

A detailed oil portrait of Sir Joshua Reynolds, showing him from the chest up. He has dark, curly hair and is wearing a dark coat with a white cravat. The background is dark and textured.

Sir Joshua Reynolds

KS2 Art and Design Resource



Museum
Gallery
Archive

The Box is Plymouth's new multi-million pound museum, gallery and archive. With brand new exhibition spaces alongside state-of-the-art facilities for research and learning, it's the perfect place to teach, inspire and engage students of all ages.

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About this resource

In 2014, The Box acquired two significant objects linked to Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), one of the most celebrated and influential painters of the 1700s.

The Self-Portrait (1746) and Sketchbook (1752) are of international importance and were acquired by private treaty, thanks to a £326,300 National Lottery Heritage Fund grant and support from the Art Fund, the V&A Purchase Grant Fund, and the Friends of Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery. In addition, many local people also contributed to this purchase.

This important acquisition – which took over 24 months to complete – followed on from the Acceptance in Lieu of Reynolds portraits from Port Eliot in 2007.

These magnificent items are valuable additions to the The Box's permanent collections. The acquisition secured the painting and sketchbook for the city, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy these items.

This resource covers some of the broad themes that relate to Reynolds' life and work and looks at seven works from our collection in depth, including the painting and sketchbook.



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 19, 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 within two years (five years was the usual length of an apprenticeship), he returned to Plymouth Dock (now Devonport) 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 moved to. 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, 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 the Mediterranean with Captain Augustus Keppel, whom he had painted at Plymouth Dock. He was dropped-off at Port Mahon in Minorca, where he was again

able to secure commissions from visiting naval officers. He was able to afford a visit to Italy, 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, memorising the work by the masters that inspired him, but made surprisingly little work whilst there. He also 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 wealthy Londoners secured 125 sitters in 1755 alone. This led to Reynolds, like most other artists of the day, employing an assistant to paint the backgrounds and 'block in' his figures, while he was left to finish off important details such as the face and hands 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 9 for more information), and secured his reputation over the next few years with a series of high profile paintings. He was knighted in 1769. By the end of his life, he had the reputation of being the greatest portrait painter in England, and was considered an equal to the great European painters such as Velasquez, Rembrandt and Rubens.

He never truly lost his Plymothian accent either.

The 1700s

Britain in the 1700s saw the beginning of the Enlightenment, almost constant war, social disparity and religious upheaval. Reynolds' sitters came from this context, some playing significant roles in the changes of the time.

Britain's victories in the Seven Years War (1756 - 1763) delivered significant territorial gains and cemented its position as master of the high seas and the world's 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. 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 Reynolds' 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 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 1800s 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 through the expansion of printing houses. Pamphlets and newspapers became more widely read and would have been available 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 1700s 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. For a different view of the 1700s, try comparing Reynolds' work with the work of Hogarth, particularly the etching 'Gin Lane'.

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 in France*. 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. 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 1700s 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.

Reynolds and ‘celebrity’

When we think of celebrities today, we think of countless magazines and websites - Hello, OK, TMZ – devoted on the whole to reporting on the activities of this small section of society.

We buy their autobiographies, perfumes and clothing ranges. We read about them on Facebook or Twitter and follow them on Instagram or YouTube.

Celebrity was just as important in the 1700s as it is for us, possibly more so. Being seen in the right place at the right time was really important for your public persona. One way to do this was to have your portrait painted by one of the greatest artists of the day – Thomas Gainsborough, Allen Ramsey 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 worked both ways. Actors, courtesans and scholars were keen to promote themselves to gain recognition – and 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 would Reynolds’ portraits have stirred the public interest – keen to see the latest fashions, famous visitors or Royal portraits.

Works by Sir Joshua Reynolds



Self-Portrait

This self-portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds was painted on his return to Plymouth in 1746, shortly after his apprenticeship to Thomas Hudson in London.

Hudson was born in Devon, but was working in London as one of the most successful portrait artists of the time. Other notable apprentices of Hudson included Joseph Wright of Derby and the drapery painter Peter Toms.

Later in Reynolds' career, Toms was often employed to work on the elaborate costume and fabric elements of the large paintings. It's been suggested that Reynolds painted this work to advertise his services as a portrait painter when he and his sisters, Elizabeth and Frances, moved to Plymouth Dock (modern-day Devonport) after the death of their father in 1745.

During conservation work on this painting in 2014, an x-ray was taken which shows that this canvas has a further portrait beneath the finished surface. It's currently unclear who this might represent.





Reverend Samuel Reynolds

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

Samuel Reynolds became Master of Plympton Grammar School in 1715. It later became Hele's School. Today it's one of the largest secondary schools in the city, although it 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 been painted posthumously. The death of his father caused Reynolds to return home for four years, only leaving when the opportunity to travel to the Mediterranean with Captain Keppel arose.



Sketchbook

This sketchbook was compiled by Reynolds over a couple of years while travelling in Italy.

In Reynolds' time, the Grand Tour was a requirement for aristocratic young men, who visited the major European cities to absorb their classical and more recent cultural legacy. Reynolds was not an aristocrat, but had the good fortune of being supported by well-off local families – particularly the Edgcumbe family - at this time. Richard Lord Edgcumbe arranged for Reynolds to travel to Italy with Commodore Augustus Keppel, leaving from Plymouth Dock in 1749. Keppel would later become First Lord of the Admiralty.

Whilst in Italy, Reynolds was able to study the work of the great painters and sculptors of the Renaissance. He considered their work to be among the greatest achievements in art.

In the sketchbook he copied work by artists such as Gian Lorenzo Bernini, not by reproducing every detail, but by selecting the parts that interested him the most. He also chose to adapt and change some of the things he saw, which highlights his own confidence as an artist at this time.

This sketchbook is one of only ten known to exist and is the only one in a public collection outside of the Royal Academy.



Lady Anne Bonfoy

The family had lived at Port Eliot, a large house in St Germans, since the mid-1500s. It was painted two years after the artist had returned from his trip to Italy. 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 helping Reynolds to secure more commissions for new portraits.



Sitter's Book

This is Reynolds' sitter's book from 1755. Reynolds kept these for most of his painting career, and so it tells us an awful lot about how his paintings were made.

There are numerous entries for the same sitters, sometimes with the word 'drapery' added next to a name to remind him of the purpose of the sitting. We also know that Reynolds employed artists such as Peter Toms to work on his drapery around this date. He also recorded the times he was expecting his sitters to arrive at the studio.

On these pages we can see the names of sitters listed for different times on different days. Two or three well know names are listed on this page:

Prideaux – a solicitor and founder member of the 'Plymouth Committee of Abolitionists'.

Keppel – in this case both Miss MJ Keppel, and Miss Elizabeth Keppel - great, great, great, great, great grandmother to Princess Diana.

Ludlow – a very large well-known portrait of Peter Ludlow from 1755 is in the collection of Woburn Abbey, including a large portrait of a dog.

Is this dog listed for a sitting on Monday at 10am?

M. 24

Appointments.

FEBRUARY 1755.

Occasional Memorandums.

Tu.

10

12 Mr. Wilke
2 Mr. Gamm
1 Mr. Gamm

W.

12 Mr. Gamm
2 Mr. Gamm
1 Mr. Gamm
1 Col. Dickson

Th.

2 Mr. Gamm
12 Mr. Morris

Fr.

10 Mr. Gamm
12 Mr. Douglas
2 Mr. Gamm

Sat.

[MARCH 1]
12 Mr. Gamm
2 Mr. Gamm

Sun.

FEBRUARY
WEEK'S ACCOUNT

land & money

10

Bill

+ 10 15
+ 10 15
+ 10 15
+ 10 15
+ 10 15

159

Self-Portrait

This self-portrait 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 (although his sitters book on the previous page says otherwise!) - he 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 he worked hard for his success. Putting in long hours from as early in his career as the 1750s helped to establish his reputation as the greatest portrait painter in the land.



Charles Rogers FRS FSA

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. It 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 The Box, 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 after his death.



Ideas for activities

Royal Academy-style

Using the text from 'The Royal Academy' section of this resource on page 13 and further research in the classroom, try hanging your own 1700s Royal Academy display in school of paintings from floor to ceiling. Can you see the paintings at the top of the display properly? Where is the most desirable place to hang your paintings - at the top, bottom or middle?

Make sure you make nice, big frames to fit around your paintings.

Paparazzi

Can you think of a celebrity that you have seen face-to-face? Now think of all the celebrities 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.

Painting from memory

Have a look at the portrait of Reverend Samuel Reynolds, the painting of Reynolds' father on page 19. It was painted after his death, meaning Reynolds either made drawings of him while still alive, or painted this from memory. 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 (who knows, some parents are also TA's)!

Did you find it difficult? Why was it so difficult?

Did your painting resemble that person?

You poser!

Have a look at the portrait of Anne Bonfoy on page 23. 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 to wear for this important occasion?

Daily diaries

Using the sitters book on page 25 as a starting point, create your own daily diaries. These don't have to just be records of what you do every day - you could also write down what you spend on sweets at the corner shop or how many stickers you swapped in the playground.

Create a graph collating these results and ask the pupils to analyse them. Why not also try to recreate the style of writing used by Reynolds in the 1755 book?

Maybe you could find a similar looking typeface - try www.dafont.com for a variety of free fonts.

Self-Portrait

Try painting a self-portrait. Use different materials to create robes such as the one worn by Reynolds in the portrait on page 27. 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?

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