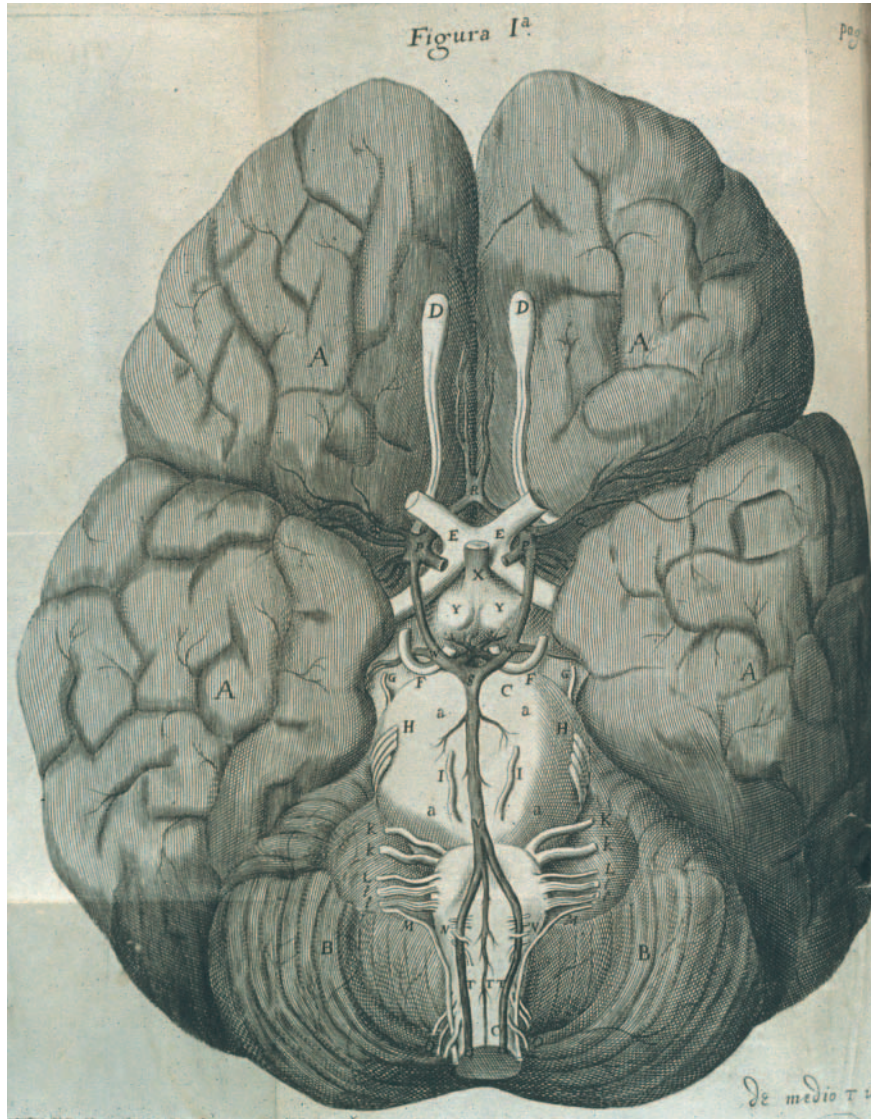


## Psychiatry in pictures

CHOSEN BY ROBERT HOWARD



Sir Christopher Wren (1632–1723): Illustration from *Cerebri Anatome* by Thomas Willis (1664)

Thomas Willis (1621–1675) studied the function of the circle of arterial connections at the base of the brain, noting that ‘if by chance one or two should be stopt, there might easily be found another passage instead of them’. He followed Harvey’s method of injecting dye into one of the arteries to trace circulation and found that the dye spread ‘into every corner and secret place of the brain and cerebel’. Willis’s most important contribution to psychiatry and neurology was his insistence that disturbance of function within the brain underpinned conditions such as depression and epilepsy. Rejecting the contemporary notion that sadness was connected with a single bodily fluid, he brought melancholy, madness and general feeling under the jurisdiction of basic mechanisms within the brain and heart. In 1683 he wrote ‘Melancholy is a complicated distemper of the brain and heart. For as melancholick people talk idly, it proceeds from the vice or fault of the brain and the inordination of the animal spirits dwelling in it, but as they become very sad and fearful, this is deservedly attributed to the passion of the heart. But we cannot here yield to what some physicians affirm, that melancholy doth arise from a melancholick humour. Melancholy being a long time protracted, passes oftentimes into stupidity, or foolishness, and sometimes into madness’. Sir Christopher Wren is known to have attended dissections with Willis and may have carried them out himself. Illustration of the brain in isolation, rather than as part of an artistic image of a dissected head, was part of the more modern and scientific approach that Willis and Wren sought to bring to what we can recognise as the beginnings of neuroscience. Sadly, 2 years after the publication of *Cerebri Anatome*, Wren was distracted from medical science by the rebuilding of London – the project for which he is most usually remembered.