

## The Great Windmill Street Anatomy School and Museum

### Helen McCormack

He did not lose time trying out small pilot projects, gathering samples. His first project was great and worthy, either for the boldness of his views or for the sacrifices he was ready to make for its success. He buys land, builds there at great cost a monument he dedicates to anatomy and natural history. In this building, where luxury is permitted because he intends it for public use, a beautiful amphitheatre is to be used for teaching; and in a superb cabinet, where everything down to the light is arranged with art, will be organised the specimens of different species...<sup>1</sup>

Felix Vicq d'Azyr, Paris, 1805

From its very inception William Hunter's house at Great Windmill Street, designed and built between 1767 and 1768, was a bold project. In his eulogy to Hunter, Vicq d'Azyr, who would have been familiar with the story of how the Great Windmill Street anatomy theatre and museum came into being, makes reference to this history. Hunter had been extremely meticulous in organising the principal parts of the building and, in the way his museum was presented, he was attentive to every detail, from the application of decoration and ornament to the arrangement of the light. William Hunter's house at Great Windmill Street is presented in this paper as a significant project that helps to place it within a chronology of the development of museums and sites of scientific interest in London in the eighteenth century. Vicq d'Azyr comments that Hunter did not waste time on 'small pilot projects, gathering samples' because his ambition by the 1760s was to create a different kind of research centre for his work, 'a centre of calculation'.<sup>2</sup> However, Hunter was also acutely aware that his 'laboratory' was located in a highly visible and commercially motivated city. He could not afford to waste time on small samples or trying to operate in isolation because the role of the scientist had changed so remarkably by the 1760s and the anatomist, in particular, was now a very public figure. Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Vicq d'Azyr, *Eulogie in Oeuvres de Vicq d'Azyr, recueillies et publics avec des notes et un discours sur sa vie et ses ouvrage, par Jacques L. Moreau (de la Sarthe)*, vol II, (Paris 1805) pp. 352-388.

<sup>2</sup> Bruno Latour, *Science in Action, How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*, (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1987), p.223. Latour's description of this method of collecting and accumulation ('rendering objects mobile, next imposing a stasis, then applying a combinability throughout') is particularly useful in its application across historical contexts.

how this public role impacted on the formal presentation of Great Windmill Street is also considered here.<sup>3</sup>

Before going on to describe the house in detail, of which only the façade now remains, it is important to recollect the origins of Hunter's plan which was first proposed to the Earl of Bute in 1763 as an idea for the establishment of a 'national academy' for the teaching of anatomy.<sup>4</sup> Written in the second person, it lists, modestly, the achievements that Hunter and his pupils had made in the study of Anatomy, despite the prejudices and difficulties they faced:

Scarce any science or art requires the protection of a prince more than Anatomy, as well on account of its great use to mankind, as because it is perfected by the prejudices, both natural and religious, of the multitude in all nations ... that few men, even of the profession, ever attempt the practical part: and, without practice, there can be no great share of real and useful knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

Hunter remarked on how the practice of anatomy had changed and the science now required an element of public performance, he suggests that this could be contained and legitimised within a national institution. He writes:

A great school, provided with all the means of improvement, is much more necessary in this, than in any other branch of knowledge, *because it is less capable of being studied or improved in private.*<sup>6</sup> (My emphasis).

While the Earl of Bute was First Lord of the Treasury, Hunter must have been confident that his plan would have a sympathetic hearing. Eventually, the proposal was given to Bute shortly before his resignation and this no doubt delayed its consideration significantly.

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<sup>3</sup> This follows from the public perception of science and scientists in the seventeenth century that has been the subject of numerous recent studies. Of particular importance for the ideas put forward in this paper are Steven Shapin, 'The House of Experiment in Eighteenth-Century England', (1988) *Isis*, vol. 79. No. 3, September, pp.373-404; Pamela H Smith, *The Body of the Artisan, Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution*, (Chicago and London 2004), pp. 183-241; and Helen McCormack, 'Housing the Collection: The Great Windmill Street Anatomy Theatre and Museum', in *'My Highest Pleasures' William Hunter's Art Collection*, (ed.) Peter Black, (Glasgow and London, 2007), pp.101-127.

<sup>4</sup> GU Archives, Hunter 106. 1763. The proposal was published in 1784 as *Two Introductory Lectures delivered by Dr. William Hunter, to his last course of anatomical lectures at his theatre in Windmill Street, As they were left corrected for the press by himself to which are added some papers relating to Dr. Hunter's intended Plan, for the establishing of a Museum in London for the improvement of Anatomy, Surgery, and Physic.* (London, 1784).

<sup>5</sup> Hunter, 1784, p.118.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Meanwhile news of the putative academy was also circulating in the press; by January 1763, and perhaps in an allusion to the bloody events staged in ancient Rome and those of the modern-day anatomy theatre, *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle* reported:

We hear that an eminent physician intends to erect, at his own expense, in this city a noble Theatre in the form of the ancient Theatres at Rome.<sup>7</sup>

The proposal appears to have been passed from Bute to his successor George Grenville (1712-1770) and then to the Surveyor-General's office and a list of possible sites for the school was compiled; Hunter was asked to provide a rough sketch of the layout for the building, and these appear in the 1784 posthumous publication:

It is required to find a convenient piece of ground within his Majesty's lands in Westminster, large enough for a Dwelling-house, a Theatre, and a Museum, for carrying out Dr. Hunter's plan into execution ... accordingly the Doctor delivered a sketch of his design, whereby it appears, that a piece of ground, of about thirty rod, or of the dimensions of one hundred and twelve feet in front, by seventy-one feet in depth, is wanted for his use.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the original Surveyor-General's report which stated that at the site at Scotland Yard it, 'does not seem possible to find one piece of ground there, large enough to answer the intended purpose', in a report that was given to George III by Caesar Hawkins (1711-1786), Surgeon to the King, it was suggested that Hunter be given, 'two old houses in Scotland-Yard, which the proprietor has begun to repair for the twenty-five remaining years of his lease. He asks one thousand pounds for them. These, with a row of little houses belonging to the scullery, would answer the purpose for situation and space'.<sup>9</sup> By January 1765, the plan still appeared to be under consideration, with *Lloyd's Evening Post* reporting:

A great anatomist at the West End of town has obtained the promise of a grant of a piece of ground in Scotland Yard for erecting a theatre there for reading public lectures in Anatomy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle*, January 3, 1763.

<sup>8</sup> Hunter, 1784, p.121.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp.127-128. John Gwynn, in *London and Westminster Improved* (1766) (see below), had remarked on the dilapidation of this area but its historical associations with a previous generation of architects to the King such as Inigo Jones and Sir John Vanbrugh would have been highly pertinent to Gwynn, and Hunter for that matter. Gwynn's acknowledgement of his royalist predecessors is described by John Bonehill, in 'The centre of Pleasure and Magnificence': Paul and Thomas Sandby's London, a paper delivered to the conference, 'London Scenes', at the University of York, December 4, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> *Lloyd's Evening Post*, January 21<sup>st</sup> 1765.

However, in frustration at the lack of progress on securing the land at Scotland Yard, Hunter wrote to George Grenville, instructing him that if he had no response to his request for action on the proposal by February 1765, he was withdrawing his offer:

However, as this is the last time that I shall give you any trouble about this affair, to cut off all suspicion of my having made a sham proposal, I will take the liberty to say, that if any order be given for the ground, before the first day of February next, I shall be ready to go on with the plan: otherwise, I am so circumstanced that I never can, and never will.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, 'the plan for a public school of anatomy, failing to obtain government support, came to nothing'.<sup>12</sup> There may have been more complex reasons than simply a change of administration which put a halt to Hunter's ambitions. The study of anatomy may have been popular within the burgeoning professions of physicians and surgeons, but Hunter's request would have caused government ministers to imagine a scenario where London would become renowned for tolerating, or worse, legitimising, a trade in human bodies, despite the fact this was already the case.<sup>13</sup>

By 1765, with Bute now in the background, Hunter had to take action into his own hands. He commissioned the Scots architect Robert Mylne (1733-1811) to build onto an existing house at 16 Great Windmill Street and to design a unique interior that was a conflation of anatomy theatre, hospital architecture, assembly and exhibition rooms. (fig.1).

### **Locating Dr Hunter's House**

The façade of William Hunter's House is all that remains of what was once an imposing structure in a relatively narrow space between the Haymarket and the Southside of Soho in London. The house stops just short of what would have been the quieter and leafier newly-built areas of Westminster and is located, quite deliberately, within a busy, commercial district. The Rate Books for the Parish of St James's show that Hunter paid a significant amount per year for his property compared to some of his neighbours, reflecting the changing demographics of this part of London during the period as artists and artisans moved west from Covent Garden and joined the 'middling sort' and elite in the 'improved' districts of Westminster.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Hunter's proposal reflects the ambitions of urban development promoted by the architect John Gwynn.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hunter, 1784, p.128.

<sup>12</sup> Brock, 2008, vol. 1, p. 194.

<sup>13</sup> Guerrini, Anita, 'Anatomists and Entrepreneurs in Early Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, vol.59, No. 2. pp.219-239.

<sup>14</sup> 'Dr William Hunter Rent £120. Poor Rate 8.10.0 Rates for cleaning the streets 10.0. Total 9.0'.

Rents of those around him in the street were typically £8-15 per annum, Parish of St James's Rate

As Miles Ogborn has noted, the ‘improvements’ described by Gwynn in 1766 were not part of any ‘utopian plan to sweep away the old city and replace it with something entirely new. Instead, Gwynn’s plan worked to reshape London into a better version of what was already there.<sup>16</sup> Gwynn’s *London and Westminster Improved* imagined a prospect that demonstrated London’s commercial success corresponding to its cultural endeavours. For Gwynn, certain spaces within the city should be organised along categories dictated by social status and polite behaviour, as Ogborn has stressed, but despite this distinction between social classes, Gwynn sought to persuade his readers that the dynamism and energy expended on commercial activity could be harnessed to benefit the whole of the city and its inhabitants:

From what has been already urged, it must be allowed that publick works of real magnificence, taste, elegance and utility, in a commercial city, are of the utmost consequences, they are not only of real use in point of splendor and convenience, but as necessary to the community as health and clothing to the human body, they are the great sources of invention and of ingenious employment, and are a means of stamping real value upon materials of every kind.<sup>17</sup>

For Hunter, a great school of anatomy would have illustrated just such a ‘publick work of real magnificence’, and as a centre of calculation, provide ‘sources of invention’. Although the school would not appear in Scotland-Yard or in the immediate area surrounding St James’s Park, Great Windmill Street itself (or rather Windmill Street) is incorporated into Gwynn’s plan as a much broader and more significant street, at the junction of Haymarket and Piccadilly.

If the proposal of Windmill-Street &c. should take place, the market for hay, now a nuisance to the neighbourhood, should be removed to some more convenient spot for the purpose, as it would become a much greater thoroughfare than it is at present.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, Great Windmill Street was part of the ‘improved’ district, according to Gwynn, and no doubt, Robert Mylne, Gwynn’s great rival in the competition for the design of a

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Books, Westminster City Archives, Collection of Records of Westminster City Council and the various authorities which superseded it. (London, 1679-1962).

<sup>15</sup> Gwynn, John, (1713-1786), ‘London and Westminster Improved’, (London, 1766), p.17. See also *An Essay on Design*, (London, 1749); Matthew Craske, ‘Plan and Control: Design and the Competitive Spirit in Early and Mid-Eighteenth-Century England’, *Journal of Design History*, vol.12, No.3, (1999), pp. 187-216.

<sup>16</sup> Miles Ogborn ‘Designs on the City: John Gwynn’s plans for Georgian London’, *Journal of British Studies*, 43, (January 2004) p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Gwynn, p.21.

<sup>18</sup> John Gwynn, 1766, p.132.

new Blackfriars Bridge, was more than aware of the changes that were taking place in the district just as he was beginning work on Hunter's house.

### Architecture

Howard Colvin describes Robert Mylne as an architect who could: '...occasionally design something as strikingly original as anything by Dance or Soane'.<sup>19</sup> This comparison to George Dance the Younger (1741-1825) and Sir John Soane (1753-1837), the two most eminent 'neo-classical' architects of a generation after Mylne, is often overlooked.<sup>20</sup> Mylne is usually characterised as an engineer first, architect second and his most famous work – Blackfriars' Bridge (1760-9; dem. 1868) was commended for its innovative engineering techniques. However, Mylne clearly had aspirations as an architect and his designs, as Colvin remarks, pre-empt a 'Neo-classical' architecture popular in the later half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Rome, Mylne was the first Briton to win the award of the Silver Medal for Architecture at the *Accademia di San Luca*, for his design of a 'public building with a memorial gallery to exhibit busts of eminent men'.<sup>21</sup> Mylne's success in Italy was intrinsic to his career development on his return to Britain and he quickly gained a reputation.<sup>22</sup>

One of many books in Hunter's library that evidence his taste for neoclassicism in architecture and design is a pre-subscription copy of George Richardson's *Book of Ceilings* (1776) (fig.2). Richardson worked for Mylne and the Adams brothers and is best known for his decorative interior schemes. The pre-subscription copy suggests that Hunter was keen to have the most fashionable painted interiors at Great Windmill Street and he was prepared to pay handsomely to ensure the interior design indicated his level of commitment to his collection. In 1768 he wrote to his friend and mentor, William Cullen, 'I am now collecting in the largest sense of the word, and I have already paid above £6,000 for my habitation in Wind-mill Street, which will cost me at least two more.

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<sup>19</sup> Howard Colvin, (ed.) *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600-1840*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, (New Haven and London, 1995), p.680.

<sup>20</sup> 'Neoclassicism' is used here in a 'pluralistic' sense, rather than an all-encompassing, monolithic meaning, to suggest that architects and designers working in classical-revival styles in eighteenth-century Britain were motivated by cultural and educational forces, rather than simply a desire to imitate. See Vicky Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique, Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760-1800*, (Chicago and London, 2006). pp.1-16; Matthew Craske, *Art in Europe 1700-1830, A History of the Visual Arts in an Era of Unprecedented Economic Growth*, (Oxford and New York, 1997), pp.7-22.

<sup>21</sup> RIBA Drawings, Reference: SA6413 (1-5).

<sup>22</sup> Architects were expected to visit ancient monuments *in situ* as part of their education by the mid-eighteenth century. In *London and Westminster Improved*, John Gwynn, lamented the 'parade of going to Rome', as distracting young practitioners from relying on their own ideas of imagination and invention. See Gwynn, p. 67.

I shall go into it in June'.<sup>23</sup> In comparison, a modest country house could be bought for £2,000, bringing into focus the amount of investment that Hunter was prepared to make in this venture.<sup>24</sup>

### **Anatomy Theatres**

Ancient approaches to the living body and to the display of human remains came together with ideas of eighteenth-century commercialism at Great Windmill Street. Hunter's anatomy theatre needed to be functional but it also had to be fashionable.<sup>25</sup> While acknowledging the legacy of Ancient approaches to medicine, Hunter stressed the need for a contemporary advance of the subject:

After the restoration of Greek learning in the fifteenth century, it was so fashionable for two hundred years together, to extol the knowledge of the ancients in Anatomy, as in other things ... because it was the fashionable turn of the times, and was held up as the mark of good education and fine taste.<sup>26</sup>

Just as the classical revival in Hunter's day signified a similar mark of 'good education and fine taste', it was simultaneously spurred by an eighteenth-century commercial culture that touched on all walks of life and the anatomy lesson increasingly took on a commodity status. To attract the best students – and his famous 'celebrity' guests — Hunter had to have a pleasing, rational, scientific space in which to display his talents. He would have known the very many precedents for anatomical theatre designs having studied in Edinburgh, Leyden and Paris.

Some anatomy theatres were intended for public display and spectacle, and were suitably enriched with luxurious materials. The anatomy theatres at Padua and Bologna are perhaps the best known of Renaissance scientific interiors where the main function of the theatre was not only as a space for teaching but a space for public display and ritual associated with the performances of the various professors at the Academies.<sup>27</sup> The seating arrangements were subject to a strict hierarchy of viewers, from professors and other dignitaries to students and movement in and around the theatre was restricted by the conventions of rituals that had taken place over many years.

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<sup>23</sup> Hunter-Ballie papers, I, f.37, Royal College of Surgeons of England, London.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Creating Paradise The Building of the English Country House 1660-1880*, (Hambleton and London 2000), p.259.

<sup>25</sup> Christine Stevenson, *Medicine and Magnificence, British Hospital and Asylum Architecture 1660-1815*, (New Haven and London, 2000), p.199.

<sup>26</sup> Hunter, 1784, p.14.

<sup>27</sup> Giovanna Ferrari, 'Public Anatomy Lessons and the Carnival: The Anatomy Theatre of Bologna', *Past and Present*, No 117, November, (1987) p. 117.

The space created by Mylne, (fig. 3) for Hunter, looks dramatically different in style to those of the Catholic Academies of Bologna and Padua. It is visibly stark – the only decoration appears to be the wall sconces in a neoclassical style, resembling ancient funeral urns. It is a modern, secular, space, adapted by Mylne to give a sense of rational scientific enquiry, not public spectacle. However, this anatomy theatre also had its own patterns of ritual and ceremony that are described in detail by William Hunter in his lectures:

Objects that are still more minute, and most of the preparations, must be sent round the company; that every student may examine them in his own hand. To prevent confusion, you will please to observe, that, in the first seat, the preparations are to go round from right to left; in the second bench, from left to right; and so alternately, to the farthest seat of all.<sup>28</sup>

Hunter was also keen to stress the modernity of his Anatomical theatre:

You may observe that this theatre is particularly well-constructed, both for seeing and hearing; a strong sky-light is thrown upon the table, and the glass being ground, that is, made rough upon one surface, the glare of sunshine is not admitted ... you may observe another circumstance in this theatre, which has not been sufficiently considered in buildings of that kind, *viz*, the table, where the object is placed, and by which the demonstrator stands, is not in the centre of the circular room, but about half way between the centre and the circumference; thence the seats make smaller segments of larger circles, in proportion as they are farther removed; and the spectators, in proportion as they are at a greater distance, are more directly before the object and speaker, which, both in hearing and seeing, makes compensation for the greater distance.<sup>29</sup>

## Museum

The contrast between the interior of the anatomy theatre and of the museum room in William Hunter's house must have been striking. A door placed at gallery level connected the two rooms, but despite their interconnectivity, they were quite distinct rooms with separate functions that only came together at specific times.<sup>30</sup> This demonstrates the

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<sup>28</sup> Hunter, 1784, p.112.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> How William Hunter's collection functioned, spatially, between these two principal rooms of the house is described by T Markus, 'Domes of Enlightenment: Two Scottish University Museums', *Art History*, vol.8, June 2, (1985): pp. 158-177. For a description of how William's house became a model for John Hunter's lecture theatre and museum, see Simon Chaplin, 'Nature Dissected or dissection



public and private functions of these rooms, suggested by Susan Stewart, 'The collection's space must move between the public and the private, between display and hiding'.<sup>31</sup> For example, the anatomical displays were Hunter's working tools; they constituted his professional practice but they also worked as museum displays and for this reason would have been utilised by Hunter within the 'private, public, display and hiding', pointed up by Stewart.

In Robert Mylne's plan, (fig.4) the room allocated as the 'library and museum' contained Hunter's natural history collections, books, coins, his extensive anatomical displays and, perhaps, some of his paintings. The proximity of the library and museum to the anatomical theatre is important and Mylne and Hunter designed the house deliberately to make a clear distinction between the practice of anatomy (dissection, preparing specimens) and the study of anatomy (displaying specimens). The design illustrates that both the architect and the doctor were carefully negotiating the working spaces of the house to comply with their ideas of, '... identity and difference which characterises the collection in accordance with the qualities of the objects themselves'.<sup>32</sup>

The museum and library constituted the largest room in the house. The dimensions alone would have been impressive at 51ft long and 27ft wide, and it was intricately decorated, as Vicq d'Azyr described in the quotation at the beginning of this paper, 'luxury was permitted'. In his memoir of Hunter, Samuel Foart Simmons also describes: 'In this building, besides a handsome amphitheatre and other convenient apartments for his lectures and dissections, there was one magnificent room fitted up with great elegance and propriety as a museum'.<sup>33</sup>

The caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson offers another impression of William Hunter's museum room in *The Resurrection or an Internal View of the Museum in W-D M-LL Street on the last day 1782* (fig.5). Despite its satirical take on Hunter's practice as an anatomist, the image appears to be the only known visual depiction of the interior of Hunter's museum. It corresponds with the written descriptions that mention a large room, double height, with a gallery and an elliptical ceiling.

Another contemporary viewer, the Danish entomologist, Johann Christian Fabricius, describes this room in 1782:

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Naturalised? The Case of John Hunter's Museum', *Museums and Society*, 6(2) July, (2008): pp.135-151.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham and London, 1993), p.155.

<sup>32</sup> Stewart, p.155.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Foart Simmons and John Hunter, *William Hunter 1718-1783 A Memoir*, CH Brock, (ed.) (Glasgow, 1983), p. 24

The Cabinet takes the form of a large and high room topped by a dome through which the light enters. A small gallery goes round all four walls of the room, halfway up, and in rows here is what is perhaps the finest collection in Europe of Anatomical preparations, partly dry and partly in alcohol. Behind these preparations are the fine large engraved copperplates of the Uterus, which Dr Hunter published some years ago. On the gallery itself are to be found hanging the weapons of savage nations, especially of the South Sea regions, animal horns, among them especially the gigantic horns of the Irish elk, and other large objects. In the middle of the room itself are two rows of double cabinets of mahogany for the collections ... The collection of stuffed birds and a small number of quadrupeds fills two upper rooms in the house.<sup>34</sup>

This account of Hunter's museum room is a reminder of how curiosity and the display of indigenous objects from the new world paralleled the accumulation and presentation of objects collected on the Eurocentric grand tour.<sup>35</sup> The juxtaposition of such objects within the same display, encapsulated the 'curious' approach that required evidence of first-hand experience of these artefacts, whereas the transmission of a discourse of colonial acquisition is, perhaps, less discernible.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly the museum room made an enduring impression on visitors but contemporary descriptions omits mention of how Hunter displayed his, by now, substantial painting collection. By 1767 William Hunter owned a number of works by Sir Godfrey Kneller (1648/9-1723), Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Francesco Zuccarelli (1702-1788), all of which would have required a particular allocation of space within the house, in accordance with the domestic function of portraits and other genre paintings.<sup>37</sup> However, where paintings may have been positioned within museums and libraries is not so easily discernible. Giles Waterfield, writing on early institutional museums, comments: 'The assumption prevailed that works of art deserved a place in a museum collection primarily for iconographic purposes or as examples of skilful craftsmanship rather than as objects in their own right'.<sup>38</sup> From this it

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<sup>34</sup> Johann Christian Fabricius, *Briefe aus London vermischten Inhalts*, Dessau, Leipzig, 1784, translated by Professor Lawrence Keppie.

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects, Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1991), p. 126-144; Coltman, pp. 10-11.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas, pp.126-144.

<sup>37</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, (New Haven and London, 1993), p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Giles Waterfield, 'Anticipating the Enlightenment', in AGW Anderson, ML Caygill, AG MacGregor, and L Syon, *Enlightening the British, discovery and the museum in the eighteenth century*, (London, 2003), pp. 5-10.

would seem that Hunter's museum and library might have incorporated some portraits at least. A well-known image of Dr Mead's library in his house at Great Ormond Street, reproduced in William Macmichael's *Gold-Headed Cane*, 1825, shows pictures hanging on the wall, above bookcases on top of which are displayed portrait busts, whereas Marcia Pointon remarks that in Sir Robert Walpole's library at Houghton Hall (completed in 1738), the only painting included was George I in coronation robes by Kneller.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, the exact location of the paintings is difficult to assess particularly as any evidence is, at best, anecdotal. For example, among the Hunter-Baillie papers is a note from an ex-pupil of Hunter's describing, 'a collection of paintings by the first masters, but deposited in other apartments'.<sup>40</sup> The display of paintings in Great Windmill Street cannot be overlooked, however, as Hunter's collection represented his own relationship with artists, dealers and craftsmen. Just as Hunter began to acquire and have anatomical preparations made as his lectures increased in popularity, so his acquisitions of paintings grew in number after he was appointed first Professor of Anatomy at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768. It is also important to stress that Hunter's role in the Academy places him in a position quite distinct from other medical collectors; it sets him apart from those who may have empathised with artists over their anxieties about the 'relationship between head and hand, between learning and manual skills'.<sup>41</sup> Hunter's practice as a teacher of anatomy to artists doubly complicates this relationship.

It is for this reason that the display of Hunter's paintings must have had a specific purpose. At a time when there were very few public exhibitions of paintings — The Society of Artists' exhibition in 1760 at the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Commerce and Manufactures was the first to show works by living artists — Great Windmill Street would have contributed another space that could be used for viewing works of art, albeit to a very privileged audience.<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting, also, that when

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<sup>39</sup> Pointon, p.21.

<sup>40</sup> The Hunterian Ovation, No 4; February 14<sup>th</sup> 1837, by Sir Benjamin C Brodie, p. 13, Hunter-Baillie Papers, vol. 6, RCSE, London.

<sup>41</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, (2003) 'Portraits, People and Things: Richard Mead and Medical Identity', *History of Science*, xIi, p.305.

<sup>42</sup> Recent studies have described how the number and diversity of exhibition spaces in London had grown by the second-half of the eighteenth century, pointing out that the Royal Academy of Arts which moved from Pall Mall to Somerset House in the Strand in 1780, was only one of a number of exhibition sites. Although Hunter's paintings and other aspects of his art collection were not on 'public' view they appear to have been made available to artists and other interested visitors to the house. Thus Hunter's semi-public museum can be added to the 'topography of display' by the late 1770s. See Dias, Rosie, "'A World of Pictures': Pall Mall and the topography of display 1780-99", in Charles WJ Withers and Miles Ogborn, (eds.) *Georgian Geographies: Essays on Space, Place and*

Hunter was planning his anatomy theatre and museum in the 1760s the contrast between the districts of Pall Mall and the Strand was not as sharply delineated as that described by Rosie Dias. In fact, Gwynn's *London and Westminster Improved*, mentions the Strand specifically: 'the Strand, which from being dark, dirty and inconvenient, is become splendid, elegant and in respect of what it was before, magnificent'.<sup>43</sup> Geographically, Gwynn's survey incorporated this extensive area, stretching from Pall Mall and St James's Park in the west to Westminster's most easterly points, converging with the perimeter of the medieval City of London, accentuating his designs with those of Sir Christopher Wren.<sup>44</sup>

A comparison with other museums, accessible to the public, in London during this period give a good indication of how extraordinary Hunter's rooms must have been. For example, Rackstrow's Museum of Anatomical Specimens at Fleet Street, presented figures of women and children displayed alongside shell work and a 'minute and accurate model of a seventy-four gun ship'.<sup>45</sup> Rackstrow's clearly performed an important role in the dissemination of a generalised view of anatomical instruction, just as Hunter's more

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*Landscape in the Eighteenth Century*, (Manchester, 2004), pp.92-113. This is also the subject of CS Matheson, "A Shilling well laid out: The Royal Academy's Early Public' in David Solkin, (ed.) *Art on the Line, The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836*, (New Haven and London, 2001), pp.42-60. Also, Matthew Hargraves, 'Candidates for Fame', *The Society of Artists of Great Britain, 1760-1791*, (New Haven and London, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Gwynn, p.19.

<sup>44</sup> As Miles Ogborn has suggested, in the late 1740s, Gwynn's promotion of Wren's designs may have been an expression of political allegiances to Frederick, Prince of Wales, the figurehead of the opposition against George II. By the 1760s, however, Gwynn's endorsement of Wren anticipates a restructuring of the role of the monarchy in national debates on the significance of the arts. See Ogborn, 2004, p.34; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, (London, 1996), pp. 208-250.

<sup>45</sup> *A Descriptive Catalogue of Rackstrow's Museum consisting of a large and very valuable collection of most curious anatomical figures and real preparations also figures resembling life; with a great variety of natural and artificial curiosities to be seen at No 197 Fleet Street*, London 1792. See also, Matthew Craske, "Unwholesome" and "pornographic" A reassessment of the place of Rackstrow's Museum in the story of eighteenth-century anatomical collection and exhibition. *Journal of the History of Collections*, first published online, November 19 2010 doi: 10.1093/jhc/fhq018. Craske describes a 'serious' role for Rackstrow's within the chronology of anatomy collections, claiming that the Museum has been previously misunderstood and misrepresented. No doubt this is the case, however, the descriptions of Rackstrow's do contrast sharply with the well-ordered and finely conveyed representations of anatomical knowledge presented in Hunter's museum and point up the differences between the public and semi-public roles of these museums. See also Chaplin, 2008, pp.135-151.

‘public’ lectures did. Where and to what extent these types of presentations and displays converge is still yet to be understood.

Rather than placing the Great Windmill Street Anatomy Theatre and Museum within a chronology of medical instruction during the eighteenth century, Hunter’s house must be incorporated into a narrative of the development of London itself and viewed across the spectrum of interests that formed the arts and sciences during the period. Histories of London in the 1760s note the emergence of organisations and meeting-places, stimulated by the convergence of ideas borne by the Enlightenment and illustrated by means of collections.<sup>46</sup> The careful planning and design by William Hunter and Robert Mylne to provide a great school of anatomy is paralleled by Gwynn’s appeal for a city that reflects its overall culture in terms of ‘publick magnificence’.

Robert Mylne’s design for Hunter’s house survived into the nineteenth century, and after the removal of the collection to Glasgow in 1807, its most famous resident, was the surgeon, Sir Charles Bell (1774-1842). (fig.6) Mylne’s scheme still had an impact on the new resident, as Bell wrote to his brother:

It would delight you to see me the proprietor of this museum, which looks great, even now in its great confusion—a noble room nobly filled. It is a room admired for its proportions, of great size, with a handsome gallery running round; the class-room door opens from the gallery. It would require a month to go round the museum with a book in your hand.<sup>47</sup>

Unfortunately, Sixteen Great Windmill Street was demolished in the late nineteenth century to make way for the Lyric Theatre. The façade of Hunter’s house remains but it stands in a rather narrow, mean little street that does not bear much relation to the commodious thoroughfare anticipated by John Gwynn in 1766. William Hunter did establish an Academy to Anatomy, albeit in a less formal capacity than he had hoped, and it is this inheritance that Sir Charles Bell acknowledged when he took over Hunter’s ‘noble’ room. It was not just medical students that passed through the Great Windmill Street Anatomy School and Museum however the site also became familiar to artists

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<sup>46</sup> Ogborn, 2004, p.22. Ogborn considers Gwynn’s ideas as forming ‘social conservatism so characteristic of the adoption of the notion of improvement within the English elite’s version of the Enlightenment’. However, more recent overviews of the period have sought to offer a broader interpretation of ‘sociability’ rather than ‘social conservatism’. See Craig Ashley Hanson, *The English Virtuoso, Art, Medicine and Antiquarianism in the Age of Empiricism*, (Chicago and London, 2009) and Jason M Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti, Archaeology and Identity in the British Enlightenment*, (New Haven and London, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> British History Online. *Survey of London*, Vols. 31 and 32, St James Westminster, Part 2 (1963), <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>.

whom Hunter knew in London as he helped introduce British artists to the European-inspired study of anatomical form.