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John Hunter was born in 1728 on a Scottish farm on the outskirts of Glasgow; the youngest of 10 children. He

received little in the way of a formal education



dropped school at the age of 13 years. Despite this background he was to become one of the of the most influential British surgeons of the 18th century.

In 1748, he wrote to his brother William, an anatomist and obstetrician, enquiring as to whether he could join him in London. Later that year he began preparing anatomical dissections and within a year he was helping his brother teach anatomy. John Hunter became an assistant to William Cheselden at the Chelsea Hospital and in 1751 he was appointed apprentice to Sir Percival Pott at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Between 1754 and 1756 he worked as a house surgeon at In 1761, he developed pulmonary tuberculosis, a disease which was to affect him for much of his working life. In order to improve his health he was commissioned as an army

surgeon and was sent to France and Portugal for two years. During this time he became familiar with the management of war wounds and their complications. In 1764, he returned to London where he set up his own anatomy school and started in private surgical practice. His surgical career was slow to be established. However, in 1767 he was elected as Fellow of the Royal Society and in 1768 he was appointed as surgeon to St. George's Hospital. He became a member of the Company of Surgeons but he was never to hold high office within the organisation.

The written work produced by Hunter had a significant



impact on medical practice of the

time. His first book, *Natural History of Human Teeth*, was

published in 1771. In it he clearly described dental anatomy and coined the terms bicuspids, cuspids, incisors and molars. His second book, *A Practical Treatise on the Diseases of Teeth*, described dental pathology. In 1786 he published *A Treatise on Venereal Disease* in which he described chancre and lymphogranuloma venereum. In *The Digestion of the Stomach after Death* (1772) he described shock and intussusception and in *A Treatise on Blood, Inflammation and Gun-Shot Wounds* (1794) he questioned the need to surgically enlarge gun-shot wounds and disproved the belief that gunpowder was poisonous. In 1786 he was appointed deputy surgeon to

**the army and in 1789 he was made Surgeon General.
He described ligation of the femoral artery in the
treatment**



of popliteal aneurysms.

**The lack of a university education failed to lessen his
contributions to surgery, medicine and science. Many of
these contributions were the result of clear and concise
personal observations based on innumerable hours spent**

preparing anatomical dissections. His anatomical and surgical teaching was held in high regard and his famous pupils include Benjamin Bell, Astley Cooper, Everard Home and Edward Jenner.

St. George's Hospital.

