



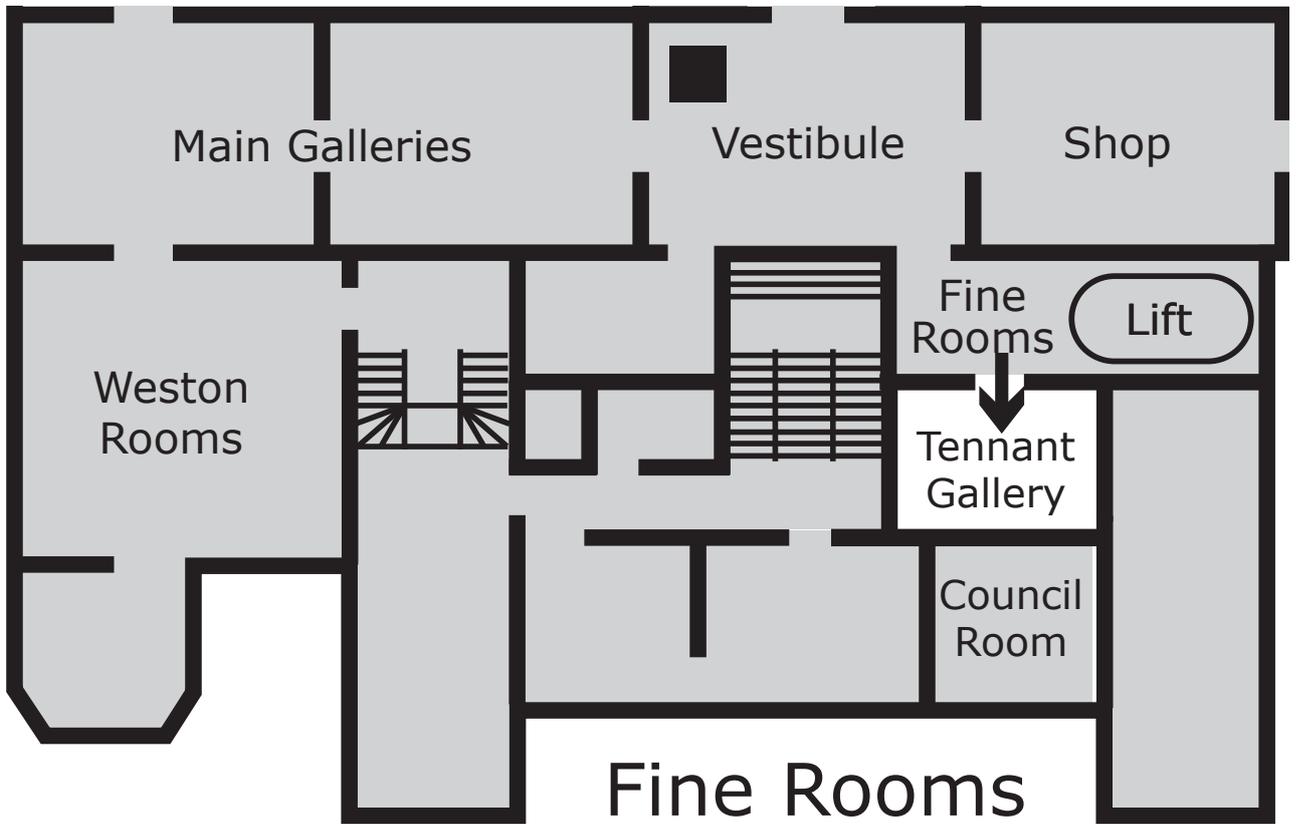
Large
Print

The Anatomy Professor

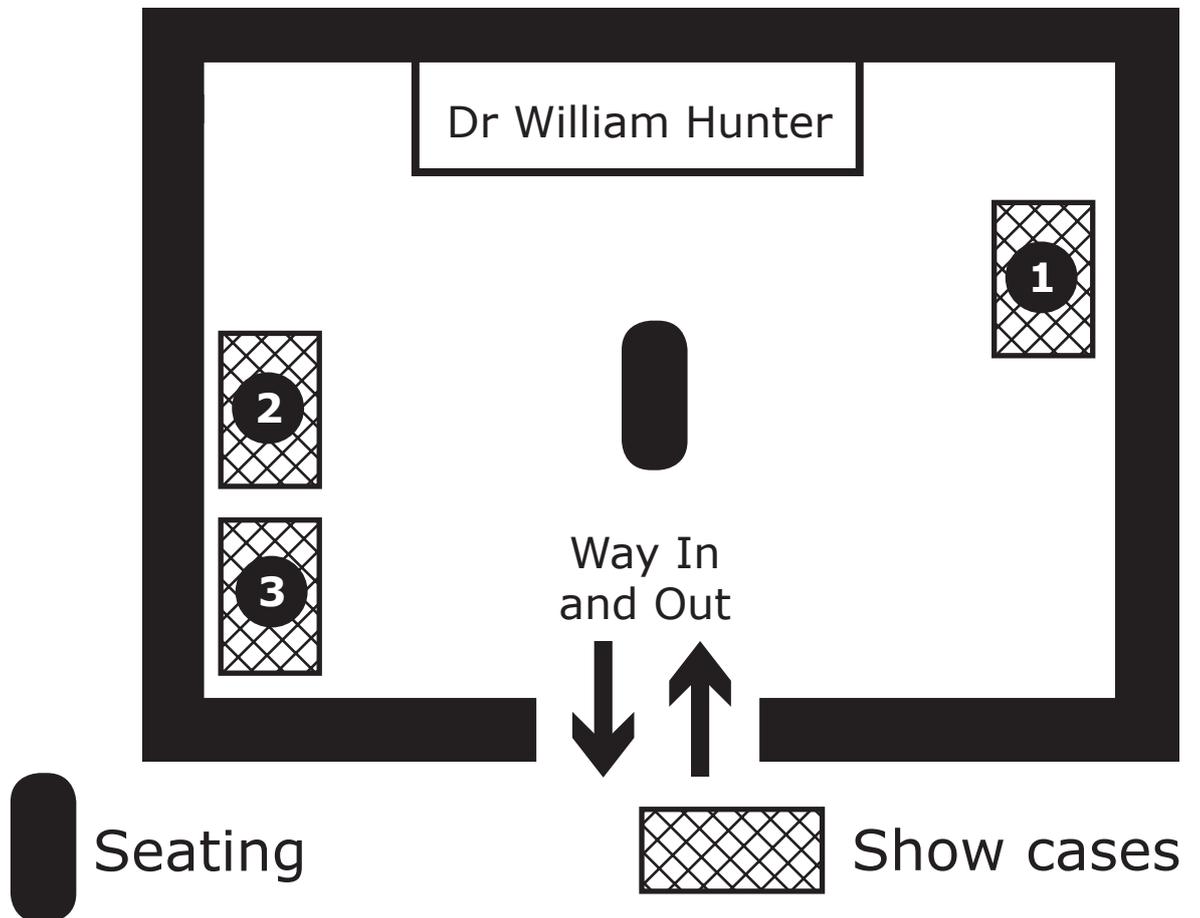
Doctors, death and dining at the RA

Tennant Gallery

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The Anatomy Professor

Doctors, death and dining at the RA

Tennant Gallery

18 January – 17 March 2019

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The production of RA large print guides is generously supported by Robin Hambro

The Anatomy Professor

Doctors, death and dining at the RA

As we celebrate 250 years since the opening of the Royal Academy Schools, this display shines a light on the institution's Professors of Anatomy.

When the Schools opened in January 1769 anatomy was a fundamental part of artists' training. The pioneering physician William Hunter was appointed as the Academy's first Professor of Anatomy and his conscientious approach to teaching set the tone for future generations.

The RA has a Professor of Anatomy and anatomical collections to this day.

Anatomy was a controversial subject, surrounded by rumours of bodysnatching and skulduggery. Anatomical instruction at the Academy varied considerably depending on the Professor (one of them even arguing that artists should not learn “too much” anatomy).

The RA’s anatomy professors had a wide range of interests from embryology and psychiatry to hot-air ballooning and Japanese art. Many were also closely involved with the social life of the Academy, one even running the RA Dining Club.

This display provides a glimpse into the social history of the Royal Academy and its Schools.

RA Professors of Anatomy and their dates in post:

William Hunter 1768–1783

John Sheldon 1783–1808

Sir Anthony Carlisle 1808–1824

Joseph Henry Green 1825–1851

Richard Partridge 1852–1873

John Marshall 1873–1891

William Anderson 1891–1900

Arthur Thomson 1900–1934

Alexander Macphail 1934–1938

Arthur Beeny Appleton 1938–1950

James Dixon Boyd 1950–1956

W. J. Hamilton 1956–1975

Gerald Libby 1975–2019

Roger Kneebone 2019–

Please take a leaflet for more information on each professor.

Mason Chamberlin RA (1727-1787)

Portrait of Dr William Hunter
1769

William Hunter, the RA's first Professor of Anatomy, holds a miniature écorché (flayed) figure in his left hand while gesturing with his right as though explaining to an audience. Hunter was once described as "the most perfect demonstrator as well as lecturer the world has ever known".

Hunter (1718–1783) was appointed in 1768, the year the RA was founded, and held the post until his death. He was an eminent physician, anatomist, "man-midwife" and collector. He attended Queen Charlotte during her many pregnancies.

The painter, Mason Chamberlin, was one of the founding members of the Royal Academy.

Oil on canvas

Probably given by the artist in 1780

Polychrome écorché made under the direction of William Hunter

1771

This striking figure was almost certainly cast from the flayed corpse of Solomon Porter, an executed criminal, under the direction of William Hunter. The painted cast shows varied levels of dissection in different areas of the body.

A student at the Royal Academy Schools recalled that Hunter dissected the body at the Academy but gave only two lectures over it to ensure it was sufficiently “fresh” to cast.

Hunter used casts like this one for teaching because of the lack of fresh corpses legally available for dissection.

Painted plaster cast

Made in-house at the Royal Academy

On the right is a reproduction of Johann Zoffany's painting 'Dr William Hunter Lecturing at the Royal Academy of Arts' (1772, Royal College of Physicians).

It was produced just a few years after the founding of the Royal Academy and shows Hunter giving a lecture, using a live model, an écorché figure and a skeleton to teach artists about anatomy.

The audience includes Sir Joshua Reynolds PRA and other Royal Academicians as well as RA students.

Hunter established a strong reputation for anatomical teaching at the Royal Academy. His legacy is part of the reason that the institution still has a Professor of Anatomy and a collection of anatomical art works today.

© Royal College of Physicians, London

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Robert Buhler RA (1916-1989)

The Death of Art Schools

c 1968

Four men in seventeenth-century dress gather around a corpse, symbolising art education in Britain, as indicated by the inscriptions 'The Death of Art Schools' and 'Dip-AD'.

These refer to the controversial Diploma in Art and Design introduced during the 1960s.

Intended to give art students a degree-standard qualification, it included the study of art history and other non-studio subjects but side-lined traditional disciplines like anatomy.

The Academy Schools, being independent, did not follow this curriculum and continued to teach anatomy.

Buhler's drawing refers to Rembrandt's painting 'The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp'.

Black pen and ink on card

Bequeathed by Carel Weight RA in 1999

Sir James Gunn RA (1893-1964)

Portrait of W. J. Hamilton
1962

Hamilton was Professor of Anatomy at the RA from 1956-1975. Shown here in his academic robes, he was considered an innovator in anatomical teaching, presenting the human body as "a dynamic, developing, functioning and eventually ageing entity in which structure and function are inextricably linked".

Gunn was a successful portraitist, elected as an RA in 1961.

Oil on canvas

On loan from a private collection

Walter Woodington (1916-2000)

Gerald Libby

Early 1980s

Gerald Libby was appointed Medical Officer to the RA Schools. On the sudden death of Professor Hamilton he was invited to give the anatomy lectures and was subsequently elected Professor in 1975.

He retires this year as the longest serving incumbent, in post for over 40 years.

Professor Libby specialises in Neuropsychiatry, Neurogastroenterology and Vestibular Medicine.

Walter Woodington was Curator of the Royal Academy Schools from 1961–1984. He painted this portrait in his studio at the RA Schools and presented it to Gerald Libby as a gift.

Oil on canvas

On loan from a private collection

Gustav Adolphus Storey (1834 – 1919)

Professor Partridge lecturing
1854

Storey was a student at the Royal Academy Schools. This humorous sketch records his impression of attending lectures by Richard Partridge, who was Professor of Anatomy at the RA from 1852-1873.

The lecture room was probably in King's College, London where Partridge usually taught.

During the 1830s Partridge was caught up in the notorious “Italian Boy” case when a gang tried to sell him the corpse of their murder victim. Partridge was suspicious of the fresh state of the body and raised the alarm, stalling the culprits until their arrest.

The case led to the introduction of a law that made unclaimed bodies available for dissection, helping to stop the trade in cadavers.

Pen and ink on paper

Purchased 2018

Sir Martin Archer Shee PRA (1769-1850)

Portrait of Sir Anthony Carlisle
1824 or earlier

Sir Anthony Carlisle (1768–1840) is shown standing next to a desk stacked with symbols of his profession: a skull, an anatomy book and an écorché figure. Carlisle was the RA's third Professor of Anatomy, elected in 1808 and retiring in 1824, when this portrait was exhibited at the Academy.

Carlisle was something of a showman who delivered his RA lectures wearing full court dress and made sure to feature a "novelty". These included passing a brain around the audience on a dinner plate and hosting a troupe of Chinese jugglers.

Shee was President of the Royal Academy from 1830–1850.

Oil on canvas

On loan from the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons, London

Henry Weekes RA (1807-1877)

**Bust of Professor Joseph Henry
Green**

1863 or earlier

This marble bust was produced in the same year as Green's death and shows the professor in academic robes. It was described at the time as having "interest and even beauty of expression".

Green was an accomplished surgeon at King's College London and was Professor of Anatomy at the RA from 1825-1851. He gave up some of his medical duties in 1834 to take on the role of literary executor to his friend, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Marble

Diploma work given by Henry Weekes on election as an Academician in 1863

Thomas Rowlandson (1757-1827)

The Dissecting Room

Late 18th century

This scene is thought to depict William Hunter's anatomy school on Great Windmill Street in London. Students are dissecting bodies on tables, while lecturers observe them. Hunter is dressed in purple.

An elderly man disembowels a body on the ground on the lower left. Skeletons, a portrait bust and handwritten notices are arranged around the edges of the room.

Rowlandson's satirical drawing is probably an imagined encounter including various people associated with anatomy in the eighteenth century.

Some of the figures have been tentatively identified as the novelist Tobias Smollett, surgeons William Cruickshank and William Hewson, and John Sheldon, Professor of Anatomy at the RA from 1783-1808.

Pen and wash on paper

On loan from the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons, London

Show case 1:

Artists and anatomists have often worked together, to learn from each other and in the production of illustrated texts on anatomy.

Several of the Royal Academy's Professors of Anatomy published books specifically for artists. Many of them were also amateur artists or collectors.

William Anderson, who was Professor of Anatomy at the Royal Academy from 1891-1900, lived in Tokyo for nearly 10 years and published on the subject of Japanese art.

The pictorial arts of Japan: with a brief historical sketch of the associated arts, and some remarks upon the pictorial art of the Chinese and Koreans.
William Anderson, London, 1886.
One of four volumes.

A handbook of anatomy for art students
Arthur Thomson, Oxford, 1899

Anatomy for artists
John Marshall. Illustrated by two hundred original drawings by J. S. Cuthbert, engraved by J. and G. Nicholls, London, 1878

Show case 2:

RA Club Album

1875

The album contains carte-de-visite photographs of the members of the RA Dining Club which was run at this time by the Professor of Anatomy, John Marshall (on the left) who was in post 1873-1891. The photograph on the right is of the painter Edward Armitage RA.

Presented to the Royal Academy in 1875 by Professor Marshall

The Royal Academy's Professors of Anatomy have always been involved in the social life of the institution. Some have been members of the RA Dining Club and Professor Marshall was its Chairman.

The RA Club dates back to at least November 1770. It sprang from a desire for an informal setting in which Academicians and guests could mingle and talk, away from the Academy itself.

The club now meets three times a year, including the “Whitebait” dinner which comprises a boat trip either up or down the Thames to a riverside venue.

A selection of silver tableware from the RA Collection

Items from the silver collection are still used by the Club on special occasions.

A selection of menus from the RA Club

Francis Derwent Wood RA

Caricature of Professor Thomson

7th June 1922

Wood made caricature heads of Academicians and others at RA and Chelsea Arts Club dinners. As one art historian observed "most of them were drawn at dinner-parties and consist of pencil sketches, tinted here and there, with a drop of port wine smudged on with a finger".

Arthur Thomson was Professor of Anatomy at the RA from 1900–1934. He worked at Oxford University and is said to have enjoyed the relative informality of art world parties.

Pencil and wash on paper

Presented by Mrs Derwent Wood, 1945

Seating plan for an RA Club dinner held in the James Gibb Great Hall of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, 29th April 1993, with Gerald Libby, Professor of Anatomy at the RA, as chairman.

On loan from a private collection

Show case 3:

Letter from Sidney Hutchison to Gerald Libby, 25th June 1975

Letter from Denis Dooley to Gerald Libby, 17th January 1978

Letter to Gerald Libby from Sir Hugh Casson PRA, undated but c 1978

The first letter advises Professor Libby of his election to the RA post. The second is from HM Inspector of Anatomy, Denis Dooley, to Professor Libby offering his assistance in teaching anatomy.

Aware that his appointment may have upset specialists in anatomy, Libby met with Sir Hugh Casson PRA to confirm that the Academy was happy with his work. The third letter is Casson's affirmative reply.

On loan from a private collection

Letter from James Northcote to his brother

Samuel Northcote,

19th December 1771

Northcote was a student at the RA Schools and wrote to his brother describing how the body of a criminal was brought to the Academy for Dr Hunter's lectures. The Professor gave two lectures over the body and then had a cast made of it.

The letter almost certainly refers to the making of the *écorché* figure on display here.

Until the passing of the Anatomy Act in 1832, the only corpses legally available for dissection were those of executed criminals. This led to Hunter and others making use of *écorché* casts for teaching.

A bill of expenses for the getting of a body from Surgeons' Hall, c 1770

Letters from Professor Marshall donating items to the Royal Academy, 20th September 1887

Professor Marshall donated items to the Academy for the Anatomical Museum he was building up in the Schools.

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Thank you.

Molly Bretton, Access & Communities Manager



InTouch  **at the RA**

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