Body Snatchers

What led to the Anatomy Act of 1832?

Key Stages 3-4 | Empire and Industry 1750-1850, Victorians 1850-1901
Lesson resource
Introduction

The early 19th Century saw many advances in science and medicine, in a time where scientific and religious ideas often clashed over what was morally correct. These ideas are explored in nineteenth century literature such as the novel Frankenstein, but the stories in the real world were often as shocking and brutal as the Gothic fantasy. This lesson explores the business of the grave robber and how they furthered the study of medicine through a grey area of the law.

Connections to curriculum

AQA History GCSE:

Britain: Health and the people: c1000 to the present day

Edexcel History GCSE:

Medicine in Britain, 1250-Present; Crime and punishment in Britain, c1000–present

OCR History GCSE:

Medicine through Time; Crime and Punishment through Time: Development Study/Depth Study
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Teachers’ notes

This lesson can be used as part of several fields of study for GCSE, including:

- Crime and Punishment
- History of Medicine
- Social Reform of the early 1800s
- Historical Context of ‘Frankenstein’ by Mary Shelley.

The confessions of Bishop and May describe their daily lives in great detail. The full confessions are twelve pages long each, and so have been presented as extracts to provide the most relevant sections describing one particular case. The initial task can be completed as group work, in carousel, or individually as its own lesson before moving on to the rest of the sources. Care should be taken in providing the source describing the murder to students.

The final source shows the ongoing effects of the Act over twenty-five years later, asking students to consider these sources in the context of a larger narrative.

Sources

Sources 1a-d: Extracts from the confession of ‘resurrectionist’ James May, 1831. Catalogue ref: HO 17/46/122

Sources 2a-d: Extracts from the confession of bodysnatcher John Bishop, 1831. Catalogue ref: HO 17/46/122

Sources 3a-b: Newgate Prison Calendar, 1832. Catalogue ref: HO 77/39/32

Source 4: Anatomy Act 1832. Catalogue ref: HO 45/6521

Source 5: Letter from medical students, 1859. Catalogue ref: HO 45/6521
Background

The study of anatomy had a troubled history. Religion dictated that dissection of human bodies was an offence leading to misunderstandings of human anatomy based on limited evidence. Galen’s writings ‘On Anatomy’ in AD190 built on the theories of Hippocrates’ Four Humours whilst applying observation of living humans and anatomical study of the deceased. As Human dissection was still not allowed outside of Alexandria, he recommended the dissection of animals such as apes and pigs, using his findings to suggest the anatomy of humans. Whilst some aspects of his observations were accurate, the differences between humans and other animals led to many mistakes but his detailed books on anatomy were believed for many hundreds of years before they were questioned. By the 16th Century, Vesalius had proven that more could be learnt through human dissection and the study of our own anatomy, and attitudes towards medicine began to change.

The industrial revolution brought social change, and significant medical advances through scientific enquiry. In an attempt to prevent murder through increasing the severity of punishment, the Government passed the Murder Act 1751 preventing the bodies of executed murderers from being buried. Instead their bodies would be strung up or given to medical science. As a result, medical students had a greater supply of cadavers to study legally than any previous period, and the study of anatomy through public dissection became a major part of the training of doctors and surgeons.

However, the opening of new medical schools and training centres in the 18th Century meant that even this new supply of subjects could not meet the needs of the students. Buried bodies were not considered property and therefore could be exhumed and sold without restriction, though the practice was hated by the general public. Cemeteries and mourners began to take measures against the business, installing gates, cages and mausoleums to protect their interred. Yet the need for bodies created a profitable black market and ‘Resurrectionists’ or body snatchers became commonplace, leading to notorious cases of murder for the sole purpose of selling the victim’s corpse.

This is the background experience inspiring Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley’s novel ‘Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus’ which sees an ambitious and driven young medical student turn resurrectionist in his quest to discover a cure for death. Through Victor we see several roles of the medical science of the day, with the position of body snatcher and surgeon in one character whilst his friends and colleagues display the public disgust and conflict within the profession in their shock at the character’s descent into desperation.

The most famous Resurrectionists were Edinburgh’s Burke and Hare but London had its own notorious cases including ‘The London Burkers’ or ‘Bethnal Green Gang’ whose case, alongside several others in the early 1830s would lead to the Anatomy Act of 1832 and the legal recognition of the rights of a corpse.

‘The London Burkers’ trial took place under a media spotlight with the accused changing their story several times following the statements of new witnesses. The Home Office documents presented here provide evidence of their trial at the Old Bailey including the final confessions of two of the accused, describing their involvement in the crime and the business of resurrectionism, and the record of their sentences and punishments from Newgate Prison’s Calendar. Also provided is an
Background

Extract from the Anatomy Act 1832, passed as a direct result of ‘the Bethnal Green Gang’ murders. The final source provided is a later letter sent to the Home Secretary describing the resulting shortfall in subjects for medical students twenty-five years on. This is one of many letters collected by the Home Office after the Act as the appointed inspectors began to keep closer contact with the schools of anatomy and medical profession.

External links

The Victorian trade in dead bodies
From HistoryExtra, the official website for BBC History Magazine

1 https://www.historyextra.com/period/victorian/the-victorian-trade-in-dead-bodies/
Tasks

Task 1

Extracts from the confession of ‘resurrectionist’ James May, 1831. Catalogue ref: HO 17/46/122

Source 1a: Becoming a resurrectionist

- What is a resurrectionist?
- How and why did May become a resurrectionist?
- Why does he discuss Patrick Murphy?
- What do the hospitals think of resurrectionists?

Source 1b: Talking to Bishop

- Bishop asked May for the ‘best price’ – what does this tell us about the treatment of bodies?
- How often are they making sales?
- What does the word ‘bid’ imply?

Source 1c: May’s involvement

- How well treated is the body?
- Why might they sell the teeth separately?
- Why is it important to arrive before the Friday evening lecture?

Source 1d: Selling the Body

- What is May’s main concern at the beginning of the extract?
- How many times is drinking mentioned? How trustworthy is his account? How responsible is he?
- Was May expecting the arrest?
- What do you think May’s crime was?

Task 2

Extracts from the confession of bodysnatcher John Bishop, 1831. Catalogue ref: HO 17/46/122

Source 2a: The Murder:

- Why was the boy vulnerable?
- How did Bishop and Williams convince him to go with them?
- What happened to the boy?
Tasks

Source 2b: Making Plans:

- Why does Mr Tuson turn down the sale?
- What does ‘The Lecture Room’ imply about where he is selling the body?
- How much does Bishop agree to sell the body for?

Source 2c: Selling the Body:

- Why does Bishop check with May?
- What was Bishop’s offer to get May involved?
- What does Mr Partridge demonstrate?
- Describe May’s behaviour during the sale.
- How much does Bishop agree to sell the body for?

Source 2d: Declaration:

- How does Bishop help May?
- What do you think May’s crime was?
- How many bodies has Bishop sold during his career as a body snatcher?
- What does this tell you about the trade?

Task 3

Newgate Prison Calendar, 1832. Catalogue ref: HO 77/39/32

Source 3a: Newgate Prison Calendar
Source 3b: Sentencing

Look at the Newgate Prison Calendar.

- What was the sentence at the trial?
- What was Bishop's punishment?
- What was May’s punishment?

Task 4

Source 4: Anatomy Act 1832. Catalogue ref: HO 45/6521

Look at the Anatomy Act 1832. This document is written in legal language so can be quite difficult, try to separate it into blocks of information.
Tasks

• Why did the Act come into force?
• Why is the study of Anatomy necessary?
• What policies are put in place to help prevent further crimes?
• List the people who can now apply for licenses to study anatomy.

Task 5

Source 5: Letter from medical students, 1859. Catalogue ref: HO 45/6521

Read the Letter from the Medical students of Guys Hospital.

• How successful was the Anatomy Act 1832?
• What problems are the Medical Students facing in 1859?

James May now under sentence of death in Newgate. About six years ago began the business of resurrection. I was then out of a situation and using the Alfred Head near the Elephant and Castle and several of them used to see it - I got acquainted with them. One of them asked me to go to Bowhill after a convict that had been buried in the marshes. I agreed to go and went with this person but didn’t recollect his name - bought the body and to the best of my recollection sold the body at St. Thomas’s for 8 Guineas.

Patrick Murphy has become rich by the business beginning from a laborer’s wife and by means of his money is able to go to the Keeper of different grounds and pay them handsomely for the use of the grounds he used to have a man of the name of Richard Hills and Joseph Napoleon with him they used to do the work. He looked out for the grounds and as the time it made a place right - I have been at hospital grounds but at the other than Thomas’s or Guy’s. They have a batch man there now a trust worthy one but we can’t get over him because I have watched him so narrowly. I have asked him to have something to drink it won’t do to give money fresh but he won’t drink with anybody before he came there we had a man there he was right and we could do as we liked - I could get more for him.

The Surgeons at the Schools or Hospitals the they never did to me yet to other they gave information about subjects and money likewise. I mean that when Gentlemen want Anatomical Subjects they will write to a friend in the Country some Surgeon of the Town generally manufacturing from popular places where there is a great many poor die - and...
James May now under sentence of Death in Newgate – About six years ago I began the business of resurrectionist. I was then out of a situation and using the Alfred’s Head [pub] near Elephant and Castle and several of them used to use it – I got acquainted with them there- One of them asked me to go to Woolwich after a Convict that had been buried in the marshes. I agreed to go and went with this person but I don’t recall his name – We got the body and to the best of my recollection sold the body at St Thomas's for 8 Guineas. [...] 

Patrick Murphy has become rich by the business beginning from a Labourer or Porter and by means of his money is able to go to the Keeper of different grounds and pay them handsomely for the run of the grounds. 

He used to have a man of the name of Richard Wilds and Joseph Naples with him they used to do the work and he looked out for the grounds and as they term it made a place right- I have been at Hospital grounds but at no others than Thomas's or Guys – They have a watch-man there now a trustworthy one but we can't get over him because I have watched him so narrowly I have asked him to have something to drink it won't do to give money first but he won't drink with no body- before he came there we had a man there he was right and we could do as we liked.

Notes:

‘Out of a situation’ – out of work, possibly homeless.

Guinea – A pre-decimalised coin. 1G = £1 1s (or £1.05) Guineas were generally used for professional fees or prices of major goods at this time having been replaced by pounds as the main unit of currency in 1816.

8 Guineas = 42 days wages for a skilled tradesman at the time. Approx. £570 today.

Thomas's or Guys – Hospitals in London which held public lectures on anatomy for medical students.
Transcript: Source 1b

Bishop used to work on this side of the water – he used to live in Shoreditch and until I went to his house this time I did not know where he lived – I met him first at the Fortune of War [pub] – I met him at the Fortune of War on the Friday the 4th of November between 11 and 12 I think as nearly as I can recollect [...] 

Bishop asked me where they were giving the best price for things I told him I had sold two the day before I said I had got 10 Guineas for mine and asked him what sort of subject his was (he having told me he had got one) He told me it was fresh and a lad of about 14 Years of age – He said he had been at the west end of the town and had been bid Eight Guineas for it – I told him if it was mine I should take no such money for it – I said if it was mine I could get 10 Guineas for it – he said if I like I should sell it and all I could get over nine I should have it for myself – I agreed to it.

Notes:

10 Guineas = Equivalent to 52 days wages for a skilled tradesman at the time. Approx. £712 today.

...then... asked a man who drove a Chariot whether he could take the job be asked me what it was to do. I told him and he said he would. Me and Bishop got into the Chariot and drove to the Fortune of War where the Prisoner... - Williams was...

Bishop uncorked a hair trunk which was there and lifted up the lid. There saw the body laid laying straight on the back with the head inclining in the chest and the hands laying by the side. Lifted the upper lip and asked him how it was he did not take the teeth out because it is natural in young persons to have a good set of teeth. I can't be positive what he said, but I think he said what would you take the teeth out. I did not think they were gone enough... I took the teeth out and put the Body in the sack. I carried to the Chariot myself. We all three got in. I desired the Coachman to drive to Guy's Hospital which he did. We got there as they were getting ready for the Friday Evening Lecture. I took the Body out myself. I took it into Mr. Davis'. Bishop went with me. We left Williams with the Coachman. Jasko Davis to take it. I so did Bishop...
I then asked a man who drove a Chariot whether he would take the job he asked me what it was to do I told him and he said he would – Me and Bishop got into the Chariot and drove to the Fortune of War where the Prisoner – Williams was –

Bishop uncorded a hair trunk which was there and lifted up the lid – I there saw the body it was laying straight on the back with the head in the chest and the hands laying by the side I lifted the upper lip and asked him how it was he did not take the teeth out because it is natural in Young persons to have a good set of Teeth I can't be positive what he said but I think he said what would you take the teeth out I did not think they were good enough [...] I took the teeth out and put the body in the sack and carried to the chariot myself. We all three got in and I desired the coachman to drive to Guys Hospital which he did and we got there as they were getting ready for the Friday Evening Lecture – I took the Body out myself and took it into Mr Davies'. Bishop went with me and we left Williams with the Coachman. I asked Davies to take it and so did Bishop.

Notes:

Chariot – a horse and carriage.

Hair trunk – a trunk covered in animal hide with intact hair.

Uncorded – untied

Guys Hospital – a leading teaching hospital

John took two of you yesterday & that’s more than I know

what to do with - Bishop then as well as myself asked him to come in there that night which Mr. Davis complied with. Bishop requested Mr. Davis not to let any one know but himself as it belonged to him and I requested not to let it go without I was there as I shan’t be money out spoken by which I meant that as I had paid for tea & what we had had to drink I had for the Coachman & I live if he had taken the Body away himself he might have done me out of the money as well as what portion I might have got by the sale of it.

We went away after I had paid the Coachman 1/2 & then took another Coach in the Box & I went to the Tuition of work, had some more drinks & stopped there sometime. I was then a little elevated & didn’t recollect very accurately but I think I went out from there with Bishop & Williams I had a Coach to Golden Lane.

After I had sold the body I went to Mr. Davis at the Hospital & shortly after I had been there, the overseer, Bishop V. Williams & Shields: the Porter came - Williams & Shields went to get something to drink. I went our return - Bishop V. then went to Mr. Sayer. They did not want it. Then we went to the King’s College & saw the porter. Bishop agreed for the price. We came back again to Sujs for Williams & Shields we then took the body put it in a hamper placed on Shields head & to the end. Mr. V. Bishop had a Cab - Williams went with Shields - we got to the King’s College first waited for them - then we were taken into custody.
He declined he said you know John I took two of you yesterday and that’s more than I know what to do with – Bishop then as well as myself asked him to leave it there that night which Mr Davies complied with Bishop requested Mr Davis not to let any one have it but himself as it belonged to him and I requested not to let it go without I was there as I should be money out of pocket by which I meant that as I had paid for Tea and what we had had to drink and 10 S for the Coachman’s hire if he had taken the Body away himself – he might have done me out of the money as well as what portion I might have got by the sale of it [...] we went away after I had paid the Coachmen 10 S we then took another coach in the Borough and went to the Fortune of War – had some more drink and stopped there sometime I was then a little elevated and don’t recollect very accurately but I think I went out from there with Bishop and Williams and had a coach to Golden Lane. [...] After I had sold the teeth I went to Mr Davis at the –Hospital and shortly after I had been there the Prisoner Bishop and Williams and Shields the porter came – Williams and Shields we sent to get something to drink and wait our return – Bishop and I then went to Mr Grainger’s and they did not want it and then we went to the King’s College we saw the porter – Bishop agreed for the price and we came back again to Guy’s for Williams and Shields we then took the Body put it in a Hamper and placed on Shields’ Head he had a knot – Me and Bishop had a cab – Williams went with Shields – we got to the Kings College first and waited for them – there we were taken into Custody -.
Body Snatchers


John Bishop do hereby declare myself to be the body snatcher. Boy was a small lad, his name was Williams. We took him to the morgue to give him some work. He was a good boy, we thought him to be the Italian boy. We took him to the morgue and put him into the bell. He fell into the bell and died. We then took him in my own yard, he was a lucky man.
Newgate December 4 1831

I, John Bishop do hereby declare and confess that the boy supposed to be the Italian boy was a Lincolnshire boy- I and Williams took him to my House about ½ past 10 O’Clock on the Thursday night the 3rd of November from the Bell in Smithfield – He walked home with us – Williams promised him some work.[...] I took him into the House – we lighted a candle and gave the boy some bread and cheese and after he had eaten, we gave him a cup full of rum with about half a small phial of Laundanum in it.

I then took him in my arms and let him slide from them headlong into the well in the Garden whilst Williams held the cord to prevent his body going altogether too low into the well – he was nearly wholly in the water of the well.

[Handwritten text]
[...]We had something to eat and drink there [a pub] and after we had been there about half an hour May came in – I knew May, but had not seen him for about a fortnight before – he had some rum with me at the bar.[...]

Leaving May at the Fortune of War – Williams and I went to Mr Tuson's in Windmill Street where I saw Mr Tuson and offered to sell him a subject – meaning the boy we had left at home – he said he had waited so long for a subject which I had before undertaken to procure that he had been obliged to buy one the day before. We went from there to Mr Capries in Dean Street and offered it to him in the Lecture Room with other Gentlemen. They asked me if it was fresh, I told them yes – they told me to wait – I asked them 10 Guineas and after waiting a little a Gentleman there said they would give 8 Guineas which I agreed to take and engaged to carry it there the next morning at 10 OClock.[...]


I called away at the outside of the house Vickers was the best price—giving for it he said he had sold two the day before for 10 Guineas each [in] bulk. I told him I was a subject. He asked what sort of one. Said a boy about 14 years old. Vital had been offered 8 Guineas for it. He said if it was dead he would not take it. He could sell it where he sold his for more. Stated him that all he could get above 8 Guineas he might have for himself. We agreed to go presently to get a coach.
Transcript: Source 2c

I called May out to the outside of the House and asked what the best price giving for “things” – He said he had sold two the day before for 10 Guineas each (I think) – I told him I had a subject – He asked what sort of one – I said a boy about 14 years old and that I had been offered 8 Guineas for it – He said if it was his he would not take it – he could sell it where he sold his for more – I told him that all he could get above 9 Guineas he might have for himself – we agreed to go presently and get a coach.[...]

[we] crossed the water in a Boar to the Kings College where we inquired of Mr Hill the Porter if he wanted a subject – he said he was not particularly in want but would speak to Mr Partridge, the Demonstrator; – Mr Partridge came and asked what the subject was, May said a male subject Mr Partridge asked the price May said ‘12 Guineas’ – Mr Partridge said he could not give so much and went away – Mr Hill asked us to stay a few minutes whilst he went after Mr Partridge to speak to him again – Hill returned and said Mr Partridge would give 9 Guineas – May said he would be damned if it should go under 10 Guineas – He was in liquor and on his moving a little way off I took the opportunity of saying to Hill that it should come in at 9 Guineas – I told May directly after that I had sold it for 9 Guineas and that I would out of it pay him what I had had of him and give him something besides. [...]

Notes:

Subject – body
Confession of bodysnatcher John Bishop, 1831. Extract

I declare that this statement is all true and that it contains all the facts as far as I am recollect. May know nothing of the murders and I do not believe he suspected that I had got the body except in the usual way after the death of it. I always told him that I got it from the ground and he never knew to the contrary until I confessed to Williams since the trial. Have known May as a body snatcher for 5 years but I do not believe he ever obtained a body except in the common way of men in that calling by stealing from the graves until the transactions before set forth I never was concerned in obtaining a subject by destruction of the living. Have followed the course of obtaining a livelihood as a body snatcher for 12 years. Have obtained it sold from 500 to 1000 bodies but I declare before God that they were all obtained after death. With the above exceptions I am ignorant of any murder for that or any other purpose.
I declare that this statement is all true and that it contains all the facts as far as I can recollect. May knew nothing of the murder and I do not believe he suspected that I had got the body except in the usual way and after the death of it – I always told him that I got it from the ground and he never knew to the contrary until I confessed to Mr Williams since the Trial – I have known May as a Body Snatcher 4 or 5 years but I do not believe he ever obtained a body except in the common way of men in that calling by stealing from the graves –[...]

Until the transactions before set forth I never was concerned in obtaining a subject by destruction of the living – I have followed the cause of obtaining a livelihood as a Body Snatcher for 12 years and I have obtained and sold I think from 500 to 1000 bodies but I declare before God that they were all obtained after death and that with the above exceptions I am ignorant of any murder for that or any other purpose.
Source 3a: Newgate Prison Calendar, 1832. Extract 1/2.
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<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td>John Bishop</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td></td>
<td>The wilful murder of Charles Ferrier</td>
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<td>Dec 2</td>
<td>Lord Chief Justice Tindale</td>
<td>All Guilty</td>
<td>Death</td>
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<td></td>
<td>James May</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Butcher</td>
<td>G.R.Minshull, Esq.,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And Thomas Williams</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
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<td>The wilful murder of Frances Pickburn.</td>
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#Body Snatchers

**What led to the Anatomy Act of 1832?**

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**Source 3b: Newgate Prison Calendar, 1832. Extract 2/2.**

**Catalogue Ref: HO 77/39/32**

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### PRISONERS ON ORDERS.

**MIDDLESEX.**

#### Under Sentence of Death.

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<td>Thomas Williams</td>
<td>do</td>
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<tr>
<td>James May</td>
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<td>William Bailey</td>
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<td>Deviuston Augus</td>
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<tr>
<td>John William Butcher</td>
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<td>William Scott</td>
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<td>William Anthony</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Williams</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Dowling</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Elton</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Respiteed and Transportsed for Life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Harris</td>
<td>20 April 1832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Mc. Lochia (Penitentiary)</td>
<td>14 Sept. 1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Langley</td>
<td>10 Oct. 1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Alfred Glover</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel Antonio</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Davis</td>
<td>18 Dec. 1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James May</td>
<td>30 do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Hyde</td>
<td>23 June 1831</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Respiteed, and Confined One Year in the House of Correction.

**John Kybert** (Removed) 20 Oct. 1831.

#### Under Sentence of Transportation for Life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Hawkins</td>
<td>43 Jan. 1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Tyler</td>
<td>20 Dec. 1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Folks</td>
<td>do 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Bouchell</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Richardson</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Conject</td>
<td>55 Sept. 1827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Patterson</td>
<td>43 Sept. 1828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Middleton</td>
<td>92 Sept. 1810</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eliza Jones</td>
<td>(Ship) 20 Sept. 1837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Arnold</td>
<td>do 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Meeking</td>
<td>do 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henrietta Lethaler</td>
<td>do 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Morrison</td>
<td>do 24 Oct. 1837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary James</td>
<td>27 Dec. 1837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia Goodwin</td>
<td>do 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Hudson</td>
<td>do 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transcript: Source 3b

Prisoners on Orders.

Middlesex.

Under Sentence of Death.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Convicted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Bishop ..................(Executed)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Dec. 1831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Williams ..............do</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>“</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James May .....................(Respited)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>“</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respited and Transported for Life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Convicted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James May .....................(Hulks)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Dec. 1831</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What led to the Anatomy Act of 1832?

**Source 4: The Anatomy Act 1832.**

Catalogue Ref: HO 45/6521

**ANNO SECUNDO & TERTIO**

**GULIELMI IV. REGIS.**

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**C A P. LXXV.**

An Act for regulating Schools of Anatomy.

[1st August 1832.]

WHEREAS a Knowledge of the Causes and Nature of sundry Diseases which affect the Body, and of the best Methods of treating and curing such Diseases, and of healing and repairing divers Wounds and Injuries to which the Human Frame is liable, cannot be acquired without the Aid of Anatomical Examination; And whereas the legal Supply of Human Bodies for such Anatomical Examination is insufficient fully to provide the Means of such Knowledge: And whereas, in order further to supply Human Bodies for such Purposes, divers great and grievous Crimes have been committed, and lately Murder, for the single Object of selling for such Purposes the Bodies of the Persons so murdered: And whereas therefore it is highly expedient to give Protection, under certain Regulations, to the Study and Practice of Anatomy, and to prevent, as far as may be, such great and grievous Crimes and Murder as aforesaid: Be it therefore enacted by the King’s most Excellent Majesty, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the Authority of the same, That it shall be lawful for His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for the Time being for the Home Department in that Part of the United Kingdom called Great Britain, and for the Chief Secretary for Ireland in that Part of the United Kingdom called Ireland, immediately on the passing of this Act, or so soon thereafter as may be required, to grant
An Act for regulating Schools of Anatomy [1st August 1832]

I. Whereas a Knowledge of the Causes and Nature of sundry Diseases which affect the Body, and of the best Methods of treating and curing such Diseases, and of healing and repairing divers[e] Wounds and Injuries to which the Human Frame is liable, cannot be acquired without the Aid of Anatomical Examination: And whereas the legal Supply of Human Bodies for such Anatomical Examination is insufficient fully to provide the Means of such Knowledge: And whereas in order further to supply Human Bodies for such Purposes divers[e] great and grievous Crimes have been committed, and lately Murder, for the single Object of selling for such Purposes the Bodies of the Persons so murdered: And whereas therefore it is highly expedient to give Protection, under certain Regulations, to the Study and Practice of Anatomy and to prevent, as far as may be, such great and grievous Crimes and Murder as aforesaid; be it therefore enacted by the King’s most Excellent Majesty,[...] that is shall be lawful for His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for the time being for the Home Department [...] to grant a Licence to practise Anatomy to any Fellow or Member of any College of Physicians or Surgeons, or to any Graduate or Licentiate in Medicine, or to any Person lawfully qualified to practice Medicine in any part of the United Kingdom, or to any Professor or Teacher of Anatomy, Medicine or Surgery or to any Student attending any School of Anatomy, on Application from such Party for such Purpose, countersigned by Two of His Majesty’s Justices of the Peace acting for the [...] Place wherein such Party resides [...] 

IV. And be it enacted, That every Inspector to be appointed by virtue of this Act shall make Quarterly Return to the said Secretary of State [...] of every deceased Person's Body that during the preceding Quarter has been removed for Anatomical Examination [...] distinguishing the Sex, and, as far as is known at the Time, the Name and Age of each Person [...] 

VII. [...] it shall be lawful for any Executor or other Party having lawful Possession of the Body of any decease Person, not being an Undertaker or other Party intrusted with the Body for the Purpose only of Interment, to permit the Body of such deceased Person to undergo Anatomical Examination, unless [...] such Person shall have expressed his Desire either in Writing at any Time during his life, or verbally in the Presence of Two or more Witnesses during the Illness whereof he died, that his Body after Death might not undergo such Examination [...] 

IX. [...]in no Case shall the Body of any Person be removed for Anatomical Examination from any Place where such Person may have died until after Forty-eight Hours from the Time of such Person’s Decease, not until after Twenty-Four Hours Notice, to be reckoned from the Time of such decease, to the Inspector of the District, of the intended Removal of the Body [...] nor unless a Certificate stating in what Manner such Person came by his Death shall previously to the Removal of the Body have been signed by the Physician
Source 5: Letter from Guy’s Hospital Medical Students, 1859.

Catalogue Ref: HO 45/6521
Guy’s Hospital

October 5th 1859

Sir!

The various metropolitan medical schools having re-opened for the winter session, the committee appointed in the early part of the year, for the purpose of investigating the causes of the deficient supply of subjects for anatomical purposes, is anxious to present its report.

The schools have of late suffered much from the lamentably inadequate means to study anatomy and await with concern your reply to the address the committee had the honour to present to you in July.

Permit me to take the liberty of asking, whether upon considering the practical suggestions you did us the favour to request of the deputation, it has been possible to adopt any remedial measures or whether it is in contemplation to effect during the next Parliamentary Session an alteration of the law, whereby the means so abundantly available under suitable regulations but now lost may for the future be secured.

I beg in my own behalf and on that of the Committee to apologise for this intrusion, which is solely prompted by our earnest desire to acquit ourselves advantageously of the task imposed by our very numerous fellow students upon us.

I have the honour to remain,

Sir,

Your obedient and humble servant

John Thomas Mercer
Honourable Secretary to the Committee of Medical Students, on the supply of anatomical subjects
The Right Honourable Sir L.C. Lewis.
Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

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The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our Onsite Workshops are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our Online Workshops allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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- [facebook.com/TheNationalArchivesEducationService](https://facebook.com/TheNationalArchivesEducationService)
- [twitter.com/UKNatArcEdu](https://twitter.com/UKNatArcEdu)