

William Lilly the Diseworth Astrologer

William Lilly was born in Diseworth in 1602, the son of a poor yeoman farmer. He was educated at Ashby Grammar School, but when his father fell into debt and was imprisoned he had to decline a place at Cambridge University. Instead he walked for six days alongside a carrier's cart to London, where he had been offered a job as a servant.

His new master was a Leicestershire man who had married a wealthy lady, and when he died seven years later Lilly took the audacious step of proposing to his widow. She protested that he was far too young for her, but they did marry (in secret) and lived together happily for six years until she died and he inherited her considerable fortune.



Lilly was now able to nurture his burgeoning interest in astrology. He read widely and took instruction from the most learned astrologers of the time. Astrology was then considered to be a science: practitioners predicted the future from complicated analyses involving the precise time of birth and up to seven different planetary movements. At the time they were highly respected: they would have been contemptuous of the simple star-sign predictions that appear in today's magazines.

In the Civil War Lilly favoured the parliamentarians and developed useful friendships with a number of influential people. He started to publish: first a very successful almanac, then in 1647 his masterpiece; a three-volume opus entitled *Christian Astrology*. It was the first such work to be written in English instead of Latin, and was hugely popular.

After the Restoration his parliamentary sympathies meant that he soon fell out of favour. He continued to publish his almanacs and bought a small estate in Surrey, where he lived comfortably until his death in 1681. The cottage where he was born still stands in a prominent position in Diseworth, and is today known as Lilly's Cottage.

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