

North Gallery Labels

PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

THE ACQUISITION OF GENIUS

Introduction

Self-Portrait Shading the Eyes

c.1747-9

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

This is the only known self-portrait which shows Reynolds as a practising artist, holding his palette, brushes and mahl stick. His presentation with eyes shaded owes a debt to Rembrandt, an artist Reynolds greatly admired.

He is fashionably dressed in a blue silk waistcoat and an informal frock-coat with a velvet collar whose plain sleeves are a practical concession to the demands of painting.

In the early nineteenth century the picture was cut down, resulting in this oblong canvas.

National Portrait Gallery, London.

Section 1 / Early Years: Plympton to Plymouth Dock

A View of Plymouth Sound

c.1748

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

This landscape, looking over the Sound from Cattedown, has long been attributed to the young Reynolds before he left Devon for Italy in 1749. It was exhibited at the British Institution in 1823 and recorded as a Reynolds in several nineteenth-century accounts of his works.

The Trustees of the Port Eliot Estate

Plympton Grammar School

Samuel Prout (1783-1852)

Oil on canvas

Plympton Grammar School was completed in 1671 and still stands today. Funded by the charitable estate of a local nobleman Elize Hele, it served the needs of local parish boys, but as the teaching was so good, the local gentry sent their sons, too.

The Reverend Samuel Reynolds took over as master in March 1715, and remained at the school for 30 years, during which time Joshua was also educated at the school.

Plympton Grammar School continues today on a new site as Hele's School.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

The Reverend Samuel Reynolds

c.1746

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Father of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the Reverend Samuel Reynolds (1680-1745) was master of Plympton Grammar School. He was a man with many friends among the local professional classes and supported Reynolds through his apprenticeship in London.

This painting is thought to have been created as a posthumous tribute to Samuel Reynolds, who died in 1745. The profile arrangement, echoing classical portrait medallions, was widely used at this time to portray scholars and intellectuals.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Cottonian Collection

Frances Reynolds

1746

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Reynolds' younger sister, Frances (1729-1807) was seventeen when this portrait was painted. After their father's death in 1745, Frances, Joshua and their older sister Elizabeth moved to Plymouth Dock (Devonport). Reynolds may have painted this portrait to advertise his Dock studio.

Frances became a painter, wrote poetry and in 1785 published a book on aesthetics. From 1753 she was Reynolds' housekeeper in London, but they were temperamentally ill-suited and in the 1770s Reynolds turned her out.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Cottonian Collection

Section 2 / Local Patronage: The Parkers of Saltram

The Admiral John Byng 1749

Thomas Hudson (1701-1779)

Oil on canvas

Reynolds trained with Thomas Hudson in the early 1740s and this picture is exhibited to show something of Hudson's portrait style at the time.

The Honourable John Byng (1704-57) had risen to the rank of Admiral largely through his connections rather than his ability. In 1756 he failed to relieve Menorca, which was under French blockade. Recalled to England, he was court-martialled for neglecting his duty and executed by firing squad on the quarterdeck of his flagship.

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

John Patch c.1717

William Gandy (c.1655-1729)

Oil on canvas

In the 1740s Reynolds studied William Gandy's paintings in Devon collections, admiring particularly his treatment of the head. Gandy had moved to Devon in about 1699, painting local worthies in Exeter and Plymouth, but he failed to prosper.

Here the Exeter surgeon John Patch (1691-1746) is shown undertaking a dissection of the arm. His son Thomas Patch became an artist, and his Caricature Group in Florence is also on show in this exhibition.

Collection of the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust

The Edgcumbes of Mount Edgcumbe

Richard Edgcumbe

c.1748

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Richard Edgcumbe (1680-1758), 1st Baron Edgcumbe, was an important early patron of Reynolds. He had two sons, both of whom became personal friends of Reynolds. The elder, Richard 'Dick' Edgcumbe (1716-61), exhibited here, was a gifted amateur painter and poet but after he left Eton in 1732, gambling overtook him and dominated the rest of his life. In 1742 he succeeded his father, now ennobled, as MP for Plympton Erle, the family's pocket borough.

Mount Edgcumbe House Collection

George Edgcumbe

1748

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Dick Edgcumbe's younger brother, George Edgcumbe (1720-95) was a close friend of Reynolds. He served in the navy in the 1740s and 1750s and is shown here in his Captain's uniform. In March 1748 he captured a French East-Indiaman and brought it into Plymouth. His ship, the Salisbury and the Mount Edgcumbe battery can be seen behind him. This portrait was commissioned by the Plympton Corporation, whose parliamentary borough was controlled by the Edgcumbes.

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

White's Club Design

Richard Edgcumbe

Line engraving

Richard Edgcumbe was a member of White's Club, in London, where conversation, drinking and gambling were prized. In 1756, with his friends Horace Walpole, George Selwyn and George Williams, he designed a humorous coat of arms, celebrating their activities at the Club. Reynolds' portraits of Richard Edgcumbe and of Walpole are on display in this room. Edgcumbe, Selwyn and Williams are depicted together in Reynolds' contemporary painting *A Conversation (aka The Out of Town Party)* hanging nearby.

The Provost and Fellows at Eton College, Windsor

The Orchards of Harland Abbey

Mrs Orchard

1771/2

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on panel

Bettina Orchard (1738–1833) was the daughter of Sir Robert Lawley, 4t Bt. Canwell, Staffordshire.

She married Paul Orchard (1739–1812) on 17 July 1764. Paul Orchard also commissioned from Reynolds a portrait of himself and a posthumous portrait of his father.

On loan from Hartland Abbey

The Parkers of Saltram

John Parker and Therese Parker

1779

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

This portrait of John Parker III and his sister Therese II, was considered by Reynolds to be one of his most successful depictions of childhood. Aged seven and four, the children had lost their mother four years earlier and were being raised at Saltram by their father, their aunt and their uncle, Frederick Robinson, who commissioned this picture. John places his arm protectively around his sister, a gesture Reynolds borrowed from paintings of the infant Christ and Saint John the Baptist.

Saltram, The Morley Collection (accepted in lieu of tax by H.M.Treasury and transferred to the National Trust in 1957).National Trust Property: Saltram

John Parker II

?1770

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

A great friend and supporter of Reynolds, John Parker II is shown here as a country gentleman, taking a pause from the day's shooting, an activity in which Reynolds joined him when visiting Saltram in 1770. Parker also loved to race horses, and his stable interested him far more than the cosmopolitan world of art and literature – he left that to his wife Lady Therese Parker and to Reynolds.

Saltram, The Morley Collection (accepted in lieu of tax by H.M.Treasury and transferred to the National Trust in 1957) National Trust Property: Saltram

Therese Parker with her son

1770-75

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Therese Robinson (1744-75), was the daughter of the Whig diplomat Thomas Robinson, 1st Baron Grantham and was the Empress of Austria's god-daughter. She married John Parker in 1769 and the couple had one son, John (1772-1840), and a daughter, Therese (1775-1856).

Therese was very interested in the arts and was the driving force behind the improvements at Saltram. Reynolds shows her in contemplative pose, a tribute to her intellectual gifts.

While the sittings for the picture were under way, the Parkers decided to include the infant John. As Therese noted, young John 'made such faces it was impossible to do any thing, however... tho' he sat but an hour you would be astonish'd to see how strong a likeness it is, [Reynolds] has caught the Character of the Child so exactly that I am quite delighted with it.'

Saltram, The Morley Collection (accepted in lieu of tax by H.M.Treasury and transferred to the National Trust in 1957). National Trust Property: Saltram

Drawing of Saltram

Samuel Prout (1783-1852)

Pencil

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

Cased items:

Sketch for Chapel at Saltram

Anonymous

Sent by Anne Robinson, Saltram to her brother
2nd Lord Grantham, in Spain, September 1776

Pencil

The chapel was converted from an outbuilding in memory of Therese Parker, who had died at the end of 1775 shortly after giving birth to her daughter. The drawing underlines the fact of her premature death, which much affected Reynolds who wrote a heartfelt obituary.

By arrangement with West Yorkshire Archive Service

Sketch of a proposed Castle for Saltram

c.1770

Thomas Robinson

Pencil

By arrangement with West Yorkshire Archive Service

Letter from Reynolds to Thomas,
2nd Baron Grantham, HM Ambassador to Spain
20th July 1773 Sir Joshua Reynolds
Manuscript

This is a lengthy and highly interesting letter from Reynolds. It describes Reynolds' Oxford Doctorate, revealing anecdotes of George III and the Prince of Wales, plans by Reynolds and other artists to decorate St Paul's cathedral, and Reynolds' impending mayoralty of Plympton, '*one of the finest towns in the world*' in the King's words. The letter is addressed to Therese Parker's brother, Lord Grantham, and thus serves both to link the two taste-makers of Saltram (who were fellow Dilettanti), and to exemplify the networking friendships that Reynolds maintained among the ruling aristocracy.

Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service (Wrest Park (Lucas) Collection)

Letter from Frederick Robinson to Thomas Robinson
23rd February 1779 Frederick Robinson
Manuscript

The letter describes 'a tour of Painters' that John Parker and his son made around artists' studios in London, ending up at Reynolds's house. It describes Angelica Kauffman's portrait of Parker's son, Reynolds's portrait of both son and daughter, and the Parkers' sense of Reynolds' pre-eminence among artists.

"...Mrs Angelica is going to leave England, she has great merit, she has lately painted small figures interesting tender & beautifull. Mr Parker has given Nanny two very pretty ones, but she wants force & truth. Sr J. says she does not paint from nature but the stage. She is now doing the dear little girls Picture. it will be something like exceedingly pretty, but will have the same fault as the boys to which it is to be the companion, viz. the head is too large. We concluded this tour & with propriety at Sr. Joshua Reynold's & wanted nothing more than the first coup d'oleil to be convinced how he is at the head of his profession in this country at least...."

Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service (Wrest Park (Lucas) Collection)

Letter from Thomas Robinson (Lord Grantham) in Madrid to his sister Ann

6th December 1773 Lord Grantham

Manuscript

In 1773, Thomas Robinson (Lord Grantham, the British Ambassador in Spain) had waited months for his sister's portrait by Reynolds to be engraved and sent to him. This letter captures his initial response to it, after months of anticipation:

"My dearest Nanny [his sister], The Print, the Print! - at last is arrived, & has paid our Impatience by it's beauty, & it's likeness. It is indeed a very fine & gracefull Figure, the Countenance very sweet & compose'd rather however too grave; the Attitude of the hands natural to her, the Hair admirable, being in a great style, yet exact; in short it gave us compleat Satisfaction...."

Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service (Wrest Park (Lucas) Collection)

Letter from Frederick Robinson at Saltram to his brother Thomas

11th September 1770 Frederick Robinson

This letter provides evidence of Reynolds' involvement in the work at Saltram commissioned by John and Therese Parker, and reports his comments on the paintings on his visit there in 1770:

...'The Great Room is ready for the Damask though the Windows are not put in, the Ceiling is the most beautifull I ever saw Sir Joshua will have none but original pictures put up there he finds some exceeding good here. There is no describing the library, it is fitted up like a snuff box, they do not like [live?]it yet because of the noise of the workmen in the next room there are more books than I thought. Upstairs the rooms that are alterd are much improved. but their own apartment is not be known again. Theres's dressing room has a remarkable pretty colourd Green Paper & is hung with a great many drawings which Sr Joshua says are invaluable...'

Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service (Wrest Park (Lucas) Collection)

Account book of John Parker

1770-1778 Manuscript

Receipts for July 1777 as seen here, include a £3000 loan to Parker from Reynolds; on the opposite page, expenditure for July 1777 includes a tip for Reynolds' coachman and a payment to Reynolds of £150 among other payments (such as for champagne, toys, lace and cutlery). This fairly typical month's account helps to bring the 18th century Saltram household to life.

Plymouth & West Devon Record Office

The Parkers of Saltram (continued)

Portrait of Therese Parker

1773

Thomas Watson after Reynolds

Mezzotint

The original painting, completed in 1772, was exhibited at the Royal Academy and still hangs in the Saloon at Saltram. Lord Grantham, Therese Parker's brother, lobbied hard to have an engraving made of it and sent to him in Spain. Therese commissioned a mezzotint from Thomas Watson, and bought 50 impressions from him, which were used as gifts to family, friends and John Parker's constituents among the Devon gentry.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

Self-Portrait Undated

Angelica Kauffman RA (1741-1807)

Pencil

This self-portrait formerly belonged to Reynolds.

Private Collection

Antony House

Reginald Pole c.1743-4

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Born in Cornwall, the son of the rector of St Breock, Reginald Pole (1717-69) lost his father when he was fourteen and was brought up by his wealthy uncle. He trained as a lawyer and in the 1740s had chambers in the Middle Temple. He was a friend of Lord Edgcumbe, Reynolds' patron, which connection may explain his decision to sit to Reynolds for his portrait. His son, Reginald Pole-Carew, inherited the Antony estate in Cornwall in 1771 and was one of the mourners at Reynolds' funeral in 1792.

The Trustees of the Carew Pole Family Trusts, Antony House, Cornwall

James Buller 1757

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

James Buller (1717-65) succeeded Sir Coventry Carew as MP for Cornwall in 1748. In 1746 he commissioned a house from the Dorset builder, Francis Cartwright, for his newly-purchased estate of King's Nympton, South Molton. The design was inspired by the recently completed Palladian villa, Marble Hill House in Twickenham.

In November 1755, despite the opposition of the local doctor and the parson, Buller used the new and controversial treatment of inoculation to preserve himself, his family and the villagers of King's Nympton from a smallpox epidemic.

Buller's sister, Anne, married Reginald Pole whose portrait is exhibited nearby.

The Trustees of the Carew Pole Family Trusts, Antony House, Cornwall

Cased item:

The Molesworths of Pencarrow

Reynolds' 1755 sitter book

Sir Joshua Reynolds

The entries in this sitter book include appointments for the portraits on display here. As can be seen, Reynolds made separate sittings for animals. Note the entry for 'dog' on this page.

The studio was run as a business and the sitter book shows the volume of work undertaken by a successful portrait painter in London. In the 1750s Reynolds took his first sittings in the morning, usually at 9 but sometimes as early as 8, and continued working until late afternoon. Each subject sat for about an hour and it usually required at least three, but frequently more sittings to complete the face.

After the sittings were over, the rest of the picture was finished. If a sitter specified the clothes to be worn (as presumably with Anne Molesworth's wedding dress here) they would be sent in to the studio. Draperies and other details were usually the preserve of specialist painters and by 1755 Reynolds was using Peter Toms for that purpose, who charged 20 guineas for painting the draperies, hands and other details in a full-length portrait. Models were often employed to sit for the hands, for the more active poses and for the clothing, although clothing could also be arranged on a lay figure. On establishing himself in London in 1753, Reynolds also had a studio assistant, Giuseppe Marchi, who he had brought back from Rome, who could undertake some of this work. From 1760 Reynolds' pupils were also employed in this way.

There were five sizes of portraits and colourmen (artists suppliers) sold canvases in these standard dimensions: Head; Three-quarter (a bust with one or more hands visible); Kit-cat (a slightly larger head and shoulders with one or more hands visible); half-length; full-length.

In 1755 Reynolds' average prices ranged from 15 guineas for a head to 60 guineas for a full-length. As his career took off Reynolds' prices leapt ahead of his rivals. By the end of his career he was charging 50 guineas for a head and 200 guineas for a full-length.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Cottonian Collection

William Molesworth

1756

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Molesworth – St. Aubyn Family Trust

Anne Molesworth (née Smyth)

1755

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Molesworth – St. Aubyn Family Trust

Sir John Molesworth

1755

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Molesworth – St. Aubyn Family Trust

The Eliot Family of Port Eliot

Richard Eliot RN

1743-4

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Richard Eliot (1733-46), the family's middle son, was a very young midshipman in the navy when this portrait was taken. He died when he was thirteen years old.

The Trustees of the Port Eliot Estate

The Eliot Family

c.1746

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

This is Reynolds' most ambitious painting for the Eliot family. Richard Eliot is seated on the right next to his wife, Harriot Craggs. In the middle stands their eldest son Edward. His younger brother Richard runs in from the left, grabbing at the coat of John Hamilton, who stands next to Mrs Goldsworthy (both family friends). Ann Eliot is in front of her, and Harriot Eliot is at the far right. Catherine Eliot is probably the child on Hamilton's back. John and Elizabeth Eliot are playing in the foreground.

The obvious model for Reynolds' composition is Van Dyck's famous group portrait, *The Pembroke Family* (1635) at Wilton House, which had inspired a number of artists to emulate it, including Reynolds' master Thomas Hudson. Yet the mood here is more about amiability than family dynasties. Indeed, on the urn is the Latin word 'Amiticia', meaning friendship – highlighting the Eliot family's welcome of their two friends into the family circle.

The conservation of this painting was made possible by The Leche Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Port Eliot Collection

Ann Bonfoy

1754

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Ann Bonfoy (1729-1810) was the eldest daughter of Richard Eliot and Harriot Craggs. She married Captain Hugh Bonfoy in 1751, but was widowed in 1762. She was Lady of the Bedchamber to the daughters of George III.

Reynolds decided to have this picture engraved as a demonstration of his abilities. The print by James McArdell (whose portrait is also on display) was published in 1755.

The conservation of this painting was made possible by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Port Eliot Collection

Charles Cornwallis, Lord Brome

1761

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Cornwallis (1738-1805) was an influential military and political figure. He is probably best remembered as a general in the American War of Independence, especially his surrender of Yorktown to a besieging force of American and French troops in 1781.

In 1761, when this portrait was painted, he was fighting in Europe, in the Seven Years War, and was promoted to Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel of the 11th Foot. In 1760 he had also become MP for Wye, in Kent. In 1762 he succeeded his father as 2nd Earl Cornwallis.

This portrait came to the Port Eliot estate through the marriage of Cornwallis' daughter Lady Jemima Cornwallis to Edward Granville Eliot, 3rd Earl of St Germans in 1824.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Port Eliot Collection

Harriot Craggs, Mrs Eliot c.1748

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Harriot Craggs (1709/14-69) was the illegitimate daughter of the diplomat and politician James Craggs. She married Richard Eliot in 1726. They had three sons and four daughters. When Richard Eliot died in 1748, she married John Hamilton, whose portrait is also exhibited here, and had two children with him.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Port Eliot Collection

Lord Edward Eliot 1781-2

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

This was the last of Reynolds' four portraits of Edward Eliot (1727-1804), whom he had first painted in 1744-45. Born within four years of each other, the two men were particularly friendly: Eliot was a member of Reynolds' Literary Club and a pallbearer at his funeral. In 1783, his son Edward James Eliot was briefly engaged to Reynolds' niece Mary Palmer.

Edward Eliot was MP for St Germans (1748-68 and 1774-5), Liskeard (1768-74) and Cornwall (1775-84). In 1784 he was formally created 1st Baron Eliot of St Germans.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Port Eliot Collection

Captain John Hamilton c.1753

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

John Hamilton (d.1755) was an aristocratic navy captain and family friend of the Eliots. Around 1746-7 Reynolds had painted him twice before leaving for Italy. By the time Reynolds painted this portrait Hamilton had become the husband of Mrs Harriot Eliot who married him in 1749 after Richard Eliot's death the previous year.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Port Eliot Collection

Section 3 / Journeys Abroad

A Caricature Group in Florence c.1760

Thomas Patch (1725-82)

Oil on canvas

Thomas Patch was born in Exeter but moved to Italy, working as a connoisseur and artist. He also etched and painted caricatures of visitors on the Grand Tour. Reynolds stayed with him in Rome where he, too, produced some paintings in this vein.

This picture supposedly shows Horace Mann, the British Envoy in Florence, on the right, greeting a party of visitors, among them David Garrick (with hands together), while Garrick's wife, the dancer Eva Maria Veigel, is shown in the portrait above Mann's head. Reynolds' contemporary portrait of Garrick is also on show in this exhibition.

Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter

Commodore the Honourable Augustus Keppel

1749

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Augustus Keppel (1725–86) was the second son of the Earl of Albemarle, and a member of a powerful Whig family. Promoted to Commodore in 1749 he was sent to the Mediterranean to negotiate with the Barbary corsairs whose activities were disrupting shipping. Reynolds had been introduced to Keppel by Lord Edgcumbe early that year and sailed with him from Plymouth on 11 May 1749. He spent the autumn and winter at Port Mahon, Menorca, and this portrait was probably painted there.

Keppel wears his Captain's uniform and his ship the Centurion, 54 guns, flying his Commodore's pennant, is shown behind him.

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

A woman in high plumed hat, in profile to left,
with flowing hair

Sir Joshua Reynolds after Guercino (1591-1666)

Pen and brown ink

Collection Frits Lugt, Institut Néerlandais, Paris

A young man, half length, looking up to right

Sir Joshua Reynolds after Guercino (1591-1666)

Pen and brown ink

Reynolds was put to work, while under Hudson, copying drawings by Guercino. These two copies are fine examples of Reynolds' draughtsmanship that reveal his early responses to the Old Masters. His trip to Italy gave him the opportunity to improve his understanding of the arts by studying at first hand a wide range of paintings by Italian artists.

Collection Frits Lugt, Institut Néerlandais, Paris

Cased item:

Italian sketchbook 1751-2

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Black chalk

Full of sketches and notes from his travels abroad, these unidentified subjects may derive from Reynolds' time in Naples and Bologna.

By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum

Sacra Conversazione with St Bonaventure and St George Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) and Rombout Eynhoudts (1613-1679/80) after Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)

Etching reworked with red chalk and brown wash

Eynhoudts' print reproduces the painting by Rubens that decorates the altar of his family chapel in the St-Jacobskerk, Antwerp.

Reynolds saw it on his journey to the Low Countries in 1781.

Reynolds reworked the print. His annotations (e.g. 'virgin dark blue/sky grey') may have been made on the spot and the colours added afterwards while the picture and its tonalities were fresh in his mind.

The Trustees of The British Museum, London

Section 4 / The Establishment of the Royal Academy

Self-portrait in doctoral robes

1773

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

In 1773 Reynolds was awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Law by the University of Oxford and, three years later, a degree of Doctor of Laws from Trinity College (Dublin). This recognition of his intellectual achievements was important for him and in the self-portraits he painted for the Corporation of Plympton, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, and the Royal Academy, he represented himself as a man of law. The crimson robes and cap of a Doctor of Civil Law allowed him to celebrate his academic status and to present an image of social prestige.

Philip Mould Ltd

The Academicians of the Royal Academy

1773

Richard Earlom after Zoffany

Mezzotint

This print reproduces an oil painting by Johann Zoffany, depicting 36 members of the Royal Academy in the Life Room at Somerset House. Reynolds is in the centre, with ear trumpet. For reasons of propriety women were not allowed into the life room. But because this was a group portrait of the Academicians, Zoffany needed to include Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffman. He overcame the problem by including their portraits on the wall above the model.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Cottonian Collection

The Royal Family at the Royal Academy

1787

Johann Heinrich Ramberg (1763-1840)

Pen and ink, with watercolour over graphite

The large royal party takes centre stage, with Reynolds at the right carrying his ear trumpet and Benjamin West, his successor as President of the Royal Academy, on the left.

Ramberg shows the tight hanging of the pictures as they were displayed at Somerset House, the most prominent position being 'on the line' with the frame touching the ledge that ran around the room at a height of eight feet from the floor.

The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London

Dr William Hunter teaching anatomy at the Royal Academy

c.1775

Johann Zoffany

Oil on canvas

William Hunter (1718–83) was the first teacher of anatomy appointed to the Royal Academy. He was a distinguished obstetrician and anatomist and personal physician to Queen Charlotte.

In this picture, Hunter uses the life model to explain the movement of the muscles of the back, also demonstrated by the anatomical model on a pedestal. Reynolds can be seen in the audience holding his ear trumpet. Lent by the Royal College of Physicians of London

Section 5 / In 'The Club': Reynolds the Celebrated Portraitist

William Beckford 1782

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

William Beckford (1760–1844) was fabulously wealthy, even by eighteenth-century standards, having inherited extensive slave plantations in the West Indies. He travelled to Italy in 1782 and published an account of his travels on his return: *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and Incidents* (1783). In 1786 he published the Gothic novel *Vathek*, which exploited the vein of literature first mined by Horace Walpole with his *Castle of Otranto* (1764). He also built up a significant art collection, from Renaissance masters to the work of his contemporaries.

At the time this picture was painted Beckford was engaged in an illicit sexual relationship with the teenager, William Courtenay, heir to Powderham Castle, near Exeter. When the affair was made public in 1784, Beckford withdrew from society to live on his estate in Wiltshire, Fonthill, where between 1795 and 1813 he constructed for himself an enormous Gothic revival house.

National Portrait Gallery, London

A Conversation

Also known as 'The Out of Town Party' 1759-61

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

This painting, finished in the year of Richard Edgcumbe's death, commemorates the holidays that Horace Walpole organised twice a year at his villa, Strawberry Hill, for Edgcumbe and his two aristocratic friends, George Williams (1719-1805) and George Selwyn (1719-1791). Reynolds shows all three of them in the library: Edgcumbe is drawing at a table, Williams is looking over him and Selwyn is standing on the left.

Walpole considered this picture to be 'by far one of the best things [Reynolds] has executed.'

City Art Gallery, Bristol

Horatio 'Horace' Walpole, 4th Earl of Orford

1756

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

The connoisseur and collector, Horace Walpole (1717–97) was the youngest son of the Prime Minister, Robert Walpole. Reynolds depicts him in contemplative mood, his elbow resting upon a table with an engraving of a large stone eagle which he had acquired from the Boccapadugli Gardens in Rome.

Walpole evidently admired Reynolds' portrait as he commissioned two further replicas, which he presented to his relations. The portrait was also engraved by James McArdell (whose portrait is exhibited close by) although Walpole seized from the engraver not only all the impressions but also the copper plate itself, in order to control the distribution of the image.

National Portrait Gallery, London

David Garrick between Comedy and Tragedy

1760-61

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

David Garrick (1717–79) was the most famous actor of his day, renowned for his naturalistic acting style which swept away the artificial pomposity of a previous generation. He was extremely versatile and excelled in all types of drama. Reynolds shows Garrick poised between the muses of Tragedy and Comedy, celebrating his supreme acting skills.

Reynolds based his composition on the classical tale of Hercules at the Crossroads, where the hero encounters Virtue and Pleasure, and has to choose between them. Reynolds took the idea and embellished it, with the upright figure of Tragedy painted in the public style of Guido Reni – who exemplifies the intellectual sphere of drawing – while the soft-focussed figure of Comedy is inspired by the art of Correggio, which emphasises colour and appeals to the private sphere of the senses.

In doing so, Reynolds demonstrated his own credentials as the most inventive and ambitious portraitist of his age.

Rothschild Family Trust, Waddesdon Manor

Sir William Chambers

c.1756

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

Chambers moved to London the year before this portrait was painted, having travelled from China to France studying architecture. Reynolds employed him to remodel his London house and design his Richmond villa. In 1757, the King made Sir William his personal architecture tutor, which must have irritated Reynolds as he was then firmly out of royal favour. Chambers later became founding treasurer of the Royal Academy (though he deeply resented Reynolds' presidency) and designed Somerset House, its grand premises in London.

National Portrait Gallery, London

Edward Boscawen

1757

James McArdell, after Sir Joshua Reynolds

Mezzotint

Reynolds' full-length portrait of Admiral Edward Boscawen (1711-61) was among his most prestigious commissions of the 1750s, as indicated by the decision to enlist McArdell's services to produce this mezzotint.

Boscawen wears the undress uniform of a flag officer, standing impassively on the shore against a storm-tossed sea. A Cornishman by birth, Boscawen had already enjoyed a distinguished naval career. Shortly after Reynolds began work on his portrait, Boscawen gained further praise following his interception of a French squadron bound for South America, and the capture of several vessels, for which he was thanked formally by Parliament.

National Portrait Gallery, London

James McArdell

c.1756

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Oil on canvas

This portrait of the mezzotint engraver, James McArdell (1729–65), was probably painted by Reynolds of his own volition, rather than as a commission. Reynolds realised that his reputation could be widely disseminated with high-quality engravings of his portraits and is reported to have said of McArdell: *‘by this man I shall be immortalised’*.

McArdell first engraved one of Reynolds’ portraits in 1754 and continued to make engravings of some of Reynolds’ most prestigious portraits until his untimely death in his mid-thirties.

National Portrait Gallery, London

John Reynolds

1757

James McArdell, after Sir Joshua Reynolds

Mezzotint

John Reynolds (1671-1758) was the half-brother of Reynolds’ father, Samuel. A distinguished cleric and scholar, he was a Fellow of Eton College and of King’s College, Cambridge, as well as rector of Stoke Charity, Hampshire, and canon of St Peter’s Cathedral, Exeter. During his apprentice years in London, Reynolds evidently stayed from time to time with his uncle.

McArdell’s mezzotint of John Reynolds was made in 1757, probably the same year in which Reynolds painted the original portrait. It is among the most formal and austere of Reynolds’ portraits, an indication of the respect which he had for his uncle, and his clerical office.

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