

Sir Charles Bell's engravings

The Sibbald Library exhibition that accompanied the November 2011 RCPE Neurology Symposium featured works written by Sir Charles Bell (1774–1842), one of the most famous fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.



FIGURE 1 Sir Charles Bell. (1839 engraving by Ballantyne & J Thomson)

Sir Charles, who was Edinburgh-born and educated, was famous as an anatomist, physiologist, neurologist and surgeon. During the early nineteenth century, Sir Charles and his older brother John produced the most influential anatomical books in Britain. Both Bells were skilled artists and their books benefit from

their artistic talent. The illustrations shown here are some of nine anatomical plates in *A series of engravings*, explaining the course of the nerves. The engravings are based on the drawings Sir Charles produced for his brother's anatomy lectures.

At an early stage in his career Bell understood the importance and relevance of anatomy to the practice of medicine and he even tried to introduce a new kind of anatomy teaching while still a student as 'the common books are not fitted to be assistants in dissections'.



FIGURE 3 Plate II. Being a view of the nerves of the neck.

The Sibbald Library has copies of all Bell's major works including the very rare, privately printed 1811 pamphlet, *Idea of a new anatomy of the brain*. In this work Sir Charles presented his theory that different parts of the brain have specific functions: 'the cerebrum and cerebellum were parts distinct in function'.

Reference

Charles Bell. *A series of engravings, explaining the course of the nerves*. London: T N Longman and O Rees; 1803.

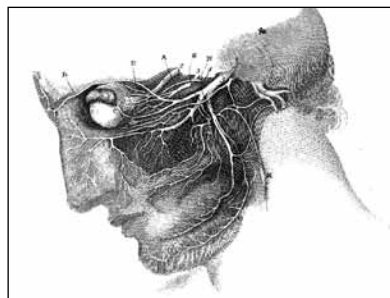


FIGURE 2 Plate I. Scheme of the nerves of the face and eye.

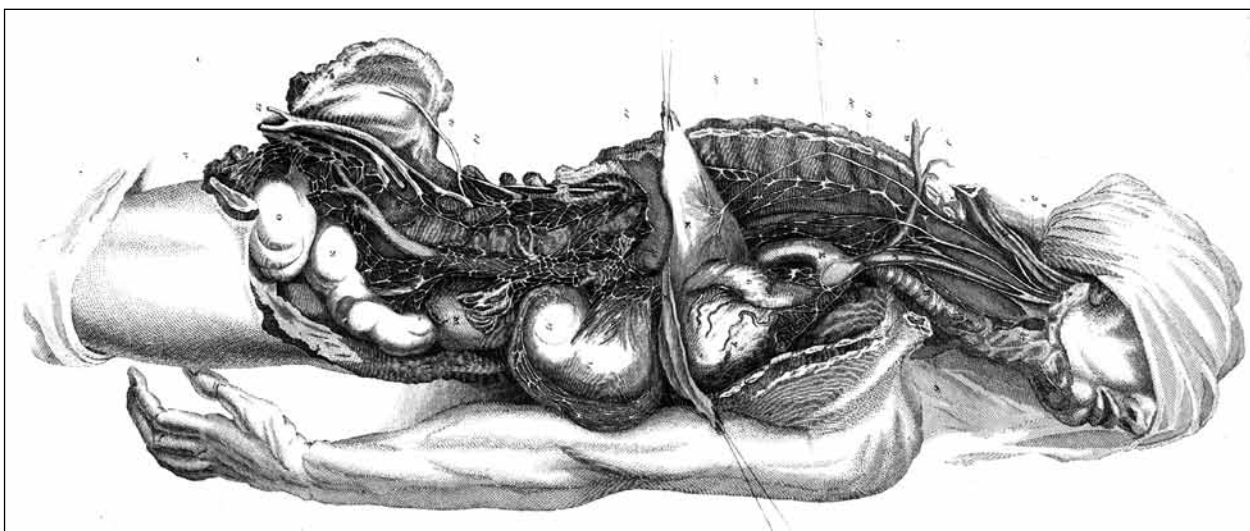


FIGURE 4 Plate III. ...a view of those nerves which are prolonged from the brain, and take a course amongst the viscera of the thorax and abdomen.