

A GLIMPSE OF OUR PAST

Andrew Fyfe the Elder (1752(4)–1824): Not all Good Anatomists are Good Teachers

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The history of teaching anatomy in Scotland is rich. One Scottish anatomist who has received little attention, however, is Andrew Fyfe the elder. Unfortunately, very little is written on the life and contributions of this early anatomist. He is considered to have been a great anatomist of his day, but a poor teacher of anatomy. Herein, we review the life of this early anatomist whose works have been compared to those of well-known Scottish anatomists such as the Monros and brothers John and Charles Bell. *Clin. Anat.* 26:418–422, 2013. © 2012 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

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EARLY LIFE

Andrew Fyfe the elder was born on 30 August 1752 (some places this date was 1754) (Rock, 2011) and baptized on 6 September 1752 at Corstorphine, near Edinburgh (Matthew and Harrison, 2004). He was the second son to John Fyfe and Agnes Alexander who were married in 1750 (Stephen and Lee, 1889; Currie, 2004). Information regarding Fyfe's early years is scarce. However, it is known that he was intrigued by the human body since childhood. To further his interest, he began his surgical apprenticeship with Mr. Anderson (Currie, 2004). Numerous documents also exist at the University of Edinburgh's archive that attests to his participation in medical classes during the academic years of 1775, 1776, and 1779–1781. However, and for unknown reasons, he never finished his medical studies or earned a degree (Currie, 2004; Matthew and Harrison, 2004). On 19 October 1787, Andrew Fyfe married Agnes Williamson and had at least nine children. Three died in infancy, and four went on to enter the medical profession.

In 1777, at the age of 25 years, Fyfe was appointed by Professor Monro Secundus (1733–1817) conjointly with John Innes as "Dissector" at the University of Edinburgh (Kaufman, 2006). Innes died shortly after this appointment and Fyfe succeeded him as principal janitor and macer, a post

usually held by a student and which offered free living accommodations (Kaufman, 2006). Soon after, Andrew Fyfe, with his focus towards human anatomy, caught the eye of leaders within the School of Edinburgh (Burch, 2007), particularly Professor Monro Secundus who was well recognized throughout Europe. When Monro noticed Fyfe's talent and interest in anatomy, he appointed Fyfe as his personal assistant. Although this position was not suitable for him to pursue professorial advancements in anatomy, he stayed in charge of different dissections along with demonstrations in medical school under Professor Monro Secundus and his son, Monro Tertius (1773–1859) for more than 45 years. Fyfe was dedicated to the Monros. For example, when John Barclay (1758–1826) attempted to teach anatomy in Edinburgh, his classes were not well attended primarily due to the opposition of Monro Secundus during the day and his assistant Fyfe in the evening (Kaufman, 1999).

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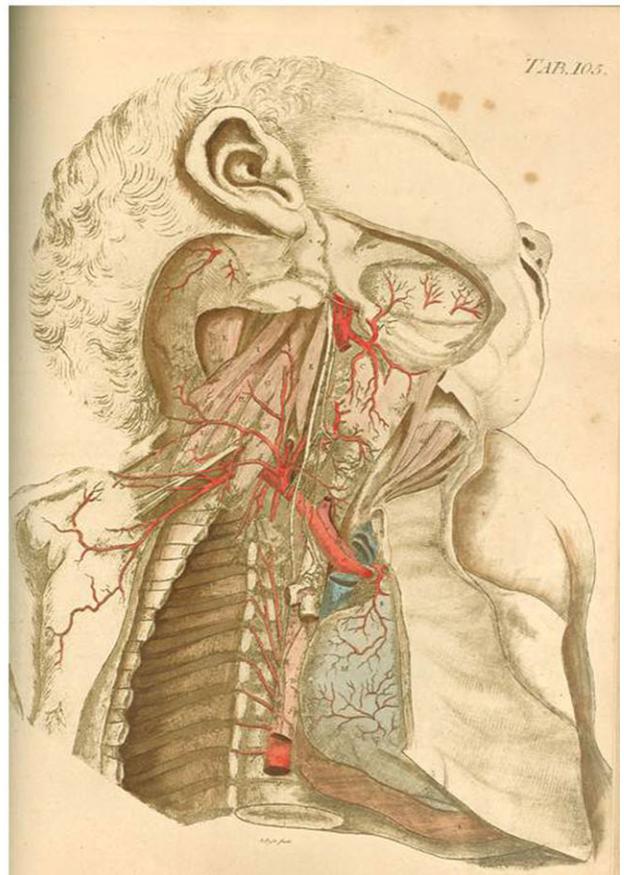
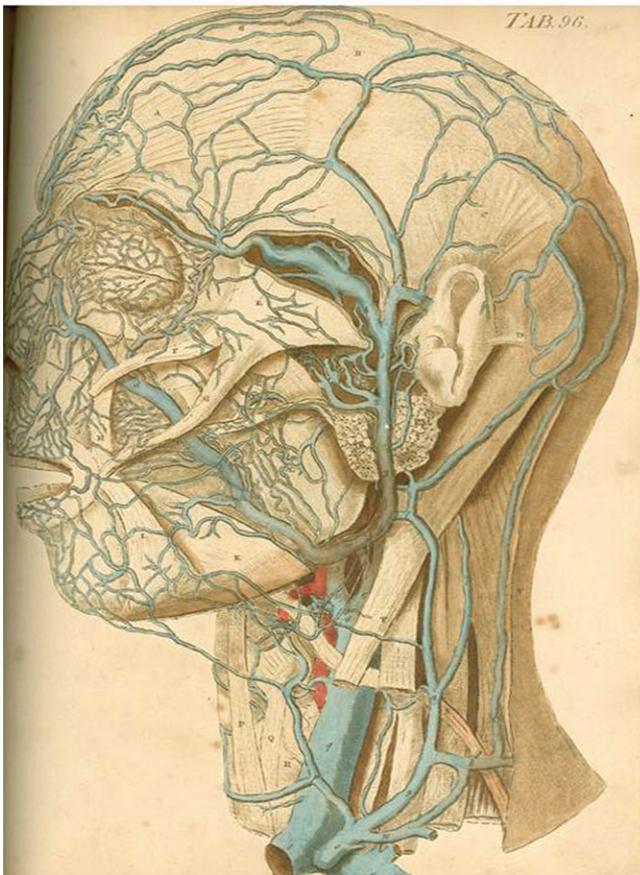
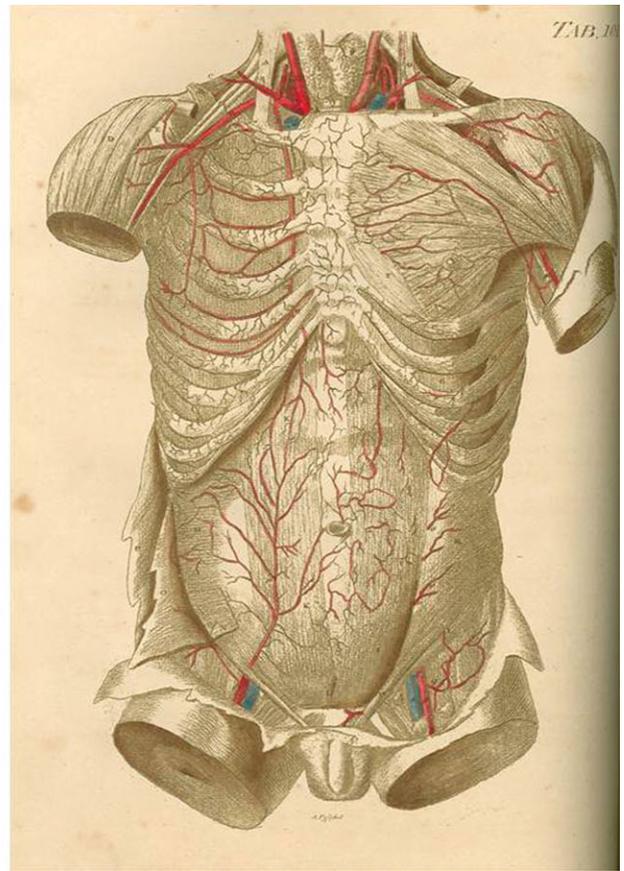
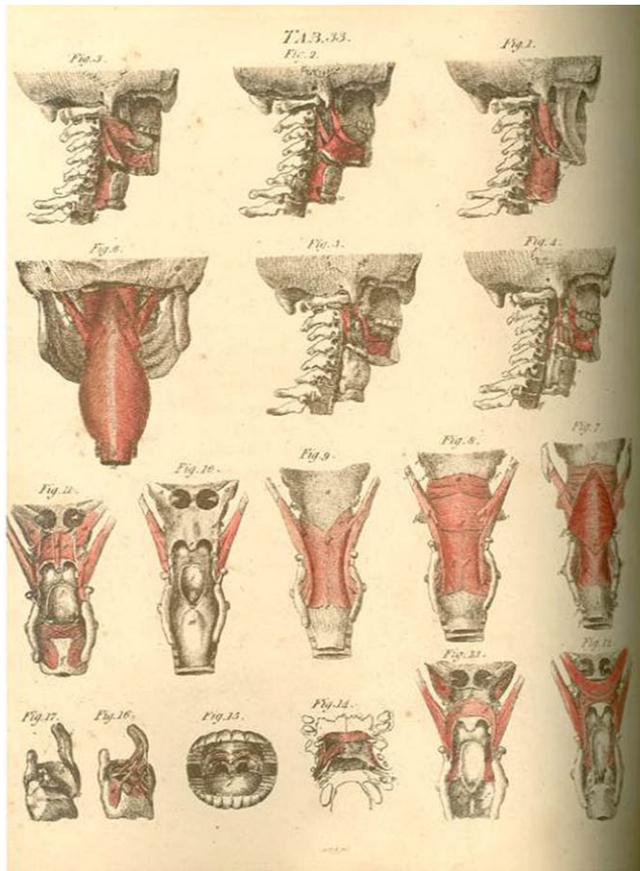


Fig. 1. Examples of art work drawn by Fyfe and used in his 1800 *Compendium of the Anatomy of the Human Body*.

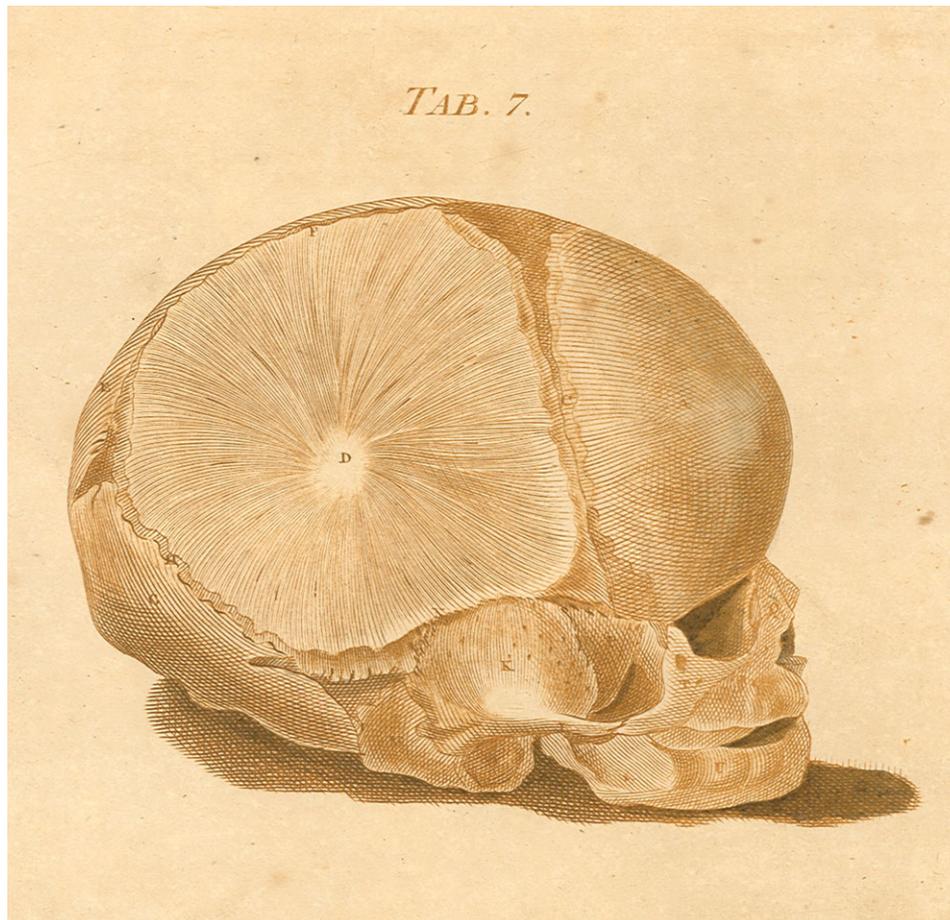


Fig. 2. Another example, "Child's Skull," of art work drawn by Fyfe and used in his 1800 *Compendium of the Anatomy of the Human Body*. [Color figure can be viewed in the online issue, which is available at wileyonlinelibrary.com.]

TEACHING

As anatomy was compulsory for students of medicine in Fyfe's day, Currie has stated that he must have taught and worked with many of the medical luminaries in Scotland of the 18th and 19th centuries (Currie, 2004). The Scottish anatomist, Sir John Struthers (1823–1899), in his *Historical Sketch of the Edinburgh Anatomical School* (1867), stated that Fyfe was

a most painstaking teacher, but his flurried manner and hesitating delivery in the lecture-room, the result of incurable diffidence, interfered much with his efficiency there. He was the plodding practical demonstrator and text-book maker, the provider of daily common anatomical food.

Sir Astley Cooper (1768–1841), a well-known surgeon of his time and a dedicated anatomist, mimicked Fyfe and described his lectures:

Fyfe I attended, and learned much from him. He was a horrid lecturer, but an industrious, worthy man, and good practical anatomist. His lecture was "I say-eh, eh, eh, gentleman; eh, eh, gentleman I say, etc"; whilst the tallow from a naked candle

he held in his hand ran over the back of it and over his clothes; but his drawings and depictions were well made and very useful (Horrocks, 1900).

Sir Astley Cooper's nephew, Bransby B. Cooper, also a student in Edinburgh, recalled:

Mr. Fyfe was a tall thin man and one of the most ungainly lecturers I ever knew. He had been assistant to Dr. Monro, and by hard study, and dissecting for the doctor's lectures, became an excellent anatomist. Sir Astley used to mimic very admirably the awkward style of delivery and primitive habits which distinguished Mr. Fyfe in the lecture room, even when he was in Edinburgh, and invariably excited much laughter (Cooper, 1843).

Sir Robert Christison, who attended the University of Edinburgh from 1815 to 1816, commented of Fyfe as "one of the last in Edinburgh to wear the pigtail," and

every afternoon going over what every student had done with his dissected part . . . duty over, we all gathered round him at the fireside, where he entertained us with anecdotes of the departed medical worthies who had adorned the University in his day (Currie, 2004).

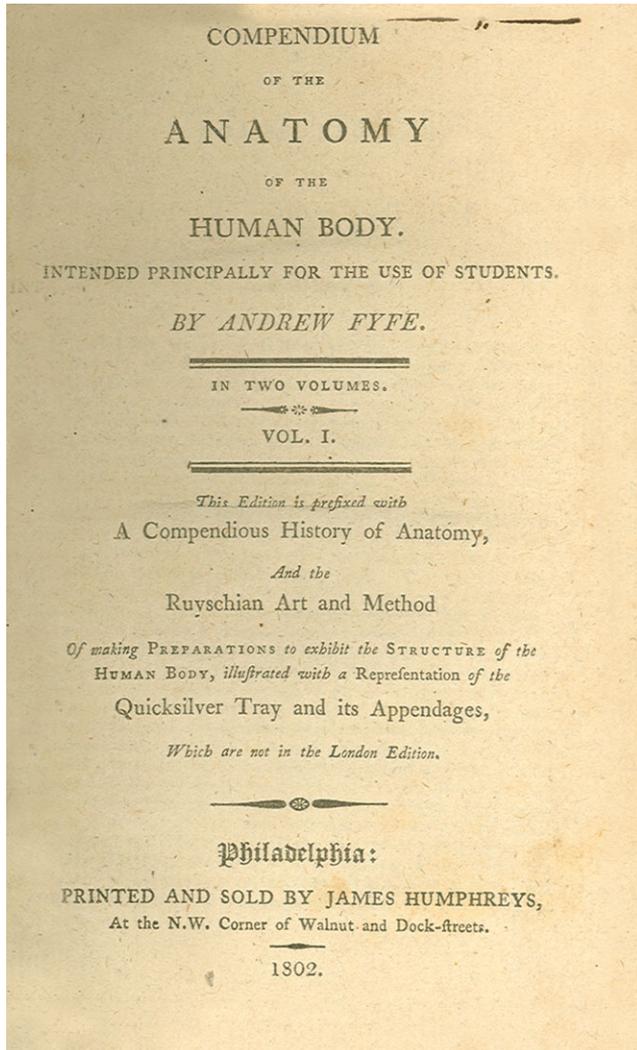


Fig. 3. Cover page of Fyfe's *A Compendium of the Anatomy of the Human Body*. This is the 1802 American edition demonstrating Fyfe's use of the Ruyschian method. [Color figure can be viewed in the online issue, which is available at wileyonlinelibrary.com.]

Liggett (1904), a former student of Fyfe's, stated:

Fyfe gave private lectures and demonstrations useful to the tyro in anatomy. He was a sharp looking man, excellent with the scalpel.

FYFE'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO ANATOMICAL ILLUSTRATION

Fyfe was a brilliant artist, and was awarded "the annual prize medal" in 1775 for his drawings by the Board of Trustees. Rock has referred to him as a "fine draughtsman." Fyfe's intention throughout his entire life was to produce a set of illustrations that would be convenient to handle, and cheap enough for his anatomy students to purchase. He had many publications that went into multiple editions (Fyfe,

1784, 1800a,b, 1803, 1813, 1814, 1818a,b; Monro et al., 1797). One of his most influential books was titled *Views of the Bones, Muscles, Viscera and Organs of the Senses* and published in Edinburgh in 1800. Because of his publications, Fyfe became extremely well known throughout Europe. Most of his publications passed through many editions due to the demand from students who needed such books to accompany their anatomical dissection classes (Rock, 2000).

A Compendium of the Anatomy of the Human Body was another well-known publication of Fyfe's (1800a). It was published in many editions between 1800 and 1823. This book illustrated 160 tables and nearly 700 figures (Figs. 1 and 2). Interestingly, Fyfe's wife and daughters were given the task of coloring the plates used in his texts (Struthers, 1867). Fyfe did not create all of the engravings and plates that he published. He likely collected both engravings and plates, and then reprinted or republished them in his *A Compendium of the Anatomy of the Human Body* (Russell, 1963). Rock (2011) has stated that of this publication, Fyfe had a reckless style as often formatting took precedence over presentation as some plates had arms and legs trimmed off.

He appears as the editor of *View of the Bones, Muscles, Viscera and Organs of the Senses*, which consisted of 23 folio tables with short explanations; however, he gives no credit to others who contributed to it. In fact, many of these appear to have the design of Richard Cooper Senior (1701–1764) who had illustrated anatomical works for Monro Primus (1697–1767) (Rock, 2011). Interestingly, Cooper would go on to found the first Scottish academy of artists, the Edinburgh School of St. Luke (Rock, 2011). Rock has stated that some of the illustrations in Fyfe's *View of the Bones, Muscles, Viscera and Organs of the Senses* may have been drawn by Cooper's pupils Robert Strange (1721–1792) or Thomas Donaldson (1755–1800). Of note, Fyfe himself probably trained under the painter Alexander Runciman (1736–1785) who was a pupil of Cooper (Rock, 2011). Fyfe was a proponent of the Ruyschian (quick silver) method of injecting anatomical specimens and devoted an entire section to this technique in his *Compendium of the Anatomy of the Human Body* of 1802 (Fig. 3). This method allowed for greater details to be observed during dissections and thus in subsequent anatomical illustrations. Fyfe was one of many anatomists who would contribute to anatomical illustration during the 18th and 19th centuries (Kemp, 2010).

LATER LIFE

Fyfe spent most of his life improving the knowledge of the human body, and helping make anatomy one of the most important courses of the medical sciences. Later in his life, he acted as curator of anatomical figures given to the University by Monro Secundus in 1800 (Currie, 2004). He became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh on 23 October 1818 a few weeks before the entry of his

eldest son Andrew (1792–1861) who graduated M.D. at Edinburgh in 1814, and became Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1818 and President in 1842–1843. Andrew the younger lectured privately on chemistry and pharmacy at Edinburgh for many years. In 1844, he became professor of chemistry in the University of Aberdeen, and retained his professorship until his death. Fyfe the elder's grandson was also named Andrew and became a London physician.

Andrew Fyfe the elder was fortunate to have a constant state of good health, which made his passing even more difficult for his friends and family. He died on 31 March 1824 at the age of 72 years (Struthers, 1867). His remains were buried at Calton New Burying-place, the cemetery where his premature son was also buried. Currie (2004) has stated that the consensus as quoted in the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal* (Anonymous, 1825) of the day was that,

In this country, it is impossible to number any other works professedly systematic than the matter-of-fact volumes of Fyfe, the work of John and Charles Bell, and the *Outlines* of Dr. Monro.

The anonymous writer of his obituary proclaimed that Fyfe's last words may have been taken from Horace "Exegi monumentum aere perennius" (I have erected a monument more lasting than bronze) (Anonymous, 1824). Indeed, Fyfe's anatomy texts went into multiple editions and continued to be posthumously published for many years.

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