

the scholarly community a great service by making these important collections available online. However, it seems likely that the Rare Materials Reading Room in the library on Euston Road will remain busy for the foreseeable future.

Bradley W. Hart

California State University, USA

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The Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons, London, England

A visitor to the Hunterian Museum could easily be excused for thinking that they had wandered into the home of some crazed collector fascinated by the rare and the exotic, the obscure and the bizarre. Indeed, this perception would not be so far from the truth. Housed in the Royal College of Surgeons in London, the museum has assumed a variety of forms and functions over its long history (the museum celebrated its bicentennial in 2013). The museum helped the College secure its Royal Charter in 1800, has served as a vital site for surgical teaching and anatomical research, and for a long time shaped the public image of anatomy, physiology and surgery. Today, the museum offers visitors an opportunity to explore the life and work of John Hunter (1728–93), the renowned eighteenth-century surgeon, anatomist, naturalist and teacher responsible for assembling the museum's core collection.

The heart of the museum, both physically and spiritually, is the Crystal Gallery, a magnificent *wunderkammer* containing a dizzying array of anatomical preparations and specimens collected from every corner of the natural world. Originally displayed in the museum that Hunter built between his home in Leicester Square and his dissecting rooms in Castle Street, the collection was purchased by the British government in 1799 and installed in the College of Surgeons in 1813. Following the museum's most recent refurbishment in 2005, the specimens (mostly preserved in jars) are arranged according to Hunter's original classification scheme: anatomical specimens (human, plant, and animal) are organised by bodily process (digestion, reproduction, generation, etc.), while pathological preparations are arranged to illustrate both the general principles of disease and specific morbid conditions. These strangely beautiful, or at least beautifully strange artefacts range from enormous animal skulls to the dissected carcasses of reptiles, birds and rodents; from strange eggs and organs to preserved human limbs, tissues and even the seven-foot-seven skeleton of Charles Byrne, the so-called 'Irish Giant'. Those who are weak-of-stomach or faint-of-heart should be wary; certain items, such as the severed face of a child who suffered from smallpox, can be both jarring and haunting.

The exhibits encircling the Crystal Gallery provide historical context for this large and often perplexing collection of objects. Displays filled with specimens, instruments and images explain various scientific and social aspects of anatomical dissection in the eighteenth century, such as its reliance on the bodies of executed criminals as well as corpses snatched from graves by 'resurrection men'. Most of the attention is given to Hunter's life and work, including his role preparing specimens for his older brother William's famous anatomy lectures and the growth of his own fame as a surgeon and experimenter. Some of the most interesting objects in the collection are those that testify to Hunter's skill at anatomical preparation or illustrate his contributions to dental and

surgical practice. These include: a preparation of a gravid uterus that later featured in a priority dispute between John and William regarding the discovery of the placental blood supply; the preserved leg, with ligatures still visible, of one of the first patients whose popliteal aneurysm Hunter successfully repaired; pathological specimens from notables upon whom Hunter performed post-mortem dissections (a prime minister and an archbishop of Canterbury among them); and a football-sized tumour that Hunter removed from the neck of one of his patients at St. George's Hospital.

An effective audio tour (£3.50, or free to download onto your digital media player at <http://www.hunterianmuseum.org>) helps visitors navigate through the crowded collection. Given the immense number of artefacts on display – roughly three thousand – one cannot help but wonder at the vast scale of Hunter's original thirteen-thousand specimen collection, much of which was destroyed by bombing in 1941. While all objects are well identified, the sheer number of them means that visitors are provided with little if any specific historical context for many individual items (though a digital catalogue, available in the museum and at <http://surgicat.rcseng.ac.uk> does provide more detailed information on their nature and provenance). What the museum does convey, however, is a sense of the collection's importance as a whole to Hunter's teaching and research. Seeing such a vast and diverse array of specimens housed in one place makes clear Hunter's attempts to discern common principles of life and disease found throughout the natural world, and highlights aspects of the 'animal oecology' in which he took a particular interest, such as reproduction, generation and sensation. Finally, the exhibits illuminate Hunter's use of his collection and museum to shape his public image as a respectable 'gentleman anatomist' and to bolster the acceptability and perceived medical value of human dissection.

Those with an interest in the history of surgery should not miss the other permanent collections at the Hunterian. The 'Silver and Steel' gallery houses a collection of surgical instruments from the seventeenth century to the present, with panels on the history of instrument making and design. More extensive and of more interest to medical historians is 'The Science of Surgery', which traces surgery's development from Hunter's time to the present, covering such topics as the introduction of anaesthesia, antisepsis, and asepsis; the rise and fall of radical mastectomy; specialisation; war surgery; and transplantation. This gallery, too, is filled with interesting artefacts, ranging from Joseph Lister's 'donkey engine' for carbolic spray to the first heart-lung machine in Europe. While the exhibit focuses on key milestones in the history of surgery, it is historiographically sensitive, giving controversy and ambiguity their due alongside triumph and progress.

The Hunterian Museum no longer plays a central role in the education and research of medical students, as the College's modern anatomical and pathological collections are now housed in the Wellcome Museum of Anatomy and Pathology (accessible only to qualified practitioners). Nevertheless, on the day of this reviewer's visit, the galleries were filled with robed students celebrating their Diplomates' Day, illustrating the powerful symbolic role that Hunter's collection continues to play. Of equal interest to physicians, medical historians, and the general public, this small yet densely-packed museum presents a fascinating window into the world of anatomy in Georgian England and the development of modern surgery.

Eli Anders

Johns Hopkins University, USA