‘If you stay over there [he wrote], you will see that towards the spring there will be a good many people who will take a trip to England, and perhaps I shall be among them.’

Christiaan’s keen interest in life in London – now officially an occupied city, with Dutch soldiers posted on every government building, and with sporadic outbursts of violence, especially against Catholics and their places of worship – is palpable. With vicarious enjoyment he urges his brother to take advantage of his new position to make the acquaintance of the English ‘virtuosi’ (the scientists associated with the Royal Society) without delay – clearly envying him the opportunity:

In time you will get to know the most eminent men in London and those who understand our great Art [of lens-grinding and telescope-making]. A Mr. Smethwick once sent me some of his lenses (which were however only ocular ones) and claimed that he knew better how to make them than many others. I think that the Royal Society is on a long vacation at the moment. However you might have the opportunity of seeing Mr. Boyle and others of the members.

But he reserves his greatest admiration for Isaac Newton, with whom he has been in correspondence:

I would love to be in Oxford [actually Cambridge], just to get to know Mr. Newton. I greatly admire the beautiful inventions I find in the work he sent me. I could send you a letter for him, which you might easily find an opportunity to deliver to him.

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4 ‘Si vous restez là, vous verrez que vers le printemps il y aura bien des gens qui iront faire un tour en Angleterre et peut être je serai du nombre.’

5 For detail of the violence that continued for some time after William’s arrival see S. Pincus, 1688: The First Modern Revolution (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), chapter 9. Pincus’s book unfortunately came out after my own Going Dutch, so that I was unable to take advantage of its excellent archival additions to the story of the 1688 Revolution/Invasion.

6 ‘Avec le temps vous pourrez apprendre a connaitre à Londres les illustres et ceux qui s’entendent a nostre grand Art [of lens-grinding]. Il y avoit un Mr. Smetwick qui m’a une fois envoiè des verres de sa façon (ce n’estoient pourtant que des oculaires) et pretendoit qu’il en scavoit plus que beaucoup d’autres. Je pense que la Soc. Royale fait des grandes vacances presentement. Cependant vous pourrez avoir occasion de voir Mr. Boyle et autres des membres. Je voudrois estre à Oxford, seulement pour faire connoissance avec Mr. Newton de qui j’adime extrêmement les belles inventions que je trouve dans l’ouvrage qu’il m’a envoyé. Je pourray vous envoier une lettre pour luy, que vous trouverez facilement
By February 1689, Christiaan was receiving vivid accounts from scientific acquaintances of the high level of intellectual excitement in London, and was increasingly envious of his older brother’s good fortune in being part of unfolding events. Meanwhile, The Hague was rapidly emptying of influential political figures and intellectuals, crossing the Narrow Sea to England as the political centre of gravity shifted to London with the Orange faction.

On 5 February, on the eve of Princess Mary’s departure from the Netherlands to join her husband in England for the joint Coronation, Christiaan wrote again to Constantijn. He had heard that his brother might decide not to remain in the service of William (which would necessitate continued residence in England), but rather to return to the Netherlands. Christiaan counselled him to be cautious before taking this course of action, since there were likely to be few jobs back home for the foreseeable future. Here too, as in several other letters, he expresses the view that the English stood to gain far more than the Dutch from the invasion:

Madame the Princess [Mary] will leave here in 2 days so they say, as long as the wind is favourable, and one can see now by the number of the best houses which are to let and by the decline in rents in general, how deserted The Hague will be. In the end it will only be England who will profit from this great revolution, and the only advantage we here will derive from it is, I think, that without it we would have fallen upon worse times still.7

On 15 March, writing this time to his younger brother Lodewijk in Rotterdam, Christiaan reported that Constantijn now looked likely to stay in London, and he once again affirmed his own intention of joining him:

It seems from his last letters that he no longer shows a desire to quit, that his British Majesty [William] treats him very well, as if planning to retain him. . . . As for myself, I have often wondered whether in such a case I might not obtain a position to improve

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7 ‘Madame la Princess va partir dans 2 jours a ce qu'on dit pourveu que le vent ser ve, et l'on voit des a cet heure, combien la Haye sera deserte par la quantitè des meilleures maisons qui sont a louer et par le rabais du louage de toutes en general. Il n'y a que l'Angleterre enfin qui profitera de cette grande revolution et tout l'avantage que nos en tirerons c'est, comme je crois, que sans cela nous serions tombé dans de plus grands malheurs.’ (Huygens, Oeuvres Complètes 9, 309).
my own fortune, and I had already planned to cross the sea for that purpose. But brother Zulichem [Constantijn] has written to his wife that in 6 weeks (of which 3 are already past) His Majesty might make a triumphant tour of this country, for which reason I have deferred my trip.  

‘It is a shame’, Christiaan added presciently, ‘that the Prince has so little love of the study of the sciences. Were this not the case, I should have higher hopes [myself].’

In May, again writing to Lodewijk, Christiaan once more makes it clear that if Constantijn would make up his mind to accept a post with the new Anglo-Dutch régime he too would like an English appointment:

If [Constantijn] were to have stayed [in England], I could have resolved to transplant myself there also, by obtaining some benefice or pension through his influence, or that of my other friends. . . . [As it is] I can avoid the pain and expense of such a journey. Anyway, I am still undecided.

After Christiaan returned from the trip which, as we shall see, he did finally make to England shortly thereafter, he pressed his older brother with increasing insistence to support his efforts to gain a significant administrative office with William III. He now had other than intellectual motives. In addition to his desire to be where the political and intellectual action was, he found himself financially embarrassed by the high level of taxation being levied in the Netherlands, to support the English invasion and its aftermath:

I hope that you will give me your assistance in this affair, which is the first with which I have ever troubled you. I would not harbour ambitions like this if I did not believe that it is impossible for me to subsist honestly with the little I have, in this period of exacting taxation, of which there is no end in sight.

For the rest, this post is honourable and not very demanding, which would mean I did not have to give up my other studies. I do not believe that anyone will doubt that I am able to carry out its duties. I beg you therefore not to lose this opportunity to put me a little more at my ease, for in truth I can see nothing in this

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8 Huygens, Oeuvres Complètes 9, 311; Appendix II.
9 Christiaan to Lodewijk, 14 May 1689. Huygens, Oeuvres Complètes 9, 317–18; Appendix II.
country which is suitable for me except one of the places on the Royal Council.  

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These intimate and candid exchanges between members of the Huygens family suggest a rather different set of motives for the visit Christiaan eventually made to London, from June to August 1689, from those conventionally given in Histories of Science. I have myself previously described this trip in terms of Christiaan’s having been briefly ‘tempted out of retirement’. From my recent closer scrutiny of these and other letters to his brothers it looks rather as if Christiaan harboured serious hopes of rekindling his public career (which had ended in Paris with the death of his patron Colbert in 1685, and the revoking of his right to his French royal pension).

He had domestic reasons for wanting to relocate and revive his public career, too. Following the death of their father Sir Constantijn, eighteen months earlier (on 28 March 1687), Christiaan had been forced to vacate the family home in Het Plein at The Hague (left, as tradition decreed, to Constantijn junior as the new Heer van Zulichem), and to take up residence in the country property at Voorburg, which belonged to the brothers together. He was soon regretting the isolation: ‘I have so far stayed at Hofwijck and intend to remain here for the whole winter. There are unpleasant evenings when the weather is bad, but I suppose one can get used to anything’, he wrote to Constantijn. He took to staying in the family house in The Hague during the winter months.

Finally – and this is much closer to the traditional background account of his 1689 prolonged stay in London – Christiaan makes it

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10 Finally, in late December he writes: ‘A la Haye, 23 Dec. 1689. Je ne vous dis plus rien touchant ma sollicitation ne voyant pas qu’il y ait rien a faire tant que S. M.eu sera d’avis de ne point remplir la place vacante. . . . Quelque chose de cette nature ser oit bien mon fait, et je l’aime autant en Angleterre qu’icy, si vous estiez pour y rester, de quoy je commence a douter croiant que peut estre vous vous accoutumeriez a cette maniere de vie. Je suis loge a la Haye depuis 5 semaines au Noordende, derriere la maison de Mr. van Buttinghe, un peu etroitement mais assez bien au reste. J’ay preferé cela a la solitude trop melancholique de Hofwijck au milieu de l’hyver. J’ai presque achevé l’edition des Traitez de la Lumière et de la Pesanteur dont je vous envoieray des exemplaires’ (Huygens, Oeuvres Complètes 9, 353).


12 Huygens, Oeuvres Complètes 9, 305: ‘Je suis demeuré jusqu’icy à Hofwijck et pretens d’y rester pendant tout l’hyver. Il y a quelque soirees facheuses, quand il fait mauvais temps, mais je vois qu’on s’accoutume a tout.’ Eventually he would rent rooms in The Hague for the winter months.
clear in his letters to Constantijn that he is anxious to take advantage of his residence in England to reconnect with old scientific friends. Shortly before the Coronation he wrote:

I informed you in one of my previous letters that I had the intention of coming to see you, and perhaps I will execute that plan shortly. Not in order to attend the Coronation, but to see some old friends, as well as those who have settled there recently, and to see what they are doing in the way of science, in London, Oxford and Cambridge, in all of which I am quite well known. Here, since your departure, there is not a single person I can talk to about things of that nature.\(^{13}\)

Christiaan was anxious to renew his acquaintance with Robert Boyle. But it was above all Sir Isaac Newton whom Christiaan Huygens now badly wanted to meet. For two years he had been working through sections of Newton's *Principia*, of which the author had sent him a presentation copy. Christiaan had engaged with the dense mathematical calculations and bold theorems contained in the *Principia*, with increasing excitement and admiration, even where he disagreed with the Englishman's approach or outcomes.\(^{14}\)

We have already noted Christiaan telling Constantijn of his enormous admiration for the *Principia*: 'I greatly admire the beautiful inventions I find in the work he sent me.'\(^{15}\) Fatio de Duillier had seen to it that Christiaan was full of eager anticipation before ever his copy arrived, providing him with a synopsis of its contents while it was still

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13 22 March 1689. 'Je vous ay mandé par une de mes precedentes que j'avois quelque dessein de vous aller voir, et peut estre je l'executeray dans peu; non pas pour estre spectateur du couronnement, mais pour voir quelques anciens amis, outre ceux qui sont passez nouvellesment, et ce qu'on fait en matiere de sciences, tant a Londres qu'a Oxford et Cambrig ou partout je suis assez connu. Icy depuis vostre depart, je n'ay pas un seul homme a qui parler touchant des choses de cette nature' (Huygens, *Oeuvres Complètes* 9, 312).

14 See, for example, Huygens, *Oeuvres Complètes* 21, 416–26.

15 See Fatio's 1687 letters alerting Christiaan to the imminent publication of the *Principia*. Huygens, *Oeuvres Complètes* 9, 167–8, N. Fatio de Duillier to Christiaan Huygens, 24 June 1687: ‘Je me suis deja trouvé trois fois à la Societé roiale où j’ai entendu proposer tantôt d’assez bonnes choses et tantôt d’assez mediocres. Quelques uns de ces Monsieurs qui la composent sont extremement prévenus en faveur d’un livre/ du Monsr. Newton qui s’imprime presemement et qui se debitera dans trois semaines d’ici. Il m’ont reproché que j’étois trop Cartesien et m’ont fait entendre que depuis les meditations de leur auteur toute la Physique étot bien changeée. Il traite en general de la Mechanique des Cieux; de la maniere dont les mouvemens circulaire qui se font dans un milieu liquide se communique à tout le milieu; de la pesanteur et d’une force qu’il suppose dans toute les planetes pour s’attirer les unes les autres.’ ‘Mr. Newton de qui j’admire extremement les belles inventions que je trouve dans l’ouvrage qu’il m’a envoyé’ (Huygens, *Oeuvres Complètes* 9, 305).
in proof with the Royal Society. ‘Let us get hold of Newton’s book!’ he exclaimed impatiently in a letter to Fatio in July 1687.16

As a respected continental virtuoso, Christiaan, once he had got his hands on the Principia and read it attentively, had made his high opinion of it widely known. When John Locke came to visit him at Hofwijck, and asked him if he thought the mathematics were sound – Locke admitted he could not himself follow them – Christiaan told him emphatically that they could certainly be trusted. Newton, to whom Locke recounted this, proudly repeated the Dutch mathematician’s endorsement in London. A visit to London would at last allow Huygens to meet Newton face to face. More importantly, since Newton’s irascible nature was legendary, the great man would be predisposed to enter into debate with the Dutchman, who was so publicly enthusiastic about his work.

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The Prince of Orange arrived in England in November 1688 with a formidable army. But he also came prepared for his encounter with the English, with a fully formed outlook and set of attitudes. A robust set of common interests and commitments had developed over at least the preceding half-century between a certain sort of Englishman and his Dutch counterpart. While there was always an edge of suspicion (there had, after all, been three Anglo–Dutch wars since the 1650s), there was also a great deal of recognisably shared experience, particularly in the realm of arts and letters.

A small episode on the road leading from Torbay to London and the English throne underlines the importance of this shared ‘mentality’. Constantijn Huygens junior records in his diary that in the course of the often arduous and demanding forced march from Torbay to London, Prince William of Orange took some time off from military affairs to do a bit of tourism, and encouraged his secretary to do likewise.

On 4 December, as the Prince travelled towards London at the head of his massive Dutch army, he insisted on making a detour to admire Wilton House near Salisbury, the country seat of the Earl of Pembroke. Wilton was renowned for its architecture and its art, but most of all for its magnificent gardens, designed in the 1640s by Isaac de Caus.

Engravings of the Wilton gardens had appeared in a lavishly illustrated book entitled Hortus Pembrochianus (Garden of the Earl

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16 Huygens, Oeuvres Complètes 9, 190, Christiaan Huygens to N. Fatio de Duillier, 11 July 1687: ‘Mes respects a M. Boyle. Ayons le livre de Newton.’
of Pembroke), first published in 1645–6, and reprinted several times thereafter – in one case, without any of the accompanying text, but simply as a set of engravings. The book is closely modelled on a famous volume brought out twenty-five years earlier by Isaac de Caus’s brother Salomon, depicting the fabulous gardens he had designed at Heidelberg for the ‘Winter King and Queen’ – the Elector Palatine Frederick and his wife, Charles I’s sister, Elizabeth of Bohemia. Both books are likely to have been familiar to a keen enthusiast for gardens like Prince William. Heidelberg’s gardens had been destroyed during the Thirty Years War, along with the city’s great university and its library.

In the midst of a military campaign, on foreign soil, William took the earliest possible opportunity to inspect the Pembroke gardens in all their glory, and at some length. Constantijn Huygens junior records the detour made for this purpose:

We marched from Hendon to Salisbury, 13 miles, a good way through Salisbury plain, but for a long time we had a cold, sharp wind blowing directly in our faces.

A mile from Salisbury we passed an undistinguished village (which nevertheless sends two representatives to Parliament), called Wilton, where the Earl of Pembroke has a rather beautiful house which is moderately beautiful, because there are some very notable paintings by Van Dyck. His Highness went to see it, but I did not – I was in a hurry to get to the town to get warm.17

William may have been anxious to see the Van Dycks, at least one of which showed his mother as a child, with her siblings, but the gardens were far more impressive than the house. Laid out and planted before the house itself was built, as was customary for the period, the Wilton gardens had been designed to complement a classical villa on a grand scale, as de Caus’s original drawings clearly show. By the time the house was constructed, the 4th Earl’s fortunes had faded, and a more modest house eventually presided over the parterres and wildernesses, statues and elaborate fountains.

Wilton House’s architecture, interior decoration, artworks and gardens were entirely to the monarch-to-be’s Dutch taste. The weather was abominable, but that in no way dampened the Stadholder’s enthusiasm. Rejoining Huygens the following day, William told

17  *Journaal van Constantijn Huygens, den Zoon* I, 35.
Constantijn that the house and garden were as outstanding as he had been led to believe: ‘In the evening the Prince was in his room coughing violently, having caught cold. He told me I absolutely must go and see the house at Wilton.’\(^\text{18}\) Huygens ‘did want to go to Wilton, but my horses were not available’. He went on foot to see Salisbury Cathedral instead.\(^\text{19}\)

So the milieu (what the French call the ‘cadre’) was familiar to the two Huygens brothers, on both sides of the Channel.

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So now that we have a context provided by that fascinating exchange of familiar letters, let us reassess what happened on the occasion of the trip that Christiaan Huygens eventually made to England.

Both Huygens brothers kept diaries for this period.\(^\text{20}\) So we know Christiaan arrived in Harwich on 1 June 1689 [old style], having travelled from The Hague in the company of Constantijn’s wife and young son. They reached London five days later. Constantijn recorded in his diary for 6 June:

> While I was seated at table in Whitehall, my wife, son and brother arrived and, to my great joy, all in good health. In the afternoon we looked over one or two lodgings with them and cousin Becker took one with Mrs Row, widow of Sir Robert Row, and spoke with the daughter. Our rooms, together with those of brother Christiaan, cost 33 guilders per week. We moved in straightaway, after we had been out shopping.\(^\text{21}\)

The whole family frequented the court of William and Mary at Hampton Court, where the couple had taken up official residence, because the sea-coal pollution at Whitehall exacerbated William’s asthma. So from his arrival Christiaan found himself at the very heart of unfolding political events in England – part of the new, Dutch ruling élite. I might add that his diary reveals that he spent the greater part of his almost three months in England enjoying the kinds of recreational activities – gambling, trips to stately homes, musical entertainment – that you would expect a courtier to engage in.

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18 ‘De Prins savants in sijn camer seer hoestende eg verkoudt zijnde, seyde mij dat nootsakelijck het huys te Wilton moste gaen sien.’
19 *Journaal van Constantijn Huygens, den Zoon I*, 36.
20 For Christiaan’s diary of the visit, see Huygens, *Oeuvres Complètes* 22, 743–9. See also Huygens, *Oeuvres Complètes* 9, 333.
He visited Wren’s new buildings: the nearly completed St Paul’s, the Monument to the Great Fire (in fact more Hooke’s), the Temple and Bedlam (Bethlehem Hospital, also by Hooke). There were trips to Windsor Castle, where Christiaan admired Verrio’s ceiling paintings in St George’s Chapel, and outings to take the waters at Epsom and to visit the Evelyn home at Deptford, with its remarkable garden. On a gambling evening at Epsom in the company of Constantijn and his wife, he won a silver ewer worth 10 and a half guineas. He went to the theatre, and to several musical soirées, during one of which he listened to French Opera and an accomplished flautist.

Towards the end of his stay he also embarked on an amorous liaison with a Miss Pernell, the intimate details of which are concealed in Christiaan’s diary behind a series of indecipherable coded entries.

It was from this position of relaxed privilege and public prominence, and with the authority of his brother and the court behind him, that on 12 June, shortly after his arrival, Christiaan travelled by boat back along the Thames to Gresham College to attend a meeting of the Royal Society. As he recorded in his diary, this meeting was in strong contrast to the glamour of life at court:

To Gresham College. Meeting in a small room. Cabinet of curiosities, extensive but poorly maintained. Hoskins presided. Henshaw was one of the principals. Halley. Van Leeuwenhoek’s letter delivered. I was accompanied by Mr. Newton and Mr. Fatio.

This diary entry tells us that Christiaan had now met Newton, formally introduced, one imagines, by Fatio de Duillier. Two weeks later, having returned to Hampton Court, Christiaan Huygens’s diary records that he had an audience with King William and dined with the king’s Dutch favourite, William Bentinck, now Earl of Portland, the most powerful man at court. It had been suggested beforehand that, as an esteemed virtuoso particularly well-connected with the Dutch royal household, Christiaan might intervene with William III on Isaac Newton’s behalf, putting the mathematician’s name forward for a promotion.

22 On 10 June, according to Constantijn’s diary, Christiaan visited Robert Boyle (cit. Andriesse, Huygens, p. 357).

Two days later, according to Constantijn’s diary, Christiaan acted directly on Newton’s behalf a second time – once again, the Dutch faction intervening decisively in the lives of English subjects:

10 July. Brother Christiaan went to London with young Mr. Hambden, Fatio de Duillier and Mr. Newton at 7 in the morning with the purpose of recommending Mr. Newton to the King for a vacancy as Head of a Cambridge College.24

On 28 July, Christiaan attended a fashionable concert, at which Hampden introduced him to the Duke of Somerset, Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, and Newton’s preferment was once more discussed:

To Hampton Court to speak to the King. Dined with Mr. Bentinck, Count of Portland. Slept at Dutton. Mr. Haden presented me, and invoked my expertise [m’avoit allegué] in favour of Mr. Newton, on whose behalf he was importuning His Majesty.25

Here, the diaries of both brothers record, Christiaan Huygens was engaged in serious, not to say significant business. He was prominently and personally involved in the political game of snakes-and-ladders as a result of which Isaac Newton – hitherto a reclusive intellectual and a comparatively minor figure, politically – moved centre-stage. His brother Constantijn’s diary confirms the importance that was attached to this intervention of Christiaan’s.

The Cambridge college whose headship Newton had ambitions to fill was King’s, and the court lobbyist on Newton’s behalf, who approached Huygens, was John Hampden, a leading Parliamentary player. Huygens’s approach evidently had the desired effect. Shortly thereafter, William III wrote to the Fellows of King’s College, informing them of his desire that they appoint Newton as their new Provost. There

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24 ‘Quoiqu’ayant parlé deux fois dans son Journal de la sollicitation de Newton, il n’a pas noté ce que le frère Constantyn écrit dans son Journal à lui: “10 juillet. Frère Christiaen alla avec le jeune Mr. Hambden et Faccio Duillier et Mr. Newton le matin à 7 heures à Londres dans le dessein de recommaner ce dernier au Roi pour une place vacante de Régent d’un collège à Cambridge”. Il s’agissait du poste de préfet de King’s College. Nous avons noté dans le T. XXI qu’à Gresham College, le 22 juin, Huygens parla sur la pesanteur. Nous pouvons ajouter que Newton traite de la double réfraction’ (Huygens, Oeuvres Complètes 22, 749).

25 ‘A Hamptoncourt parlè au Roy. Disnè chez Mr. Bentinck Comte de Portland. Couchè a Dutton. Mr. Hamden me presenta et m’avoit allegué en faveur de Mr. Newton pour qui il sollicitoit Sa Majestè’ (Huygens, Oeuvres Complètes 22, 744).
was only so far, given university politics, that such influential lobbying could take a candidate. The new foreign king was roundly rebuffed by the Fellows, who chose another candidate. Nevertheless, Newton’s public career was clearly in the ascendent, thanks in no small part to the brothers Huygens.²⁶

Even though this direct attempt by Christiaan Huygens to advance Newton’s career proved unsuccessful, it significantly strengthened the relationship between the two men, and with it the intensity of the intellectual bond between them. In August, before Christiaan returned home, Newton presented him with two papers on motion through a resisting medium, in response to his *Discours de la cause de la Pesanteur*. Autograph copies of these papers (marked ‘received in London, August 1690’ by Huygens), and Huygens’s notes in response, survive. The two men also had lengthy discussions of optics and colour. Huygens told Leibniz that Newton had communicated ‘some very beautiful experiments’ to him – probably his experiments with thin films similar to the ones Huygens himself had performed twenty years earlier, and similar to those Robert Hooke had recorded in his *Micrographia* even earlier.²⁷

In the domain of science and virtuosity, Christiaan did not confine himself to constructing a solid relationship with Newton. In pursuit of his general aim of re-establishing his connections with the London scientific virtuosi, he did indeed see Robert Boyle, and was shown experiments that delighted him in the field of what we would call chemistry, but in the period was actually closer to alchemy:

Saw Mr Boyle 3 times. On the last occasion he showed us an experiment with two cold liquids which burst into flame when they were combined. He had moistened a piece of wool in a silver spoon with the first, which had a strong smell almost like oil of anis. The other, which was poured on to it, was in a tiny vial, and gave off fumes when the stopper was removed.²⁸

²⁷ Westfall, *Never at Rest*, p. 488.
²⁸ ‘Vu Mr. Boile 3 fois. A la derniere il nous fit voir l’expérience de deux liqueurs froides qui estant mises ensemble faisoient une flame. De l’une, qui avoit une senteur forte presque comme de l’huile d’anis, il avoit mouillé de la laine dans une ceuillere d’argent. L’autre qu’on versa dessus estoit dans une tres petite phiole, et fumoit quand on ostoit le couvercle’ (Huygens, *Oeuvres Complètes* 22, 746). See also his farewell to Boyle: ‘19 Aug. Pris congé de Mr Boijle, de Mr. Fatio, et Mr. Locke. De Mr. Witsen et chez Me. P. f. le f. Mr. Boijle me promit la recepte pour faire de la glace sans glace ni neige’ (Huygens, *Oeuvres Complètes* 22, 747).

By the beginning of 1689, Newton had already emerged as one of the most prominent Protestant-supporting members of the Cambridge University community, with impeccable credentials to serve the incoming regime. On 15 January he had been elected one of the three University representatives to the national Convention appointed to settle the legitimacy of William and Mary’s claim to the English throne. He came to London to sit on the Convention, and remained there until early the next year. Following the Coronation of William and Mary, the Convention to which he had been appointed became the Convention Parliament, and Newton remained in the capital until a week after it was prorogued on 27 January 1690.

Nevertheless, Christiaan Huygens’s intervention with the new Dutch king was of no small importance to Newton. It surely helped ensure, when the two of them went together to that meeting of the Royal Society on 12 June (much reported and commented on in the History of Science literature) that it was Huygens’s contributions on gravity and light to which Newton attended seriously. I have written elsewhere about the way in which, on that same occasion, he and the other Royal Society Fellows who were present ignored Robert Hooke’s contributions on these topics – Hooke, predictably, took grave offence.

We tend to be told that Christiaan Huygens retreated to his self-imposed life as an intellectual invalid on his return to The Hague. In fact, as we have seen, he made serious – not to say energetic – efforts to re-enter mainstream social life, and to revive his international scientific activities. He eventually moved from Hofwijck to rented rooms in Nordeinde because Hofwijck was too cut off from civilised conversation. He wrote repeatedly to Constantijn urging him to intervene on his behalf to obtain a position at the court of William and Mary that had recently fallen vacant. He rebuilt his scientific and intellectual links with key members of the Royal Society, particularly with Newton and Robert Boyle.

If he was unsuccessful in procuring that administrative post with the new King William, it was not for want of his – or his brother’s – efforts. Constantijn approached the new king on at least two occasions to press Christiaan’s suit for the vacant place on his Council. In the end, Constantijn records in his diary that, just as Christiaan feared, William’s lack of interest in science prevented him from valuing any possible

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contribution he would be able to make on his behalf, and to conclude that Christiaan was overqualified for an administrative post:

Following a second letter, in which brother Christaan tormented me to ask the King for a place in his Council, vacant since Pettecum’s death, I spoke to him about it, and he told me through clenched teeth that he was not sure he would fill that vacancy. When, shortly afterwards, I told him again that he would be well served by my brother, who is of a penetrating intelligence and applies himself assiduously to everything he does, he replied that he thought that my brother had ideas which were too high-minded for him to dawdle (or some such word) with the administrators, so I did not insist any further.30

From the point of view of a possible shared Anglo-Dutch intellectual tradition, what an irony it now seems, that the deposed English Catholic king James II should have been passionate about the new science, while the Dutch Protestant William III was utterly indifferent to it.

How different might it have been – how much more conclusively a shared tradition – had Christiaan obtained that post in William III’s Council, for which he pressured his influential brother in letter after letter in late 1689 and early 1690. One can only speculate about how fruitful might have been the collaborative deliberations between Christiaan Huygens and Sir Isaac Newton if they had only been in a position to sit down together, on a regular basis, in some comfortable drawing room at Whitehall or Hampton Court in the years following the ‘Glorious Revolution’.

30 Cit. Huygens, Oeuvres Complètes 9, 336, note 1 to letter of 9 September 1689: ‘A l’occasion de cette lettre, Constantyn, frère, nota encore dans son journal, le 25 septembre: “Sur une seconde lettre, avec laquelle frère Christiaan me tourmenta pour demander au Roi la place dans son conseil, vacante par la mort de Pettecum, je lui en parlai et il dit entre ses dents qu’il ne savait pas s’il remplirait cette place. Lorsque, peu après, je disais encore, que je croyais qu’il ne serait pas mal servi par mon frère, comme étant d’une intelligence pénétrante et de bonne application il répondit, qu’il croyait qu’il avait des idées plus hautes que de s’attarder (ou quelque mot pareil) avec les administrateurs, sur quoi je n’insistais plus”.’