



TEACHERS PACK

PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

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WHO WAS SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS?

Sir Joshua Reynolds was born in Plympton on 15 July 1723. His father Samuel Reynolds was a clergyman, and Master of Plympton Grammar School, which later became Hele's School. Reynolds' passion for art was clear from his childhood. At the age of nineteen, he began to study painting with the London-based artist Thomas Hudson, who was himself a successful portrait painter. After learning how to paint portraits that flattered his subjects, he returned to Plymouth Dock and began to paint portraits of well-off local people and their families.

In terms of his career opportunities, Plymouth Dock was an important area for Reynolds to have relocated. Separate to Plymouth, Stonehouse and Plympton, Plymouth Dock was a new town based around the naval dockyard. The naval officers who lived in Plymouth Dock began commissioning portraits from Reynolds - the first of which to bring any notice was a portrait of Captain John Hamilton, who had married into the Eliot family of St Germans. This early recognition paid dividends in the future, as Reynolds continued to paint portraits of Admirals, Commodores and Captains for the rest of his life.

In May 1749, aged 26, Reynolds travelled to Italy with Captain Augustus Keppel, and for the first time saw works by the great Italian painters, which were to become the inspiration for many of his later paintings. He stayed in Rome for two years, making detailed copies of work by the masters that inspired him. He travelled to Florence for six months, Venice for six weeks, and Bologna and Palma for a few days.

In 1753, Reynolds returned home to Devon. After three months he moved to London and set up a studio at St Martin's Lane. His rise in popularity amongst London's wealthy elite secured 125 sitters in 1755 alone. This led to Reynolds, like most other artists of the day, employing an assistant to paint his backgrounds and 'block in' his figures, while he was left to finish off important details such as the face and clothing of his sitters. Among his assistants were Guiseppe Marchi, whom he had met in Rome as a 15 year old, and James Northcote, another Plymouth-born artist.

In 1768, Reynolds became the first president of the Royal Academy (see page 6 for more information), and secured his reputation over the next few years with a series of high profile paintings, such as '*The Ladies Waldegrave*', and '*Three Ladies Adorning a Term of Hymen*'.

By the end of his life, Reynolds had the reputation of being the greatest portrait painter in England, and considered an equal to the great European painters such as Velasquez, Rembrandt and Rubens. He never truly lost his Plymothian accent either!

Not bad for a lad from Plympton, eh?

Note:

Plymouth Dock became Devonport in 1824. So far, historians have been unable to pinpoint the exact houses where Reynolds lived in either Plympton or Dock.

THE 18TH CENTURY

Britain was at war for a large part of the 18th Century, most notably involved in the Austrian War of Succession, the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence. Britain's victories in the Seven Years War delivered significant territorial gains and concreted its position as master of the high seas and the worlds leading colonial power. The loss of the American colonies on the other hand was a severe blow. Plymouth played an important role in the protection of the country and its interests as a naval garrison town and the location of the growing naval dockyard. Many of the naval officers who were stationed in Plymouth would have been among Reynolds' early client base; the commissions from military officers would continue throughout his career and serve to celebrate Britain's heroes in true patriotic fashion.

London had become the major European port as a result of Britain's increasing trade with its colonies. The city grew and many of its inhabitants were involved with the port; merchants, shipping agents and clerks, customs officers, marine insurers and those who worked in the financial institutions. These occupations swelled the ranks of the 'middling classes', joining the doctors, solicitors and clergymen. Sugar, tobacco and cotton from plantations in Britain's colonies were among the most profitable imports - the production of these commodities relied heavily on the transatlantic slave trade.

London was also the political centre; there were two political parties that held the balance of power during the century - the Tories and the Whigs. The Whig politician Robert Walpole became the first person to hold the powers of a Prime Minister in 1721. The Tories were traditional and tended to come from the old landed families whilst the Whigs were popular with the up and coming merchant class and professionals and were more liberal in their beliefs. Only about 5% of the population were eligible to vote and qualification was by property. Members of Parliament were another source of commission for Reynolds and he painted Charles Fox and Lord Rockingham among others. The cartoons of James Gillray offer an interesting contrast to Sir Joshua's portraits and an insight into contemporary political issues.

Many of Reynolds' clients came from wealthy landed families, many of whom had residences in the new and fashionable areas of the city as well as country homes; they would have been attracted by the many pleasurable pursuits and society that London offered. The theatres of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, the opera and the art exhibitions would be the in places to be seen and the fashionable ladies of the day would display their fine and fancy garments. The popularity of the theatre transcended class - even the Prince Regent was an avid theatre goer - and Reynolds painted the popular stars of the day.

THE 18TH CENTURY

The scientific discoveries of the enlightenment led to inventions such as James Watt's steam engine and Arkwright's spinning frame which kick started the industrial revolution that occurred in the latter half of the century. The first cotton mill opened in Derbyshire in 1771 although it wasn't until the 19th century that industrialists ranked among the wealthiest classes. Enlightenment philosophers had applied rational thinking to big questions such as the nature and existence of God and about how society should be structured. Adam Smith's major work *The Wealth of Nations* applied enlightenment logic to the economy and with its theory on free trade was the herald of today's capitalist society.

Many of these new ideas received an airing to the populace through the expansion of printing houses. Pamphlets and newspapers became more widely read, and would have been available to read in coffee houses. The *Times*, which first appeared as the *Daily Universal Register* in 1785, is the only daily newspaper that has survived from the 18th century to this day. Debating societies were formed to mull over these ideas, topics such as 'whether the current peace would last', new inventions such as the steam engine or the contentious issue of slavery would have been discussed. There might also be criticism of the latest government decision on taxation or the Prince Regent's spending habit and a good deal of gossip thrown in. At the top end of the spectrum The Literary Club, of which Reynolds was a founding member, met at the Turk's Head; they had a restricted membership of 30 and only the most learned men of the literary and liberal professions were invited to join. This ensured that all aspects of debates could be fully understood.

Of course there was another side of society, the large underclass who worked on the land as labourers or in the new factories - the label 'working class' had not yet been adopted. Many ordinary people lived in poverty and had no vote and therefore no way of improving their lot, some took solace in drinking gin which was cheap and widely available. Justice was harsh and the death penalty was given for relatively minor offences; James Boswell recorded watching hangings at Newgate Prison in his journals and such events would draw a large crowd. The disparity between the rich and the poor was not a subject covered by Sir Joshua Reynolds whose sitters were taken from the upper echelons of society - try comparing the work of Hogarth for a different view of the 18th century.

Those who were ineligible to vote often made their grievances heard by rioting, these riots did not have the violent connotations that we associate with the word today and were, more often than not, a protest about a single localised issue. After the French Revolution in 1789 many of those in power feared that a similar event would happen in Britain. Edmund Burke was particularly vocal in his condemnation and wrote his *Reflections on the revolution*. Others such as Charles Fox applauded the fall of the Bastille, equating it with France's attempt to gain the same liberties as the English but opinions were later to change dramatically with the onset of the terror.

THE ROYAL ACADEMY

The Academy was founded by George III in 1768. The 34 founding Members were a group of prominent artists and architects who were determined to achieve professional standing for British art and architecture. They also wanted to provide a venue for exhibitions that would be open to the public; and to establish a school of art through which their skills and knowledge could be passed to future generations of artists.

Among the founding members were artists such as Thomas Gainsborough, John Zoffany, Francesco Bartolozzi and Angelica Kauffmann. Other artists with strong South West connections joined later - among them John Opie and James Northcote.

Sir Joshua Reynolds was the first president of the Royal Academy, a position he held from its formation in 1768 until his death in 1792. As President, Reynolds was expected to lecture to the other members and students of the Academy. His Discourses on Art, delivered between 1769 and 1790, are still available to read today.

The Academy today continues to aspire, in the words of its eighteenth-century founders, 'to promote the arts of design', that is: to present a broad range of visual art to the widest possible audience; to stimulate debate, understanding and creation through education; and to provide a focus for the interests of artists and art-lovers.

Note:

Engravings by Bartolozzi and paintings by Kauffmann can be seen in the Cottonian Collection

The Royal Academy exhibitions were famously hung with paintings from floor to ceiling. Try hanging your own 'Royal Academy' display in school of paintings from floor to ceiling. Can you see the paintings at the top of the display properly? Do you think we should have hung the paintings in our exhibition this way?

REYNOLDS AND CELEBRITY

When we think of celebrities today, we think of countless magazines and newspapers - Hello, OK, Now, The Sun, The Mirror - devoted on the whole to reporting on the activities of this small section of society. We watch television programmes such as Hell's Kitchen, Celebrity Big Brother, and I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here. We buy their autobiographies, perfumes, and clothing ranges.

Celebrity was just as important in the 18th century as it is for us, possibly more so. There obviously weren't television programmes to watch, perfumes or clothing ranges to buy back then, but being seen in the right place at the right time was paramount. One way to do this was to have your portrait painted by one of the greatest artists of the land - Thomas Gainsborough, Allan Ramsay or Joshua Reynolds. Not only would your portrait have been on display at one of the artists' private galleries, a public gallery or a London townhouse, but more than likely it would have also been reproduced as an engraving and published widely.

This also worked both ways - actors, courtesans and scholars were keen to promote themselves to gain recognition - and also the artists were able to further their reputation by publishing widely. In the same way that Sam Taylor-Woods' 2004 film of David Beckham sleeping was widely covered by newspapers and television when it was displayed at the National Portrait Gallery in London, so too Reynolds' portraits would have stirred the public interest - keen to see the latest fashions, famous visitors or Royal portraits.

Can you think of a celebrity that you have seen face-to-face? Now think of all those celebrities that you have seen on television, or in magazines or newspapers. Try making your own Hello - style magazine, filled with portraits of those celebrities. You could collage these, or have a go at drawing them from memory. Why not try only using celebrities from Plymouth?

PAINTINGS BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

Portrait of Rev. Samuel Reynolds

Oil on canvas

c.1745-46

© Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Cottonian Collection

This portrait shows Reynolds father, Rev. Samuel Reynolds, sitting almost in profile.

Samuel Reynolds became Master of Plympton Grammar School in 1715, which later became Hele's School. The school survives today as one of the largest secondary schools in the city, though has now moved from the Old Grammar School in Plympton St Maurice to a new site.

As Samuel died on Christmas Day 1745, this portrait is thought to have painted posthumously. The death of his father caused Reynolds to return home for 4 years, only leaving when the opportunity to travel to Italy with Captain Keppel arose.

Have a go at painting a portrait from memory, without making drawings or using photographs first. Try and paint one of your family members - make sure they are not in the classroom with you (we know some parents are also TA's)! Did you find it difficult? Why was it so difficult? Did your painting resemble that person?

Portrait of Rev. Samuel Reynolds

Oil on canvas

c.1745-46

© Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Cottonian Collection



PORTRAITS BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

Portrait of Lady Anne Bonfoy

Oil on canvas

1754

© Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Port Eliot Collection

This is a painting of Anne Bonfoy, a member of one of Reynolds most important local patrons, the Eliot family. The family had lived at Port Eliot, a large house in St Germans since the mid 16th Century.

Reynolds received many commissions to paint members of the Eliot family and their relations, and was to remain on close terms with them throughout his life. Edward, 1st Lord Eliot, was one of the pallbearers at Reynolds' state burial in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral on 3 March 1792.

Anne had married Hugh Bonfoy, a captain in the Royal Navy in 1751. Reynolds was in a prime position whilst based in Plymouth to capitalise on the abundance of wealthy Royal Naval officers in the city. They were willing to pay good money for themselves and their families to be painted by artists such as Reynolds, and also often paid for copies to be made to hang in their friends' houses.

Reynolds' reputation was secured by painting this kind of work. The portraits would have been seen by the great and good of the time, both in the South West and London, and would have been appealing for both the artist and the sitter - gaining a reputation for the sitter as a fashionable lady of the time, and for Reynolds in helping to secure more commissions for new portraits.

Imagine you are either Anne Bonfoy, or her husband Hugh, posing for Sir Joshua Reynolds. What pose would you have held for your portrait, and what clothes, jewellery and accessories would you have chosen for yourself to wear for this important occasion?

Portrait of Lady Anne Bonfoy

Oil on canvas

1754

© Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Port Eliot Collection



PORTRAITS BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

David Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy

1760 -61

Waddesdon Manor,

The Rothschild Collection (Rothschild Family Trust)

David Garrick was the most celebrated British actor of the 18th century. His rise to fame was fast. Critically acclaimed performances - particularly as Shakespeare's Richard III - writing and producing plays, and co-owning the Drury Theatre all helped to establish him on the London social scene. Garrick regularly socialised with Reynolds, and was invited to join the Literary Club - home to some of the greatest thinkers of the day.

Members of 'The Club', as it came to be known, included leading figures in the artistic, literary and intellectual world such as Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith and Edmund Burke.

The Club's reputation soon eclipsed other leading societies and clubs of the day, and so to become a member meant instant recognition and fame.

Garrick, like Reynolds, was no stranger to the idea of self-promotion, and appeared in many other leading artist's paintings and engravings of the time.

This painting is one of the most important works that Reynolds produced in his career.

Reynolds drew inspiration for this painting from an ancient Greek story - Ovid's Amores. Using a modern story (and some children as willing actors and actresses!), set up a three person pose for the rest of the class to draw. Can they represent an entire modern story by just posing?

David Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy
1760 -61
Waddesdon Manor,
The Rothschild Collection (Rothschild Family Trust)



PORTRAITS BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

Self Portrait

Oil on canvas

c.1764/65

© Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Cottonian Collection

Sir Joshua Reynolds painted many self portraits during his artistic career; a selection of these can be seen in the exhibition from different periods of his life. The portrait from our collection would have been painted when Reynolds was around 40 years old.

Despite Reynolds having a very busy professional life - he was said to work seven days a week for nine months of the year - the artist was able to regularly paint images of himself. Perhaps he waited until the summer when his appointment book was usually empty. Reynolds used this time to experiment with new techniques and compositions for his work.

Clearly, Reynolds worked hard for his success. Putting in long hours from as early in his career as the 1750's helped to establish his reputation as the greatest portrait painter in the land.

Try painting a self portrait. Use different materials to create robes such as the one worn by Reynolds in this painting. This will help you to concentrate on painting your face, rather than your clothes or jewellery. How difficult did you find it when you were painting your self portrait? Did the model fidget too much?!

Self Portrait

Oil on canvas

c.1764/65

© Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Cottonian Collection



PORTRAITS BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

Portrait of Charles Rogers FRS FSA

Oil on canvas

1777

© Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery: Cottonian Collection

Charles Rogers was an important collector of books, paintings and prints. He inherited parts of his substantial collection from William Townson, a colleague at the Customs House in London. He also added to the collection whenever he could, even employing people to collect on his behalf overseas. The portrait shows Rogers in his fine clothes and holding papers, implying a well-off and professional individual. This portrait was commissioned by Rogers, and was the only painting by Reynolds in his collection at the time.

Rogers' collection forms a key part of the Cottonian Collection held by Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, having been left to his brother-in-law William Cotton I. The other Reynolds paintings in the Cottonian Collection were added later by William Cotton III, and were donated to the city on his death.

Using the internet, can you discover any important patrons for British artists today? Have any of these patrons had their portraits painted or photographed?

Portrait of Charles Rogers FRS FSA

Oil on canvas

1777

© Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery: Cottonian Collection



Charles Rogers, F.R.S., F.S.A. (1711-1784)
painted 1777 by
SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, B.P.A. (1723-1793)

