

Original Portraits of Francis Bacon



Information sheet regarding the original portraits of Sir Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam, Viscount St Alban, Lord Chancellor

Six portraits of Francis Bacon were done from life as far as is known. The six are: an oil painting by an unknown artist of Francis Bacon as a child; the miniature of Francis Bacon painted by Nicholas Hilliard in 1578/9; the half-length portrait of Francis Bacon as Lord Keeper painted by Frans Pourbus in 1617; the half-length portrait of Francis Bacon as Lord Chancellor attributed to Abraham Blyenberch (or studio of Paul van Somer), painted 1618; the three-quarter-length portrait of Francis Bacon as Lord Chancellor attributed to Paul van Somer, painted 1618; and the engraving of Francis Bacon as Lord Chancellor made by Simon Passe in 1618 for use as the frontispiece to Holland's *Baziliologia, a Booke of Kings* (1618).

Three other important portraits of Francis Bacon are also included in this information sheet.

(1) Portrait of Francis Bacon as a child, aged 1-2 years – oil painting by unknown artist (c.1561-2).

Francis was known to have dark brown or hazel eyes and light brown or ginger hair, which this portrait shows. He is depicted holding an apple in his right hand, whilst hung around his neck are two gold chains from which are suspended two square miniatures, one of which is concealed by the other.

[On display at Gorhambury House, St Albans.]



(2) Portrait miniature of Francis Bacon in his 18th year – painted by Nicholas Hilliard in Paris in 1578.

The Latin inscription reads: "Si tabula daretur digna animum mallem".

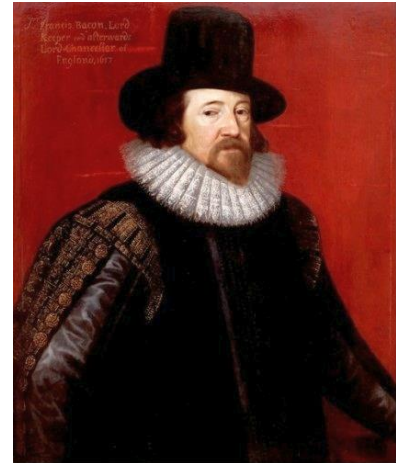
[On display in Room 4 at the National Portrait Gallery, London]



(3) **Half-length portrait of Francis Bacon as Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England (1617)** – oil on panel by Frans Pourbus the Younger (1569–1622).

The inscription on the painting reads: “Francis Bacon, Lord Keeper and afterwards Lord Chancellor of England”.

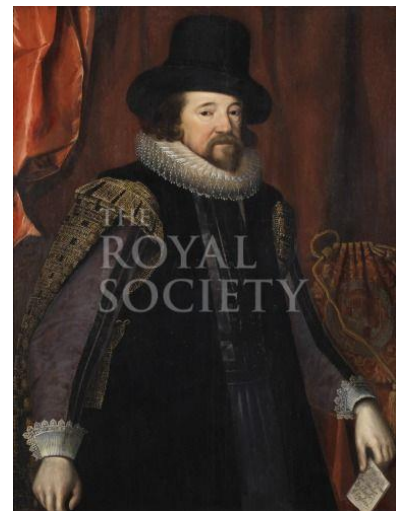
[Current Location: Łazienki Palace, Royal Baths Museum, Warsaw, Poland]



(4) **Half-length portrait of Francis Bacon as Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England and Lord High Chancellor (1618)** – oil painting attributed to (a) Abraham van Blyenberch, or (b) Studio of Paulus van Somer I (1576-1621, Flemish); bequeathed to the Royal Society by Martin Folkes in his will (died 1754).

Bacon is shown standing, his left arm resting on a table upon which is a bag holding the Great Seal of England, signifying his office as its Keeper. This hand holds a paper addressed “To the Hon:ble Francis Lord Verulam Ld. Chancller of England”.

Francis Bacon was appointed Lord Keeper of the Great Seal on 7 March 1617. The title of Lord High Chancellor was bestowed on him by King James on 4 January 1618. He was created Baron Verulam of Verulam on 12 July 1618. The portrait was probably painted shortly after 12 July 1618.



(5) **Three-quarter-length portrait of Sir Francis Bacon as Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England and Lord High Chancellor (1618)** – oil painting attributed to Paul van Somer.

[On display at Gorhambury House, St Albans]

The diarist, George Vertue, noted in 1731 that John Vanderbank made six copies of the Gorhambury portrait of Lord Bacon. A number of these copies are recorded:-

1. Badminton House (Duke of Beaufort);
2. National Portrait Gallery (presented to the British Museum in 1758 by Dr A. Gifford);
3. with Duits, 1943;
4. recorded by Vertue in Speaker Onslow's collection.



When Vanderbank made his copies of the Gorhambury portrait, the Gorhambury portrait was thought to be an original painted from life. It is thought nowadays by some that the Gorhambury portrait might actually be a posthumous version after the portrait in the Royal Society, although there are several notable differences which perhaps argue against this.

(6) Portrait of Sir Francis Bacon as Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England and Lord High Chancellor – engraving by Simon van de Passe and printed in Holland’s *Baziliologia, a Booke of Kings* (1618).

Held in and suspended from Bacon’s left hand is the bag containing the Great Seal. The top end of the bag is positioned in such a way as to conceal the pendant suspended on a ribbon from Bacon’s neck.

The border bears the words: “HONORATISS : D^s. FRANCISCUS BACON : EQUES AU: MAG : SIGILL : ANGL : CUST^{os}”.

Above the picture are shown Bacon’s heraldic arms, with the motto, “MONITI MELIORA” on the ribbon.

The inscription reads: “The righte Honourable S^r Francis Bacon knight, Lorde highe Chancellour of Englande and one of his Ma^{ties} most hon^{ble} privie Counsell”.

Under this inscription, in small letters, is engraved: “Simon Passæus sculpsit L. Are to be sould by John Sudbury and George Humble at the signe of the white horse in Pope’s head Ally”.

Because the inscription does not include Bacon’s title of Baron Verulam, it is probable that the engraving was made sometime between 4 January 1618, when Bacon was created Lord Chancellor, and 12 July 1618, when he was created Baron Verulam. It is recorded that at least £33 was “paid to the picture drawer for his Lp’s picture” on 12 September 1618.

[A copy is in the National Portrait Gallery Archive Collection: NPG D26070.]

Passe’s plate was copied later by Hollar for the frontispiece of Bacon’s *Sylva Sylvarum* (1626 and 1627), with suitable changes. The frontispiece to the 1640 *Advancement and Proficiency of Learning* is also based on this same portrait.



(7) **Portrait of Sir Francis Bacon as Lord Verulam and Viscount St Alban** – engraving by Wenceslaus Hollar after Simon de Passe and printed as the frontispiece to the first edition of Francis Bacon’s *Sylva Sylvarum* (dated 1626).

Above the picture are shown Bacon’s enhanced heraldic arms as Viscount St Alban, with the Bacon motto “MEDIOCRIA FIRMA” beneath. The motto on the surrounding ribbon reads: “MONITI MELIORA”

The inscription reads:-

The right Hon^{ble}, Francis Lo: Verulam, Viscount S^{ct} Alban. Mortuus 9 Aprilis, Anno Dñi. 1626. Annoq Aetat 66.



(8) **Portrait of Sir Francis Bacon as Baron of Verulam and Viscount St Alban** – engraving by William Marshal after Simon de Passe and printed as the frontispiece to *Of the Advancement and Proficiency of Learning or the Partitions of Sciences* (1640), being the first English translation of Francis Bacon’s *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* (1624).

The laurel-wreathed plaque above Bacon’s head reads: “Tertius A Platone, Philosophiæ Princeps”.

On the left-hand page of the open book on the desk are written “Mundus” and “Mens”, whilst on the right-hand page Bacon has just completed writing the phrase “Conubio jungam stabili”.

The inscription beneath the picture reads:

QUOD FELICITER VORTAT REIP: LITERARIAE
V.C. FRAN. DE VERULAMIO PHILOSOPH: LIBERTATIS
ASSERTOR AUDAX, SCIENTIARU REPARATORY FELIX
MUNDI MENTISQ MAGNUS ARBITER INCLYTIS
MAX: TERRARUM ORBIS ACAD: OXON: CANTAB. Q. HANC
SUAM INSTAUR: VOTO SUSCEPTO VIVUS DECERNEBAT
OBIT V NON: APRIL II D:N: KAROLE. I.
PP AUG: clō lōc XXVI.



Notably the pendant suspended on a ribbon from around Bacon’s neck, which in earlier portraits was concealed, is in this picture shown exposed, revealing itself as being the Lesser George and thereby suggesting or indicating that

Bacon was a secret Knight of the Garter, or had the right to be one.

The work is included by Bacon's chaplain, Dr Rawley, in the list of his lordship's true works (*Resuscitatio*, 1657, 1671).

(9) **Full length portrait of Francis Bacon, Viscount St Alban** – oil on canvas by unknown artist, after 1731. Posthumous version after the Gorhambury and Royal Society portraits of Bacon. Purchased in 1900 by the National Gallery.

[National Gallery Primary Collection: NPG 1288]

