

A taste of one's own medicine: medical satire at the Royal College of Physicians

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We see countless satirical images in our everyday lives, from commercial advertisements and newspaper cartoons, to magazine covers and humorous internet memes.

Graphic satire has saturated all levels of society since it emerged as a skilled artform in the 17th century. It developed into a thriving industry in the 18th century, becoming a powerful tool for expressing political and social opinions.

The enduring appeal of satirical images encompassed the wealthy and poor alike. Reproduced in their tens, hundreds or even thousands, prints could be bought by the wealthy from printmakers, viewed in shop windows and later newspapers, and put up in public places such as barber shops, billiard rooms and brothels.

Like many public figures, medical professionals such as doctors, apothecaries and surgeons were targeted by satirists and caricaturists. These artists used public opinion and personal agendas to ridicule, reprimand and malign their subjects and the work they were involved in.

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) cares for a unique collection of medical satire prints from the mid-18th century to the 1980s, selected and given by doctors and members over its 500-year history. Like all satire, these prints are closely tied to a particular time and place. They responded to contemporary events and were consumed by audiences who understood the circumstances of their creation.

Join us as we explore the diverse social, political, and historical contexts in which our satirical prints were produced, and seek to decipher the complex narratives they contain.

satire, n. A work of art which uses humour, irony, exaggeration or ridicule to expose and criticise prevailing immorality or foolishness, especially as a form of social or political commentary.

caricature, n. Grotesque or ludicrous representation of persons or things by exaggeration of their most characteristic and striking features.

lampoon, n. A virulent or scurrilous satire upon an individual.

Case 1: The doctor

‘God heals, and the Doctor takes the Fees’.

Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard’s Almanack* (1744)

Pompous, vain, arrogant, ignorant, ridiculous and indifferent to their patients’ suffering, 18th and 19th century medical professionals were stereotyped by contemporary satirists, who used this imagery to comment upon the medical professions and the state of the nation’s health.

The medical professions were targeted generally – as were priests, lawyers and teachers – because they were in the public eye and were perceived as a threat to the young and the healthy. Anti-doctor satire in particular initially focused on fear and anxiety of, and resentment towards, the powerful professionals who prodded, bled, wounded and invaded their patients, with limited success in curing them. It later became a way of putting doctors in their place, of deflating egos and exposing pretension.

Satirists delighted in portraying doctors as cynics who only consulted with patients to collect their fees. Doctors were also mocked for being dangerously ignorant and for arguing among themselves, for only being concerned with appearances, or even of working in collusion with Death.

‘The good man, Death and the doctor’

Engraving by Thomas Rowlandson, from William Combe, [The English dance of Death](#) (published by Rudolph Ackerman, London, 1 August 1815)

CN21011

A man lays dead or dying, surrounded by his mourning family. Exiting the scene is his doctor, who sniffs his physician’s cane while a skeleton taps him on the shoulder.

The popular artist Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827) here plays on the resonating suspicion that doctors were disciples of Death. The doctor has failed to save the dying man, and so has assisted Death in his work – Death and the doctor appear to be in collusion. The idea that a visit from the doctor could be fatal meant that doctors were viewed with fear as well as hope.

This scene is from Rowlandson’s series *The English dance of Death*, published by the prolific London print trader and publisher Rudolph Ackerman. *Dance of Death* illustrations feature people from all ranks of society accompanied by Death, usually represented as a skeleton. The illustrations are memento mori – a reminder that everyone dies.

‘The good man, Death and the doctor’ shows us that Death will come for the doctor as well as for his patients – the doctor’s knowledge of medicine and healing will not save him.

**William Combe, [The English dance of Death](#)
Published by Methuen & Co, London, 1903
CN21012**

Thomas Rowlandson's series of 74 Dance of Death engravings were published alongside verses written independently by the writer William Combe (1742–1823). The end of the verse for 'The good man, Death and the doctor' helps us understand the messages within the illustration:

"Tis Fate commands; the patient dies. No call requires me now to stay: I've something else to do than pray. I feel my Fee'; – 'Then hold it fast,' Said grinning Death, – 'for 'tis your last.'

As the doctor turns his back on his dying patient, Death comes to claim the doctor. This is not collusion after all – instead, Death is warning the doctor that he has just treated his last patient and that his death will be next.

Doctors' practices were commonly perceived as ineffective. Here, the doctor sniffs his cane as protection against the disease that is killing his patient. Illness was believed to spread via foul odours or 'miasma', and so the doctor sniffs sweet-smelling herbs secreted in his cane to stave off disease. In this case, the gesture is futile.

By referencing the doctor's fee in the poem, Combe acknowledged the common criticism that doctors only treated patients to collect their payments. Here the doctor's greed has backfired, a notion that may have entertained Rowlandson's audiences.

[Monsieur le medicin](#) (Mr doctor)

**Engraving attributed to Henry William Bunbury, published by Matthew and Mary Darly, London, 13 June 1771
PR15128**

An elaborately dressed elderly doctor wears a periwig (a highly styled wig) and carries a large umbrella tucked under his arm. He is taking a pinch of snuff, and poking out of his pocket is an enema labelled 'Unne [sic] Lavement pour Mademoiselle Mimi', or 'An enema for Mademoiselle Mimi'.

In this satirical image of a French doctor, the viewer is shown the stereotype of the 'macaroni' – someone who dresses and behaves in an eccentric and affected or effeminate way, and who is overly concerned with fashion and with adopting stylish habits. The doctor is dressed head-to-toe in the latest fashion and pursues the chic habit of taking snuff.

This print is from a series of 'macaroni' caricatures published by husband-and-wife print seller team Matthew and Mary Darly. It represents a stereotype, rather than an individual – the ineffective, slightly ridiculous doctor. The only obvious reference to medicine in the image is the small enema in the doctor's pocket – he is preoccupied with his appearance and with carrying the trappings of his social status rather than with his occupation.

A consultation of physicians

Coloured engraving by unknown artist, 1760–1830

PR15133

A dead or dying patient wearing a funeral shroud is attended by a nurse or female family member and two men, one of whom kneels on a chair to keep out of the blood that is spattered across the floor. Two doctors stand closely together in consultation.

The doctors do not engage with the patient but put their heads together and close their eyes. One doctor sticks out his chin and sniffs his cane – an action associated with doctors in the 18th century. Above their heads coins spill from a purse.

A common 18th century medical stereotype was of the doctor as a ‘dangerous ignoramus’ – someone who did not know what they were doing and could not cure their patients. In this image the doctors have failed to heal their patient, and the blood on the floor and on one doctor’s handkerchief suggest their treatments were violent.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries doctors were more commonly satirised for being pretentious and unwilling to get their hands dirty. In this image, the doctors tread carefully to avoid the blood on the floor. They are pompous, indifferent to their patient’s suffering, and only concerned with collecting their fee.

The apothecary’s prayer

Coloured etching by Thomas Rowlandson after George Murgatroyd Woodward, published by Rudolph Ackerman, London, 1801

2008.1/19

An apothecary prays by an empty armchair. He is identified by his hat and cane which lie on the floor, and by the typical tool of his trade: an oversized pestle and mortar on the table behind him.

According to the poem beneath the picture, the apothecary is praying that a host of illnesses descend upon his neighbours and customers. Their good health is bad for his business, and illness would enable him to earn money and clear his debts by preparing and selling medicines to them.

The poem refers to the pregnancy of ‘the Lady of ‘Squire Handy’, and the apothecary claims that if he was ‘so fortunate as to bring the young gentleman handsomely into the world, it may be the means of raising me to the highest pinnacle of fortune’. The apothecary displays his greed, playing into the stereotype that medical professionals were preoccupied with exploiting their patients.

The print’s publisher, Rudolph Ackerman (1764–1834), mostly sold to ‘the respectable and well-heeled middle classes’. This print was reprinted by the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, meaning the image’s audience were society members and the wealthy – the very people for whom the apothecary is praying for ill health.

'Lord Beaconsfield's Physician' Richard Quain (1816–1898)

Chromolithograph by Vincent Brooks Day and Son Ltd after Leslie Ward 'Spy', in Vanity Fair, 15 December 1883

PR10401

Standing full length with his right hand tucked into his coat, an enlarged head and baggy clothing, Irish physician Sir Richard Quain is gently satirised in this image by the Vanity Fair illustrator Leslie Ward, also known as 'Spy'.

Between 1860 and 1914, 53 well-known doctors were depicted in Vanity Fair, which described itself as 'A weekly show of political, social and literary wares'. The magazine aimed to truthfully expose the contemporary vanities of Victorian society, without singing praises or diminishing merit. Inclusion was considered an accolade, and the portraits were humorous and friendly rather than mocking or malicious. Quain's accompanying biography describes him as 'an amiable and agreeable man, full of good stories'.

For Vanity Fair's satirical portraits to work, their subjects needed to be recognisable. Quain was well known in London society. He worked at the Brompton Hospital for Diseases of the Chest and held senior positions at the RCP and other medical organisations. In 1881 Queen Victoria asked him to care for prime minister Benjamin Disraeli during his final days, and he later became the queen's doctor, which kept him in the public eye.

In the second half of the 19th century, doctors were no longer depicted inflicting violent treatments (such as bloodletting) upon patients. This shift may reflect a greater level of esteem held by the public towards the medical professions. The practice of medicine was advancing technically with the widespread use of anaesthesia, anti-sepsis and X-rays, making diagnosis and treatment more comfortable and reliable. The emergence of medical specialties with highly skilled individuals, and the standardisation of competence set out by the 1858 Medical Act, helped to increase public confidence in doctors and their abilities.

Richard Quain (1816–1898)

Oil on canvas by John Millais, 1896

X120

Sir Richard Quain was painted by the Pre-Raphaelite artist John Millais 13 years after he appeared in Vanity Fair in 1883.

Portraits and satirical prints often give contrasting or even contradictory impressions of the same subject. They are produced under different circumstances, for different audiences and purposes. For the comparison to work however, there must be visual similarities, and caricatures often rely on the viewer's familiarity with existing portraits.

The RCP's two representations of Quain are clearly related, although in this instance the portrait was produced after the caricature. In both images Quain stands side-on to the viewer with arms crossed or tucked into his coat. He has a hooked nose with grey hair swept into a side parting, a black overcoat and

bow tie, and a white shirt with a prominent collar. The most significant difference is Quain's facial expression: here he is more serious and thoughtful.

Millais had connections with Vanity Fair and would almost certainly have been aware of Quain's caricature. We do not know if Millais (or Quain) intentionally imitated Spy's drawing, or if a third image was the inspiration for both. The serious facial expression in the portrait may have been intended to differentiate the doctor's formal portrait from his more frivolous caricature. It shows how the doctor wished himself to be perceived – something that could be achieved with a portrait, but not in satire.

Case 2: Medicine as metaphor

Medical satire could be used to comment upon themes that had little – or nothing – to do with medicine.

Examples from our satirical print collection show how imagery of the medical profession was sometimes adopted as a metaphor to critique current events. In particular, images of doctors were used to comment upon the tumultuous political events occurring in France in the 18th and 19th centuries, including the revolution, political and social unrest and changes in governmental regimes.

Other, more obviously political imagery was also used to comment upon these events. However, medical imagery may have been used in these examples because satirical images of the medical profession were so commonplace. They would have been widely recognised by public audiences, and the stereotypes and associations that these medical images brought to the referenced events were likely to have been understood.

Today, knowing the political context behind the creation of these images is vital to interpreting the medical metaphors they contain.

[La consultation](#) (The consultation)

**Lithograph by Eugène Delacroix, published by Charles Motte, Paris, c. 1820
PR15018**

Death – represented as a skeleton with a scythe – sits behind a group of arguing doctors, biding his time before the sickly, bedridden patient in the background inevitably dies.

This image appears to be a straightforward medical satire, commenting on the role of Death as a close companion to the doctors, whose incompetence causes their patient's demise. However, the point being made is not about medicine. Rather, medical imagery is being used as a tool for commenting on France's political situation – in particular, the political factions under the Bourbon Restoration, the constitutional monarchy of Louis XVIII (1755–1824) following the French Revolutionary Wars.

The three doctors on the left are 'Ultras' – ultra-royalists who favoured the pre-revolution, absolutist monarchy. They wear outdated clothes and wigs, have exaggerated facial features, and ignore their patient (or sleep!). This critical print suggests that France (the patient) will suffer if the Ultras continue their rise in

power and implement their laws censoring the press and restricting individual freedoms. However, the younger, smartly dressed and enigmatic doctor on the right – who represents more liberal elements of the government – offers hope (cures).

Charles Motte (1785–1836) was a liberal publisher, and it is likely that the audience for ‘La Consultation’ had similarly liberal political leanings. They were likely familiar with current affairs and therefore able to decipher the metaphors in the print. Today, without information about the political background of France at the time, this layer of meaning is easily missed and the print remains a straightforward medical satire.

[Consultation de médecins](#) (The doctors’ consultation), 1760 (left) and [Consultation de médecins, 1823](#) (right)

**Coloured lithographs by Louis-Léopold Boilly, c.1823
2008.1/5 and 2008.1/6**

In French painter Louis-Léopold Boilly’s prints from his series *Recueil de grimaces* (Collection of grimaces), two contrasting groups of doctors are given the same title: ‘*Consultation de médecins*’ or ‘the doctors’ consultation’.

In the first, labelled ‘1760’, five aged medics have ear trumpets, walking canes, confused expressions and old-fashioned clothes, suggesting they are ineffective and outdated. In the second print, labelled ‘1823’, five younger, fashionably-dressed doctors have carefully styled hair, a magnifying glass and contemplative expressions, suggesting they are engaged in academic study.

These two groups of doctors are metaphors for the huge political changes that France experienced between 1760 and 1823. The older doctors represent France’s *Ancien régime* (Old regime), the centuries-old government based on a hereditary, absolute monarchy and powerful nobility. The doctors – and the *Ancien régime* – are chaotic and useless.

The younger doctors represent the French Revolution of 1789 which overthrew the *Ancien régime*, and began decades of unrest as different regimes held power. These young doctors look more capable, but on closer inspection are perhaps not much more effective than the old doctors. They appear baffled and dreamy, and are overly concerned with appearing stylish.

Boilly’s political views are unclear, and so the viewer must decide what message he is conveying in this image. Does he think that the political situation in France improved following the revolution, or that – despite initial appearances – things mostly stayed the same?

Case 3: Spitting image

Medical professionals were frequently targeted by satirists and caricaturists. Like other civic figures such as priests, lawyers and politicians, individual doctors and surgeons gained public reputations that were critiqued and perpetuated in satirical images.

Medical specialisms, preferred treatments, personality traits and social backgrounds were all the subject of satire. Caricatures about specific individuals were made identifiable through exaggerated facial features, verbal puns, text and labels. In some cases, caricatures were closely related to existing portraits, relying on the viewer's knowledge of works of art for recognition.

The production of satirical prints hugely increased during the 18th and 19th centuries, following a drop in the cost of printmaking. Images that were previously consumed by the wealthy were reproduced in the hundreds and thousands and could be viewed in broadsheet newspapers and everyday places such as taverns, barber shops, smoking rooms and brothels. Images of medical professionals were seen across all levels of society, and caricatures of doctors in particular would have been easily recognised, with their stereotypical wig, cane, and pompous expression.

Today, surviving satirical prints help us understand how medical professionals were perceived and judged. This shifted considerably during the 18th and 19th centuries, away from focusing on distrust of the medical professions and the inherent violence of medical intervention, towards the mocking of perceived pretensions.

[The examination of a young surgeon](#)

**Coloured etching by George Cruikshank, published in 'The scourge; or, monthly expositor, of imposture and folly', vol 2, by M Jones, London, 1811 (possibly a later copy)
2008.1/3**

Founded in 1800, the College of Surgeons controlled surgical practice in and around London. The College's standards were criticised by prominent satirists including George Cruikshank (1792–1878), who regularly drew caricatures for the English periodical 'The scourge'.

This print accompanied the article 'Medical science exemplified', which mocks the College's education and examination of surgeons. It describes the board of ten examiners, represented in the caricature, including 'one gentleman [who] was so old and sleepy that he asked you a question, "describe the organs of hearing, Sir," and fell a snoring before you could reach the tympanum [eardrum]'.

The young surgeon to the left of the scene is unidentified, but the examiners behind the table are those mentioned in the article. The Master examiner in the central high chair is Sir Charles Blicke (1745–1815), who was deaf and known to hoard money – he is depicted with an ear trumpet and bags of cash below his chair. To his left, the figures in tartan are the Scottish Serjeant-surgeons Sir David Dundas (1749–1826) and Sir Everard Home (1756–1832). Dundas is supposed to have gained his position through royal connections, and Home allegedly destroyed manuscripts belonging to the surgeon John Hunter (1728–1793).

To Home's left is the Scottish physician Edward Jenner (1749–1823), who created the smallpox vaccine from samples of cowpox – he is identified by the paper in front of him which reads 'THH [sic] COW POX CRONICLE'.

[Drs Taylor and Rees, the analytical chemists](#)

**Newspaper engraving from *The illustrated times*, London, 2 February 1856
PR15076**

The 'analytical chemists' are Drs Alfred Swaine Taylor (1806–1880), a pioneer in British forensic medicine, and George Owen Rees (1813–1889), a physician at Pentonville Prison and Guy's Hospital, London. In 1856 Taylor and Rees both gave damning testimonies in the famous trial of William Palmer, the so-called 'Rugeley poisoner'.

Taylor and Rees are carrying out chemical experiments, perhaps a reference to their testimonies as expert witnesses in the trial. Their heads are enlarged and their facial features and hairstyles are exaggerated – a common stylistic trait used by caricaturists to create unflattering images and to draw attention to distinguishing features.

This image appeared in the *Illustrated times* weekly newspaper, a cheaper, popular paper first published in 1855 by Fleet Street bookseller David Bogue as a rival to the dominant *Illustrated London news*. During the 19th century illustrated newspapers became increasingly successful, allowing greater public exposure to visual satire. Surviving caricatures from before this period were more exclusive to the wealthy who bought them as ephemera, although cheaply produced copies would have been visible to all in print shop windows and public houses.

**Daniel Solander (1733–1782), or ['The simpling macaroni'](#)
Engraving published by Matthew and Mary Darly, London, 13 July 1772
PR2470**

Although resembling a portrait rather than a satirical image, this print is from the 'macaroni' series of printed caricatures by husband-and-wife print seller team Matthew and Mary Darly. They feature individuals holding items which give clues to their identity.

This individual is Daniel Solander, the Swedish scientist and botanist. In 1772 Solander had recently returned from an around-the-world voyage aboard HMS Endeavour with explorer James Cook (1728–1779) and naturalist Joseph Banks (1743–1820).

Solander's dress hints at macaroni fashion (big wigs and affected mannerisms), but satirising his dress or person is not the purpose of this image. His face is accurately represented, suggesting the Darlys may be playing a visual guessing game, providing clues for an informed audience to enjoy identifying the person represented.

Solander holds plant specimens and is described as 'simpling' (herb gathering), which he did aboard HMS Endeavour. 'Soland-Goose' is a play on Solan goose (a northern gannet), comparing the well-travelled Solander to the migrating seabird. 'Banks' references Joseph Banks, and the rhyme ends 'Sol*****', allowing the viewer to fill in the rest of the name.

The Darlys sold many macaroni caricatures from their popular print shop at 39 Strand, London. Prints were displayed in the shop window, creating a free public gallery where new caricatures could be seen even by

those who could not afford to buy them. Inclusion in this series may have been flattering for Solander, as it suggested he was well known enough to be an interesting subject for caricature.

[A specific against the pox after Sodom](#)

Engraving by unknown artist, 18th century

PR15144

An unidentified man wears a cockaded hat and carries a cane. Beneath him is written 'A specific against the pox. To be had at the doctor's back door in Westminster Hall.' The illustration is attributed to 'sodom inv.t', meaning designed or drawn by Sodom – referencing the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were destroyed as punishment for 'sins' including homosexuality.

This print references a 1776 image of the bookseller and jeweller Samuel Drybutter, who kept a shop in Westminster Hall. Drybutter was involved in homosexual scandals, for which he was first arrested in 1770. These incidents helped initiate a public debate about homosexuality and may have contributed to the popularity of caricatures of fashionable, effeminate men called 'macaronis'.

This image may represent Drybutter, or it may be using a notorious public figure to refer to someone or something else. It is clearly intended to insult the subject. The references to Sodom and the back door of Westminster Hall could relate to Drybutter's shop, or they could be questioning the subject's morality and sexuality. We do not know who published this image or where, but perhaps these references were meaningful to contemporary viewers.

The artist has used a simple line drawing for the subject's face but goes into greater detail in the clothing. Anatomical features such as faces and hands were difficult to draw by artists who were not classically trained. Faces were turned to the side and hands were tucked into pockets and coats, and instead emphasis was placed on clothing, which became an important feature for identifying the subjects of caricature.

[Bertrand Dawson, Lord Dawson of Penn \(1864–1945\)](#)

Newspaper engraving after George Belcher in Punch, or the London charivari, London, 16 March 1927

PR4782

Bertrand Dawson was a consulting physician to the London Hospital, and main doctor to four successive British monarchs. In 1927 when his image appeared in the weekly satirical magazine Punch, Dawson was titled Baron Dawson of Penn, and was serving King George V.

This image is not obviously satirical, until you read the accompanying poem. 'The world of clinique is the oyster he sucks' likely alludes to the great wealth doctors could gain from their practice (clinique is the French word for clinic), particularly if like Dawson they treated the wealthy. 'This Baron (of Bucks)' reclines casually in an armchair with an aloof expression – a comment on his aristocratic status.

From the mid-19th century, caricatures of doctors tended to focus less on their invasive treatments and the aggressive nature of medical practice. Treatments and practices were becoming less threatening to the body, and prudery and high-mindedness were increasing. Consequently, doctors were satirised for having aristocratic pretensions, for their sartorial style, and for being exceedingly wealthy despite not getting their hands dirty.

This illustration was part of a series of satirical portraits in *Punch*, titled 'Mr Punch's personalities'. First published in 1841, *Punch* became increasingly popular, and specialised in sophisticated, non-offensive humour. Technological advancements in printing at this time, including improvements to make the production of wood engravings quicker and cheaper, meant that illustrations could be repeatedly reproduced without losing detail. Newspapers and periodicals could increase their circulation, enabling satirical images to reach a much wider audience.

[The dissecting room](#)

**Coloured lithography by T C Wilson after Thomas Rowlandson, 1838
PR15002**

Post-mortem dissection, or 'anatomisation', was greatly feared in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some people were afraid for religious reasons, as dissection may hinder resurrection. Others were concerned that they might be pronounced dead incorrectly, and that the anatomist might cut into their still-living body. This image plays on these fears, and on popular perceptions of the cruelty of anatomists and dissection.

In a crowded attic room four anatomists dissect three corpses. In the foreground a body is being disembowelled, the entrails discarded on the floor as if in an abattoir. The right-hand corpse has no eyes but appears to be screaming in pain or horror. It is a scene of butchery, performed by bewigged, learned men wearing aprons and sleeves to protect their clothes.

On the right-hand wall a poster reads 'Prices for bodys', with categories for 'male', 'female' and 'infant' bodies, suggesting that the image may also be commenting on the practice of body snatching. This was performed by so-called 'resurrectionists' who were employed by anatomists to exhume the corpses of the recently dead. These were bought by doctors to help them study anatomy. This practice strengthened the public's fear of disinterment and dissection.

This chaotic, gruesome scene takes place at the anatomy school at Great Windmill Street, London, established in the 1760s by the physician and anatomist William Hunter (1718–1783). Hunter is depicted standing at the back of the room in a blue coat, addressing the group of students around him – his assistants are the ones getting their hands dirty.

Hunter was a royal doctor, but this status did not protect him from satire – if anything it made him a more attractive target. Hunter was well known in London society circles, and his appointment as the first lecturer of anatomy at the Royal Academy of Arts put him in the public eye. Thomas Rowlandson became a student at the Royal Academy in 1772 when Hunter taught there, and may have visited his school at Great Windmill Street – does his personal acquaintance with Hunter change how we interpret this image?

Case 4: Quackery and distrust

What varied wonders tempt us as they pass!

The cow-pox, tractors, galvanism and gas,

In turns appear, to make the vulgar stare,

Till the swoll'n bubble bursts – and all is air!

Extract from 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers', Lord Byron, 1809

The stereotype of the quack doctor was widely recognised, and therefore particularly appealing to satirists.

The term 'quack' refers to an unregulated practitioner who sold medical cures of dubious origins, available over the counter without a doctor's prescription. Quacks were either not educated enough or were from marginalised groups (such as women) who could not enter medical guilds or colleges – instead they hawked homemade remedies on street corners or fairs in loud voices likened to the cries of noisy geese.

In the past, the distinction between a legitimate, qualified medical professional and a quack was often not clear – in fact they could be one and the same. New and unproven treatments – especially radical or controversial ones – proposed by licensed practitioners were often treated with suspicion, and any practitioner was vulnerable to charges of quackery. On the other hand, some quacks were well-intentioned healers with widely respected skills – a medical professional in many respects, but without the qualifications.

Quacks and their remedies were exposed and ridiculed in satirical imagery, but legitimate medical professionals that the artist wanted to attack could also be represented as ill-informed quacks. Characteristics of quacks were often ascribed to medical professionals – and other public figures – to label them as distrustful, boastful and ignorant.

The company of undertakers

Engraving by William Hogarth, 1736

PR15014

Artists like William Hogarth (1697–1764) frequently attacked the medical profession by equating it with quackery.

Hogarth's famous print 'The company of undertakers' features twelve bewigged doctors deep in thought. Above are caricatures of three well-known quacks: the oculist (optician) John Taylor (c. 1703–1770/1772), the bone-setter Sarah Mapp (d. 1737), and the medicine maker Joshua Ward (1685–1761). All three were known through contemporary newspapers and songs.

Mapp's clothing resembles a court jester's, and Ward's face appears divided in two, suggesting he is deceitful. Otherwise, the quacks are dressed similarly to the doctors below, with wigs and canes. Hogarth is making the point that doctors can be indistinguishable from quacks, or worse, that the medical profession is alike to quackery.

Doctors were trained and qualified, but their treatments could be painful and invasive, focusing on purging the body through vomit or diarrhoea, bleeding, or administering enemas. A visit to a quack was no worse and just as likely – or unlikely – to cure you. The motto ‘Et Plurima mortis imago’ (‘And many an image of death’), implies that the consequence of treatment from either a qualified doctor or a quack doctor would be the need for the services of an undertaker.

The narrative is complicated, however, because Sarah Mapp was widely respected for her skill in setting broken bones and dislocated joints. Women, religious minorities, and other marginalised people were systemically excluded from practicing medicine legitimately, training instead through personal networks. These ‘outsiders’ often demonstrated great skill and affordable care.

The cow-pock – or – the wonderful effects of the new inoculation!

Engraving by James Gillray, published by Hannah Humphrey, London, 12 June 1808

PR15051

This satirical print by the political cartoonist James Gillray (1756–1815) was originally thought to lampoon English doctor Edward Jenner (1749–1823). Jenner developed a successful vaccine for the deadly smallpox virus using the milder disease of cowpox.

The smallpox vaccine was controversial because it involved injecting infected tissue from cowpox sores into healthy humans. In the image, a doctor uses a lancet and a dose of ‘Vaccine Pock hot from ye Cow’ to administer the smallpox vaccine to a frightened woman. Gillray plays on the popular but misplaced fear that the vaccine caused people to develop cow-like characteristics: a butcher grows horns, a pregnant woman produces a cow from her mouth and petticoat, and many patients sprout cows from their bodies.

This print is now thought to depict Dr William Woodville administering Jenner’s vaccine at the St Pancras Hospital in London. Woodville was in a dispute with Jenner after some of his patients died from Smallpox when he used Jenner’s vaccination technique. Although Jenner’s vaccine eventually contributed to the global eradication of the disease, in the early 19th century it was alarming, distrusted, and likened to a quack remedy.

Metallic tractors

Coloured etching by James Gillray, published by Hannah Humphrey, London, 1801

2008.1/17

Scientific phenomena such as electricity and magnetism drew increasing public interest in the 18th century, and were quickly adapted into often lucrative quack medical treatments.

In this image, a patient with a bulbous, boil-spotted nose is treated with a set of ‘metallic tractors’ by a serious-faced, gurning doctor. The tractors are 9cm metal rods with a pointed end. The doctor applies them to the patient’s red nose, which shoots flames as the illness is withdrawn.

Tractors were drawn across the skin to discharge ‘galvanic electricity’ – a kind of electrical life force thought to be present in living things – into the affected part, resulting in instant, painless cures. The electricity is shown in the print, knocking the patient’s wig off and making the doctor’s hair stand out horizontally.

The exaggerated features and humorous postures of the two figures ridicule the practice and popularity of ‘tractoration’. However, we know that this print was designed as a covert – and effective – marketing ploy. The newspaper in the image refers to the tractor’s inventor, Elisha Perkins: ‘just arrived from America ... Perkinism in all its Glory – being a certain Cure for all Disorders’. Perkins’ son Benjamin supposedly commissioned James Gillray to create this print, requesting that their arrangement be kept secret and the print be sold widely. For Perkins it seems that there was no such thing as bad publicity. His tractors sold for high prices and he returned to America in 1810 after making his fortune.

Galvanic tractors

England, 1798–1808

S423

Galvanic tractors (also called metallic tractors) exploited a trend for using electricity for medical purposes. Two rods made of different metal alloys are separated by a flat rod of a third metal, all stored in a small case. They were designed by American doctor Elisha Perkins and exported to the UK in 1797 by his son Benjamin.

Tractors were a quack treatment, promoted to cure everything from burns to epilepsy. ‘Tractoration’ – drawing the tractors across the afflicted area – was recommended for 20 minutes a day. Although many medical professionals were sceptical, tractors were popular with the public in both the USA and the UK, and they made the Perkins family very wealthy.

Accepted from Jean Symons under the Cultural Gifts Scheme by HM Government and allocated to the RCP, 2018

‘Death and the apothecary, or the quack doctor’

Coloured aquatint by Thomas Rowlandson, from William Combe, *The English dance of Death* (published by Rudolph Ackerman, London, 1 July 1814)

2008.1/12

In this scene from Thomas Rowlandson’s *Dance of Death* series, the legitimate medical profession of the apothecary is attacked as quackery.

A benevolent-looking, well-nourished apothecary fills bottles in his shop, while ailing clients await his attention. A seated man with gout looks over his shoulder in horror at a skeleton – the personification of Death – who acts as the apothecary’s assistant, wearing an apron while turning a pestle in a mortar labelled ‘slow poison’.

Rowlandson is accusing the apothecary of killing his clients with his remedies – the queuing individuals certainly do not look healthy, perhaps symptomatic of slow poisoning. The apothecary is identified by the typical attributes of the pestle and mortar, jars and ingredients, but also present is a dried fish hanging from the ceiling – a recognised emblem of a quack. Some apothecaries were known to cheat their patrons with adulterated drugs and cheap substitutes, to harm them through ignorance, and to provide unqualified medical advice – just as quack doctors did.

Such images could be commenting upon the naivety and gullibility of the general population, who took the advice and remedies of professionals who may be dishonest.

Satirical brass button

France, late 17th century

S322 and reproduction

In these tiny, intimate scenes, King Louis XIV of France (r. 1643–1715) bends over his bed in his bedclothes. An aproned doctor administers a rectal enema as a purgative treatment, then watches as the king sits on a chamber pot. The enema would have contained warmed water or milk scented with rose, orange or angelica.

This undignified representation of the king may not have been shocking to a contemporary audience. Enemas were commonly used, and fashionable among the royals and nobles of Europe. They were believed to maintain good health and complexion, and relieve the symptoms of overindulgence such as bloating and constipation.

Enemas were also satirised to expose the physical violence of some medical treatments. Doctors routinely caused discomfort and pain by using aggressive procedures that prodded, poked and stabbed at the bodies of their patients. Enemas were used to correct humoral imbalances thought to be the cause of disease or illness. The nature of enema administration – via the anus or vagina – also hinted at sexual threat and violation, and the doctor was the perpetrator.

Who were these images created for? Their small, intimate design is a contrast to the satirical images published in magazines or newspapers. Perhaps they were intended for private amusement.

Accepted from Jean Symons under the Cultural Gifts Scheme by HM Government and allocated to the RCP, 2018

Caricature of Charles-Édouard Brown-Séquard

Published in *Le Figaro*, Paris, 12 October 1889

MS1000/215 Reproduction

This caricature of Mauritian neurologist Charles-Édouard Brown-Séquard (1817–1894) appeared in the literary supplement of the widely read French newspaper *Le Figaro*. It is part of a large, two-page article mocking Brown-Séquard's extraordinary claims of a treatment that could restore youth.

Brown-Séquard experimented on animals and on himself. He caused controversy by injecting himself with the testicular fluid of guinea pigs, rabbits and other creatures, claiming that the process had the power to rejuvenate the male body, restore virility and prolong life.

In this cartoon, an elderly Brown-Séquard (who would have been aged approximately 72 at the time of publication) is depicted getting younger and younger, until he becomes a sperm cell. The title of the cartoon reads '*chaque injection vous rajeunit de dix ans!*' or 'each injection makes you ten years younger!', in reference to Brown-Séquard's self-experimentation and his claims regarding the rejuvenating powers of injecting animal tissue.

Brown-Séquard was treated as a quack. However, he was a qualified doctor and his experiments with sperm extracted from animals have since been recognised as fundamental to the establishment of the science of endocrinology (hormone-related diseases), and the development of modern hormone therapies.

Case 5: Treatments and illnesses

Say, florid Florister, if you can tell:
How many Patients you've dispatched to Hell?
Say Harrington of not inferior skill!
How many Church-yards thy Prescriptions fill?
The diseases of Bath: a satire (London, 1737)

Waterborne, airborne and parasite-borne diseases were prevalent in the 18th and 19th centuries. As an unfortunate aspect of everyday lives, illnesses, their symptoms and treatments were often represented in satire.

Medical practitioners at this time had little power to cure the sick or prevent death, and their treatments were often considered to be ineffective. Some were also alarmingly invasive, even violent. Doctors wielded sharp lancets, prescribed disgusting purges, and invaded bodily cavities – the treatment was often as agonising as the illness, and satire exaggerated this phenomenon.

We do not know why artists created these images from our collection, or how they were received or consumed. Humour may have been used to reduce the potency of the fear of sickness and death, and of the treatments themselves. Light-hearted representations of common illnesses may also have appealed to healthy audiences, who could view them with amusement and relief.

[The headache](#)

**Coloured etching by George Cruikshank, published by George Humphrey, London, 1819
2008.1/14**

Physical discomfort is a central theme in medical satire – it is something we all experience and can relate to. Headaches are a commonplace ailment and an easily recognisable discomfort, depicted vividly in this image by George Cruikshank (1792–1878).

Cruikshank's patient is suffering intensely from his headache. While he languishes in a chair, six devils torment him by hammering, boring and drilling into his skull, and singing and trumpeting in his ears. One grinning devil teases him with a red-hot poker. The viewer can really empathise with the patient, who is overwhelmed by the headache's ability to incapacitate. The viewer can also be amused by the patient's exaggerated expression, and perhaps relieved that they are not suffering in the same way themselves.

There is an empty medicine bottle in the patient's left hand, and a pile of books on the table. The image is mocking the patient's failed attempts to treat himself. It is also a satirical commentary on modern medicine's limited ability to cure – in this case medicine is ineffective against the simplest and most commonplace of complaints.

Frontispiece to the 'doctor'

Engraving by Charles James Grant, published by John Kendrick, London, 1833

PR15153

An array of common ailments is presented as puns in this satirical print. Contagious diseases, pains, physical and mental illnesses, poor nutrition, childhood diseases and death are illustrated with light-hearted accompanying illustrations.

The first image shows 'A burning inflammation', with a man leaning from a broken window while flames engulf his body. Beside him, 'A galloping consumption', which was a common expression used to describe acute tuberculosis, shows a man riding a horse downhill. A man's ankle is caught in a hare trap to illustrate the intense pain caused by 'The cramp', and in 'The hooping cough' a boy plays a game of hoop and stick. The artist quotes Shakespeare's Macbeth, who said 'Throw physic to the dogs. I'll none of it' to his doctor, who could do nothing to cure Lady Macbeth's mental illness.

These illnesses and diseases were all part of everyday life and medicine could do little to cure them or ease symptoms. Humour was probably used in this print to bring light-hearted relief and amusement to healthy viewers, and to allay fear in the sick.

The patient's paroxysm or the doctor outwitted

Engraving after Samuel Collings, published as the frontispiece to the September issue of 'The wit's magazine', vol 1, by Harrison & Co, London, 1784

PR15149

Doctors notoriously prescribed medicines and treatments that were often unpleasant, and usually ineffective.

In this illustration a trick is being played on a doctor who over-prescribed and paid unwanted visits to patients. A man wearing bedclothes and pretending to be ill is forcing the doctor to drink a mixture of all his own medicines and draughts. His hat and cane are discarded on the floor, and empty medicine and pill bottles stand on the windowsill. From the look on the doctor's face, the mixture he is being forced to drink is not agreeable.

The scene is observed by a chambermaid leaning on her broom, a waiter, and a coachman who rubs his hands together gleefully. They are delighted as the doctor receives his comeuppance and suffers through the foul medicine, as they no doubt have done in the past.

Patients were at the mercy of doctors and their harsh treatments. By showing that a doctor could be outwitted, and represented as a fool, the viewer could take comfort that the doctor was no threat. Additionally, the idea that a doctor could be outsmarted by members of the serving class – his supposed inferiors – would no doubt provide viewers with a sense of satisfaction, and perhaps vengeance.

[The bitter draught](#)

Engraving by Jan Lauwryn Krafft after Adriaen Brouwer, Brussels, 1759

PR15124

One glance at this image clearly conveys how absolutely revolting this man's medicine tastes.

Based on a 1637 painting by Flemish artist Adriaen Brouwer, the image focuses on the taste of the potion. As one of the five senses, taste was a popular theme in Dutch paintings in the 17th century, but was usually shown through depictions of people drinking wine or eating tasty food. The subject's pinched eyes, wrinkled nose, furrowed brow and mouth hanging open in disgust all strongly evoke the experience of drinking something unpleasant.

Many medicines are disagreeable because of their ingredients, and the experience of taking bitter medicine is something the image's audience – and viewers today – would have been able to identify with.

We do not know why Krafft reproduced this painting so long after the original artwork was made. Although a close copy, the engraving increases the figure's grotesque features – his mouth is more misshapen and his teeth more prominent, his face and clothes more wrinkled and his hair wilder. Were these changes intentional, to highlight the inherent humour of the image?

Four satirical prints: [‘Taking physick’](#), [‘Gentle emetic’](#), [‘Breathing a vein’](#) and [‘Charming well again’](#)

Coloured etchings by James Gillray, published by Hannah Humphrey, London, 1800–1804

2008.1/21

Dressed in a night cap, breeches and slippers with humorously exaggerated facial expressions, we are clearly shown how this man feels about being treated with the three most common therapies prescribed by doctors at the time: purging, vomiting and bloodletting.

‘Taking physick’, shows the effects of taking laxatives to purge the body of poisons. The sick, unshaven patient grimaces at his bitter medicine, concocted from the bottles in his hand and on the mantelpiece. Laxatives were taken repeatedly, to flush toxins from the digestive system. The patient has just used the chamber pot – he leaves his shirt untucked and his trousers undone, showing that he expects to return there soon.

In 'Gentle emetic' the patient's doctor has mixed senna or tartar into his tea to enforce vomiting. 'Gentle' is tongue-in-cheek – the patient looks queasy, and his hands move unconsciously to his stomach and to grip his knee. His right foot flexes at a wave of nausea. The patient's face tells us that the treatment is anything but gentle, and a bowl sits ready on the table.

'Breathing a vein' refers to bloodletting. Implying a gentle treatment to allow fresh air into the bloodstream, in reality this procedure was brutal. The horrified patient cannot watch as blood gushes dramatically from a punctured artery in his forearm, and the doctor stands poised with a bowl to catch it. Patients were often bled until they fainted, and the procedure was repeated if the patient did not improve.

The final image shows the patient restored to full health as a result of (or despite) the treatments. He smiles and lifts a celebratory glass before a meal of roast bird and eggs. The viewer wonders how long this overindulgence can continue before the man will be required to repeat the gruelling treatment regimen.

These prints were on public display in the vibrant windows of the publisher Hannah Humphrey's print shop, above which Gillray worked. Gillray and Humphrey produced over a thousand satirical prints across Gillray's 30-year career. The shop's location in the West End of London meant a wide audience for the prints. Having experienced the treatments of purging, vomiting and bloodletting themselves, Gillray's audiences could readily recognise the misery and pain in the patient's expressions, and relate to the popular but brutal medical practices of the day.

[A case of indigestion](#)

Coloured lithograph by John Doyle 'HB', in *Political Sketches by HB*, published by Thomas McLean, London, 19 May 1834

2011.6.1

Royal doctor Sir Henry Halford (1766–1844) sits beside Prince William Frederick, 2nd Duke of Gloucester and Edinburgh (1776–1834). Halford takes the pulse of the Duke, whose expression is pained as he holds a hand across his abdomen in discomfort.

Both men are unflatteringly represented with disproportionate body parts. The Duke was frequently lampooned by cartoonists, to whom he was known as 'Slice of Gloucester and Cheese'. He was described as being 'large and stout, but with weak, helpless legs', and as having 'prominent meaningless eyes ... a very unpleasant face with an animal expression'. The Duke had a successful army career but was considered unprofessional and unintelligent.

Halford's spoken words, 'Something in the Chancellor's Dinner has certainly disagreed with you', refer to an insult received by the Duke from his host during dinner – an offence that was difficult to digest. However, the unintelligent Duke mistook his affrontery for indigestion, and so consults a doctor.

The 19th-century developments in satirical representations of doctors are clearly seen here. Halford does not assault his patient with enemas or lancets but politely keeps his distance. Only one hand is used to take the Duke's pulse, while the other is tucked away inside his coat – Halford is keeping his hands clean. He is

also dressed similarly to the Duke. While doctors were mocked for aristocratic pretensions, in this case Halford, as president of the RCP and a baronet, had a legitimate claim to aristocracy.

The physician of the period

**Coloured engraving by Louis Dalrymple, published in *Puck*, New York City, 22 December 1897
PR15146**

In this engraving by American cartoonist Louis Dalrymple (1866–1905), published in the popular satirical magazine *Puck*, an elderly physician sits in his office in front of a large sign. On the left the sign reads 'Ailments for People of Moderate Means. Low Fees', and on the right, 'Same Ailments for Rich Patients. Fees Accordingly'.

The print is subtitled: 'He has ordinary and inexpensive ailments for ordinary patients and high-sounding and costly maladies for the rich.' One 'ailment' listed on the left is 'Indigestion 5.00', which becomes 'Acute Gastro-Enteritis 400.00' on the right. The implication is that the wealthy will pay more for the treatment of an illness that has a more complicated name.

Like contemporary British medical satire, this image shows the doctor's preoccupation with fees, and a certain snobbery and arrogance regarding his patients. The doctor is clearly affluent, as are the patients in his waiting room, and his prosperity comes from exploiting the wealthy who could afford to pay more for their medical care.

On the other hand, this image could also show the wealthy subsidising the healthcare of the poor – at least this doctor is willing to treat the poor at affordable rates. Perhaps the 'Rich Patients' are as much a target as the doctor in this satire, as they are duped into paying more for ordinary illnesses with 'high-sounding' names.

Case 6: A time and a place

Satire is usually deeply rooted in current affairs. Satirical artists use their trade to comment upon well-known events. They play on popular opinions and fears to thrill, amuse and entertain their audiences, and ultimately to sell their work.

Scientific breakthroughs, philosophical leaps, political wrangling and pandemics are just some of the subjects found in our satirical print collection. These images require us to understand the contexts in which they were produced before we can decipher what the artists wanted to convey. In some cases, the full context is not known and the messages remain a mystery.

Today, satirical images from the past can show us the human responses to a wide range of past events, both significant and mundane, and can help us to understand common assumptions and experiences of the time.

[The kind of 'assisted emigrant' we can not afford to admit](#)

Coloured engraving after Friedrich Graetz, published in *Puck*, New York City, 18 July 1883

PR15066

High on the bow of an English ship, a skeletal immigrant holding a scythe gazes towards Manhattan Island. The skeleton is Death, and he is bringing the foreign disease of cholera to the US.

In the background, bottle-shaped canons fire disinfectant towards the ship, and the Board of Health tries to prevent it from entering. In the distance is Castle Garden – now Castle Clinton – the US's immigrant processing centre between 1855 and 1890.

In this political print, the Austrian cartoonist Friedrich Graetz captures the public's fear of disease, death and immigration. Cholera was an acute, often fatal illness caused by infection of the intestine from drinking contaminated water, which spread swiftly across Asia and Europe in the 19th century. It is believed that English immigrants brought the disease to the US in 1832. Over the next 30 years the US had three serious waves of the disease, and New York was the first city to feel the impact.

Immigration to the US increased rapidly in the 19th century, and emigrants were often 'assisted' to leave by the government of their home country. Published in 1883, this image plays on general xenophobic ideas surrounding immigration. The figure of Cholera wears Turkish clothing, perhaps showing fear of the Turkish-Cypriot immigrants who came to the US following the 1878 Ottoman handover of Cyprus to Britain. This sentiment is familiar today in the enduring anti-immigrant rhetoric in modern politics.

[Legislation and lunacy \(we shut up the sane man and let the happy crank wander at large\)](#)

Coloured engraving published in *Puck*, by Mayer Merkel & Ottman, New York City, 1879

PR15058

'Legislation and lunacy' appears to be commenting on late-19th century legislation concerning asylums and mental health in New York City. In the image, 'sane' people are locked up, and 'cranks' are free to make outrageous claims and commit heinous acts.

We do not know which event or situation prompted the creation of this image, but some historical context can provide clues. The care of mentally ill patients was a growing concern in the US in the late 19th century. A rapidly growing population meant there was a need for better facilities and laws to care for the vulnerable, and in 1873 the office of state commissioner in lunacy was created in New York. The commissioner reported upon the management of asylums and the condition of inmates. A new law stipulated that for a person to be confined to an institution for the insane, two doctors 'of reputable character' must provide certificates declaring their insanity.

In the central image, two prison guards are leading a man towards an open cell. One of the guards holds a piece of paper displaying the words 'certificate of insanity', signed by 'Dr Gag'. The image could be satirising the new legislation requiring doctors to certify the state of a patient's mental health. 'Dr Gag' on the other hand could imply that the new laws are being used to silence people. The asylums are not filled with people

with mental health conditions, but with political inmates – and the lawmakers are letting the lawlessness continue.

[The craft in danger](#)

Engraving by J Kay, 1817

PR164a

Dr John Barclay (1758–1826), anatomy teacher at the University of Edinburgh, rides an elephant skeleton into the university's gates. In 1817 Barclay was put forward by the university as the new chair (professor) of comparative anatomy – a proposal that was not universally accepted by Barclay's colleagues.

Barclay's elephant is a reference to his use of skeletons from his own collections – in particular his Asian elephant – to illustrate his lectures. The elephant is being pushed forward by Barclay's only supporter, Dr James Gregory (1753–1821), who was professor of medicine at the University of Edinburgh.

The other figures in the scene are colleagues who opposed and eventually defeated the proposal to make Barclay chair of comparative anatomy. Beneath the elephant the English doctor Thomas Charles Hope (1766–1844) falls while attempting to break the animal's stride. Blocking the entrance to the university are the professor of medicine and botany John Hope (1725–1786), the professor of natural history Robert Jameson (1774–1854), and the chair of anatomy at the medical school, Alexander Monro the Third (1773–1859).

These professors feared that the proposed chair would threaten their position within the university and put their 'craft' in danger. In 1798 Monro's father had donated his anatomical collection to the anatomy department; perhaps Monro felt that Barclay's promotion would diminish his family's prominence within the faculty.

We do not know how widely understood this image would have been at the time by viewers outside of the university, and today we can only understand it with specific knowledge of the feud it depicts.

[The youthful Darwin expounding his theories](#)

Albortype photographic copy after William Holbrook Beard, published by the Photo-Plate Printing Co., New York, 1871.

PR15223

Shortly after Charles Darwin published *On the origin of species* (1859), the artist William Holbrook Beard painted this scene. Darwin, depicted as a young humanoid with a tail, shows a pair of sceptical apes a series of organisms from a fish to an amphibian.

Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection is accepted today as a key concept in mainstream science. Since the publication of the theory, however, Darwinism has been derided and opposed by followers of Creationism – the belief that all living things were created by God – and Darwin himself has been the repeated target of satire.

A copy of Beard's painting was engraved by his nephew Thomas Francis Beard, an American comic illustrator, and a copy of this engraving was sent to Darwin by his friend Asa Gray in 1872. Gray received the copy from the physicist Ogden Nicholas Rood along with a letter stating that: 'The artist [Beard] assured me that it [the painting] was executed in a purely neutral spirit, and without any intention of casting ridicule—on either side.'

How are we to interpret this scene? Beard was famous for his paintings of animals satirising human behaviour. He was interested in Darwin's theory of evolution, but he was also sceptical of it. Whether he intended his painting to ridicule or not, the fact remains that he represented Darwin as a young humanoid, at a time when opposition to his theory was strong. We are left to wonder what his motivations were.

Case 7: The Royal College of Physicians in medical satire

[...]why physicians were so cautious grown
Of others' lives, and lavish of their own [...]
There stands a dome, † majestic to the fight,
And sumptuous arches bear its oval height;
A golden globe, plac'd high with artful skill,
Seems, to the distant sight, a gilded pill
†The College of Physicians
Samuel Garth, 'The dispensary', 1699

As a royal institution representing doctors, many of whom were well known figures in society, the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) and its members have been in the public eye for over 500 years. Consequently, the RCP has been the repeated target of satirical commentary.

Satirical artists have represented and commented upon diverse aspects of the RCP's work and its members, including the cruelty of dissection as a lawful punishment, internal squabbling, controversial medical developments, and the common – and often comical – stereotypes of doctors, such as depicting them wearing a wig and sniffing a cane.

The RCP was established in part to protect the public from the harmful work of quack doctors. However, the RCP and the medical profession were attacked as quackery in disguise, and were accused of the same offences as the unqualified practitioners they sought to protect the public against.

[The four stages of cruelty: the reward of cruelty](#) Etching and engraving by William Hogarth, 1 February 1751 PR15370

This scene depicts the fate of fictional Tom Nero who murdered his mistress. Nero was hanged, and his body passed to the College of Surgeons for dissection or 'public anatomy'. This gruesome event takes place in a fictional anatomy theatre which combines elements of the Barber-Surgeons' theatre, the new

Surgeon's Hall, and the Cutlerian Theatre at the RCP, whose coat of arms are alluded to above the high chair.

Hogarth's well-known print plays on the public's fear of dissection, and on the stereotypes of doctors and surgeons. The doctors – in this case members of the RCP, depicted with wigs and canes – were commonly portrayed as uncaring, and surgeons as cruel. Here the chief surgeon is aloof and insensitive to the exaggerated butchery below. A dog devours Nero's heart, and his intestines are pulled into a bucket while a surgeon and two assistants attack his corpse with knives. The butchery is performed by surgeons – doctors knew the medical theory of dissection but felt that the practical aspects were beneath their dignity.

Does Nero's expression indicate he feels pain? One of the public's biggest fears surrounding dissection was being mistakenly cut up while still alive – the viewer winces as the scalpel gouges an eye. Is this torture a fitting punishment for the crime committed?

Part of a series of four, this print was produced with the aim, in Hogarth's words, 'of preventing in some degree that cruel treatment ... which makes the streets of London more disagreeable to the human mind than any thing what ever'. Hogarth deliberately intensified the horror of dissection to deter people from committing abhorrent crimes like Nero. The print was propaganda intended to influence public behaviour.

[The College suspended](#)

Drawing on scraperboard by Leslie Wood, 1988

2009.2

In this light-hearted illustration, the artist ridicules the ineffectiveness of the RCP and its members. Suspended from a hot air balloon, piloted by the fictional 18th-century German nobleman Baron Munchausen, is the RCP's Cutlerian anatomy theatre.

The Adventures of Baron Munchausen tells the tale of the Baron's impossible and outlandish exploits. His adventures were illustrated by Leslie Wood for a 1948 Cressett Press edition, but this illustration was a later commission and was not included in the 1948 publication. The Baron's damning of the RCP is, however, part of the original story. He cheerfully recalls lifting the RCP building from the earth, by balloon, during their annual dinner:

'Though this was meant as an innocent frolic, it was productive of much mischief to several respectable characters amongst the clergy, undertakers, sextons, and gravediggers: they were it must be acknowledged, sufferers; for it is a well-known fact that during the three months the college was suspended in the air, and [the members] therefore incapable of attending their patients, no deaths happened.'

The Baron probably had bitter experiences of being a patient, because he implies that the health of London greatly improved during the time that the doctors were unable to treat their patients. This modern illustration shows a fun, more carefree subject for medical satire – a contrast to many of the earlier images in this exhibition. It was published in the Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1997, accompanying an article on 'The College suspended'.

[The old College of Physicians, Warwick Lane](#)

Hand-coloured aquatint by unknown artist, 1825

PR7796

After the RCP's headquarters at Amen Corner in the City of London were destroyed by the 1666 Great Fire of London, new premises were built close by at Warwick Lane. These included a purpose-built anatomy theatre, designed by architect Robert Hooke and paid for by Sir John Cutler (1607/1608–1693), a London merchant and financier. It was demolished in 1866.

The anatomy theatre was a distinctive, hexagonal-shaped building with a domed roof. It dominated the street and was infamous for the dissections that took place within. Consequently, the theatre would have been easily recognised – and possibly feared – by the public. Satirists frequently used the theatre to represent the RCP because of its unique appearance and familiarity to viewers.

[The siege of Warwick-Castle or the battle between the fellows and licentiates](#)

Engraving by unknown artist, 1768

PR15116

The RCP's most embarrassing historic episode, the 'Siege of Warwick Lane', is ridiculed in this print.

On two occasions in 1768 a small group of RCP members broke into the RCP's premises, then at Warwick Lane near St Paul's Cathedral. They invaded the Committee Room and disrupted the elections of officers.

This 'Siege' was essentially a battle between RCP fellows and licentiates, following decades of antagonism. Only doctors who were educated at Oxford or Cambridge universities could become fellows, while doctors educated elsewhere could become a licentiate, a lower form of membership. Despite being charged higher fees than the fellows, licentiates were barred from participating fully in RCP business and from voting in elections.

The print satirises both factions in the dispute: the Scottish doctors (the licentiates) are depicted as brutish, with their leader wearing a jester's hat, and the fellows are shown as quacks and their leader (probably the RCP's president) as the skeleton Death. The licentiates forcing medication on the fellows can be interpreted as the RCP getting a taste of its own medicine, or the licentiates curing the RCP of its ills.

The ridicule directed at everyone involved after this event persuaded the licentiates to change tactics and protest through the law courts instead, and the fellows eventually made a series of concessions. The dispute about who could be a member of the RCP and under what criteria was not fully settled until the Medical Act of 1858.

[Doctors differ or dame nature against the college](#)

Coloured etching by Charles Williams, published by Samuel William Fores, London, 1813

PR15011

Four elderly doctors fight over a patient's diagnosis and treatment. They have arrived at the patient's home with their prescriptions predetermined – whoever's treatment is used will profit. The doctors are identified as synonymous with their treatments, which can be seen written on documents protruding from their pockets.

'Dr Emetic' insists that the patient suffers from 'exfoliation of the Glands' and must be purged; 'Dr Sudorific' argues for 'a pleurisie in the thigh' which must be 'sweated away'; 'Dr Drastic' claims that 'it is a nervous affection of the cutis and the patient must immediately loose 18 ounces of blood', while 'Dr Blister' declares that 'it is an inflammation on the os sacrum' to be cured by the application of '14 blisters'. Through the open door the patient has used the commode and declares 'I say Dame Nature has relieved me both of the Cause & Effects while these learned disputants are deciding the nature of my complaint—so I'll be off to save both my money and my Life.'

Doctors – and through them the RCP – are presented here as petulant and incompetent, their involvement acting against nature. The patient's exclamation of saving 'both my money and my Life' reiterates the common satirical themes that doctors were focused on making money, and that a visit from the doctor could result in death.

Charles Williams, as chief caricaturist for the leading British publisher S W Fores, has used a popular satirical punchline in his critique of doctors and the RCP: 'doctors differ' while their patients suffer – or in this case manage to heal themselves.

[The cow pox tragedy](#)

Coloured etching by George Cruikshank, published by M Jones, London, 1807

2008.1/16

Designed to look like the main scene of a puppet show flanked by decorated doors, these six images are an attack on both smallpox vaccination and the RCP.

English doctor Edward Jenner (1749–1823) introduced the now-obsolete practice of using the mild disease of cowpox to protect against the deadlier smallpox virus. The idea of vaccination using a disease taken from a cow provoked repulsion and accusations of quackery towards Jenner. In 1806 the RCP strongly supported vaccination and Jenner – and as a result was targeted by medical and political satirists.

In the main image a funeral procession follows a coffin for the cow 'Vaccina' (who is slaughtered in the top image). The mourners are emerging from the RCP's Cutlerian anatomy theatre, which has been struck by the ray of 'Truth' coming from the sun above. Two pallbearers carry torches inscribed 'Harveian Oration' – a prestigious yearly lecture held at the RCP.

The four smaller scenes tell stories that show the supposed unreliability or ridiculousness of vaccination. For example, the top-right scene shows a doctor dismissing a boy's smallpox symptoms because he had vaccinated the boy himself.

Part of the RCP's remit was to protect the public from quackery and illegitimate doctors. By supporting new and radical treatments, the RCP and its members themselves were opened up to accusations of quackery. Satirical images such as this one used the RCP to represent quackery and a disreputable medical profession.

Silver lancet case used for vaccination

France, c.1833

X453

Vaccinations against smallpox were performed using lancets like these. Dried cowpox scabs or fluid from pustules were introduced into a cut made in the skin. The vaccinated person would experience mild cowpox symptoms and would then be immune from contracting smallpox. The person would, however, be susceptible to contracting other diseases such as syphilis and hepatitis through the procedure, as the scabs and pustule fluid used could pass on other illnesses from which the cowpox patient was suffering.

Edward Jenner (1749–1823) was a skilled doctor who noticed that milkmaids who had been infected with cowpox did not contract smallpox. In 1796 Jenner inoculated 8-year-old James Phipps with the fluid from a fresh cowpox lesion taken from milkmaid Sarah Nelmes. Phipps developed temporary, mild cowpox symptoms, and when Jenner exposed him to infectious smallpox, Phipps did not contract the disease. Jenner promoted his 'vaccine', a word derived from the Latin word *vacca*, meaning 'cow', which was supported by the RCP. Within four years the process of vaccination was used in most European countries. 'To fetch out the fire': reviving London, 1666