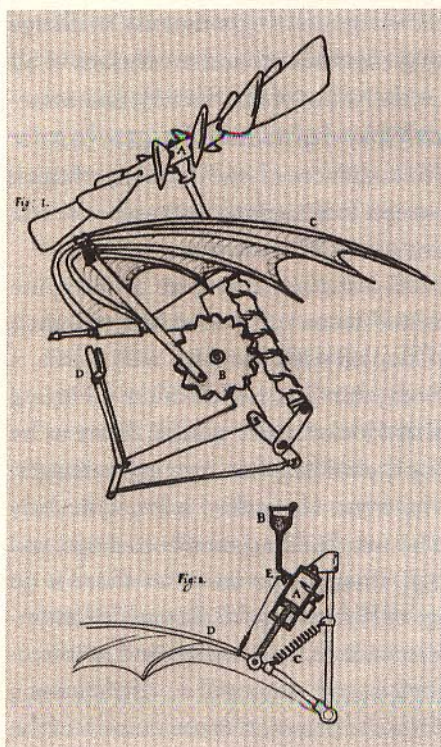

WRITE IT DOWN

ROBERT HOOKE'S FLYING MACHINE POWERED BY

ARTIFICIAL MUSCLE



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There are no existing drawings of Hooke's flying machines. This artist interpretation is based on Hooke's writings. (See endnote.)

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1635—1703

London, England, in the 1660s was a crowded, vibrant, dirty place. Four hundred thousand people were crammed into its narrow, sewage-smearred streets, though the great plague of 1665–1666 reduced that number by a quarter. It was in this era that Robert Hooke, a young man in his thirties, lived and breathed science. Unlike most natural philosophers of his day, Hooke did not have independent wealth. He worked his way through the University of Oxford as a servant and afterward worked as the 17th-century equivalent of a lab technician. He was part of a small circle of men, along with Christopher Wren, John Wilkins, and Robert Boyle, who started the Royal Society in order to further science. He played an instrumental role in the Society throughout his entire life, and he spent decades working for it as curator of experiments, in charge of designing and demonstrating experiments and inventions of all sorts during meetings, often at the whim of the Society, and sometimes going without the measly pay due to him. He gave regular lectures for years, frequently to audiences of one or two: perhaps a man who'd wandered off the streets looking for a warm place to rest or a spy from his employer sent to see if he was doing his job.

Hooke had a deformed back, a natural curvature of the spine that became noticeable in his mid-teens and caused him to hunch over for the rest of his life. Coupled with his thin, wiry frame, a head that was too big for his body, thin lips, and distinctive bulging gray eyes, one can imagine that Hooke struck quite a figure as he traipsed about London on foot, avoiding fast moving carriages, horse dung, and potholes as he went. He walked a lot, with daily excursions to and from coffee houses, building sites, bookshops, and his rooms in Gresham College. Imagine we must, for there is no known portrait or other image of Robert Hooke, despite his astonishing array of contributions to science, technology, and architecture. The lack of a portrait or historic memorial to this man is a symptom of his near erasure from the common consciousness of the scientific community for over three hundred years.

Hooke was a fierce proponent of empirical science, and as such he deserves a place as a father of modern science. He supported a