Dr. Philip Beeley, Oxford University

Title: Advancing the Public Good. A Seventeenth-Century Mathematical Life

Abstract:

Like no other contemporary figure, Robert Wood encapsulates the scientific interests and fortunes of a mathematician in early modern Britain and Ireland. Following university, and private tuition under the influential algebraist William Oughtred, he found himself swept into the circle of the social reformer and intelligencer Samuel Hartlib and spent the best part of the 1650s in Dublin. There, he campaigned for currency reform (decimalization) in line with advances in logarithms and played an important role in efforts to set up a second university. All the while, he continued to keep abreast of mathematical developments, and corresponded with influential figures such as the Oxford mathematician John Wallis. In the early 1680s he served as master of the Royal Mathematical School in London and developed proposals for calendar reform, before returning to Dublin where he became chancellor of the diocese of Meath. The talk will sketch the life of Robert Wood and seek to assess his significance for our understanding of seventeenth-century mathematics.