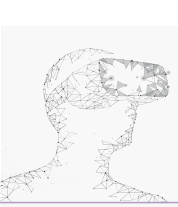

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Hunter's treasures
How did John Hunter come to commission two Cherokee paintings by William Hodges? *Page 60*

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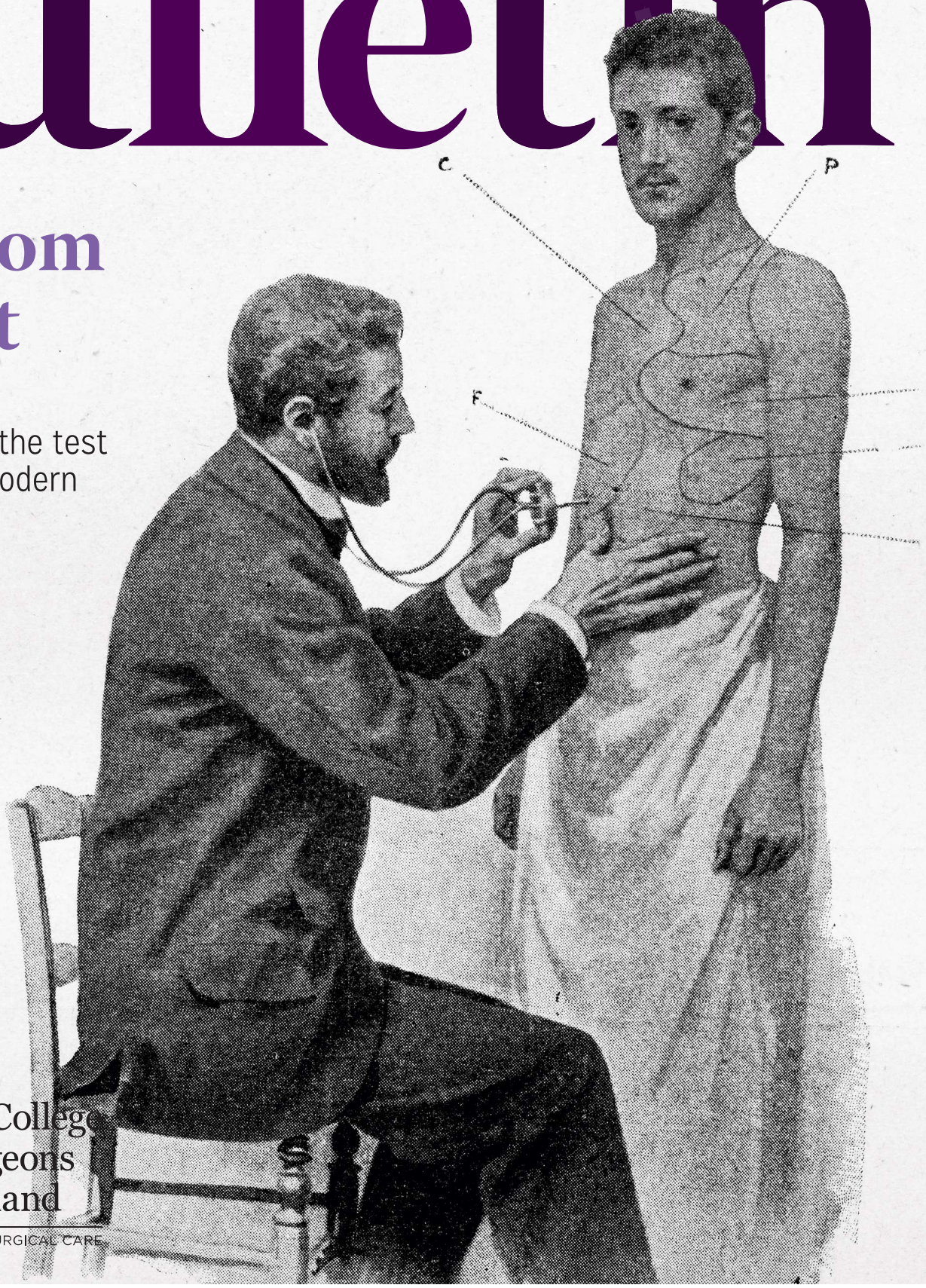

Royal College of Surgeons of England
ADVANCING SURGICAL CARE

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Hunter's treasures: the Cherokee paintings by William Hodges

Historian Jonathan Rex explores the real history behind the origin of two Cherokee paintings, commissioned by John Hunter.

J Rex Historian

James Madison, President of the United States,
to all and singular to whom these
Presents shall come, Greeting:
Whereas a Treaty of Cession was made
and concluded at the City of Washington
on

In 1976, Dr Anthony A Pearson, a professor emeritus of anatomy at the University of Oregon, visited The Royal College of Surgeons of England and became enamoured with the paintings of two unidentified Cherokee men on display in the Hunterian art collection. Pearson wanted to know who they were, what brought them to London, how John Hunter met them and who had painted them. Publishing his findings in the Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, he was able to successfully track their movements, established their connection to Hunter, and identified the men as Richard Justice and Moses Price.[1] Unfortunately, Pearson was neither Cherokee nor a historian and he relied heavily on an out-of-print book by Carolyn Thomas Foreman.[2] Foreman misrepresented what was actually stated by a trader in contemporary war documents from the American State Papers.

On 19 October 1790, the two Cherokees arrived in Portsmouth with William Augustus Bowles, a merchantman from Quebec, aboard the Lord Dorchester.[1] The Gentlemen's Magazine stated: "In her came passengers, some Indians, said to be Cherokees, the object

According to William Clift... the Cherokees had come to England after the American Revolutionary War to meet with the king, having fought on the side of Britain

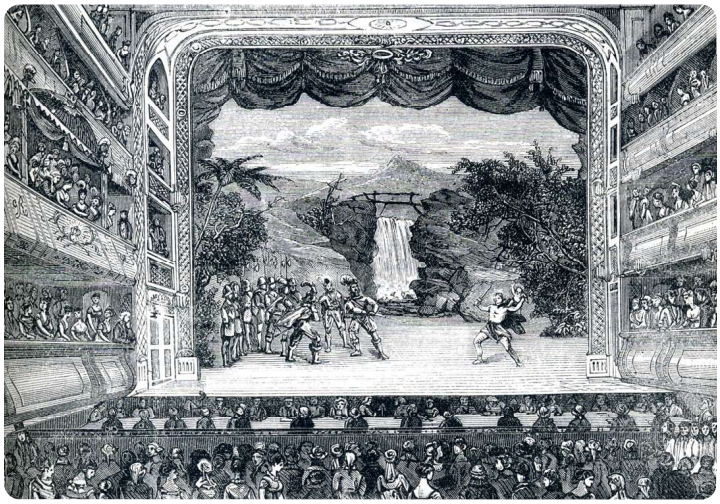
of whose mission is not generally known." According to William Clift, the Hunterian Museum's first conservator, who worked closely with John Hunter, the Cherokees had come to England after the American Revolutionary War to meet with the king, having fought on the side of Britain. Their passage was financed by Governor Guy Carleton of Quebec, commander-in-chief of North America, and they were greeted by the home secretary, William Wyndham Grenville, who lodged them at Osborne's Hotel in the Adelphi district.

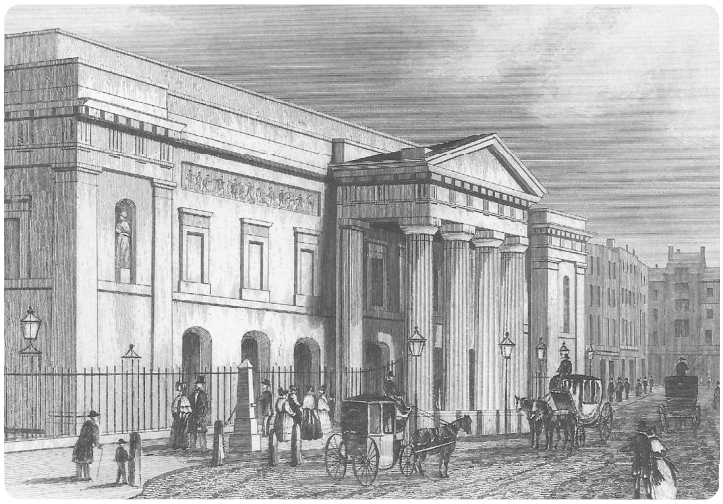
The two Cherokees met with the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Gloucester and Lord Townshend as well as being courted by various other members of the nobility.[1] They visited St Paul's Cathedral, were celebrated guests at the Covent Garden theatre, where they were presented a play entitled *The Cherokee*, and attended numerous masquerades. It was at one of those balls that they were introduced by Sir Joseph Banks to John Hunter and William

Tsiyu Gansini (Dragging Canoe), founding war chief of the pan-Indian confederacy. From the RCS England museum collection (collection no. RCSSC/P 246)

Cheucunsene (Young Dragging Canoe), only documented son of Dragging Canoe. From the RCS England museum collection (collection no. RCSSC/P 245)

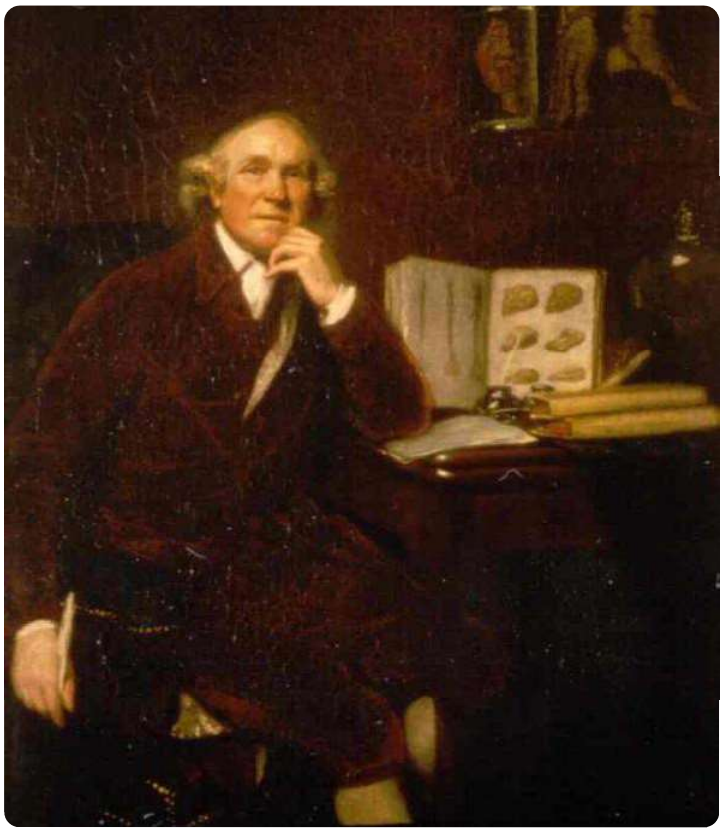
The Covent Garden theatre, where the Cherokees were presented a play entitled *The Cherokee*. (Getty 147041594; 1430426669)





Hodges. On 3 January 1791, they received a private audience with King George III. Hunter commissioned them to be painted, Hodges painted them and departing from London in March 1791, they stopped off at Gravesend to visit the site where Pocahontas is buried before continuing across the Atlantic with Bowles aboard the Mercury.[1]

John Hunter, who commissioned William Hodges to paint Dragging Canoe and his son, Young Dragging Canoe. From the RCS England museum collection (collection no. RCSSC/P 121)



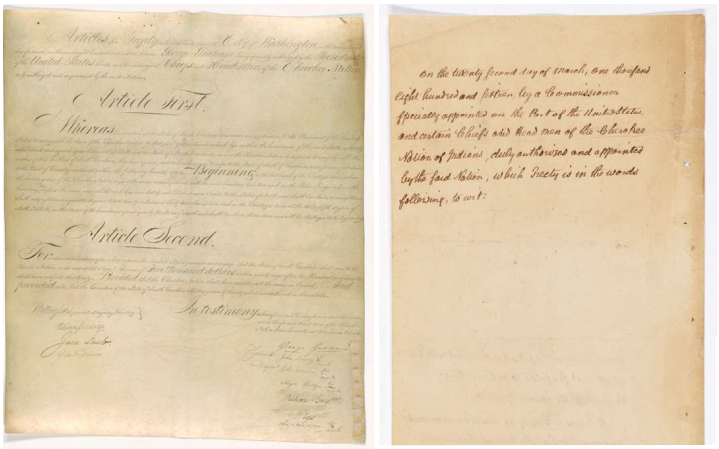
Shortly after returning to Tennessee from London with the two Cherokee men in 1791, Bowles began distributing posters to leading Chickamauga warriors.[3] The posters included a painting of Bowles wearing a headdress crown at the centre with the two Cherokee paintings by William Hodges added on each side of him. Bowles had privately hired Thomas Hardy to paint his own portrait and paid for the posters, angling for influence among the Native Americans by lying and claiming that he was commissioned as an agent of the Crown. In order to achieve his ends he had himself placed at the centre of the posters. By placing one Cherokee's portrait on each side of him, he was attempting to make himself matter to the warriors to whom he gave the posters because they were followers of those particular Indians.

A trader spying for the Americans noted that one of these posters was in the home of Richard Justice, a priest-chief of Lookout Mountain Town in Tennessee, and a highly devoted follower of Tsiyu Gansini (Dragging Canoe) and his son Cheucunsene (Young Dragging Canoe).[3] Acting as a spy for the Americans, the trader stated that he included that information only because it confirmed his suspicions that Justice was merely feigning friendship with America.[4] Nowhere did he say that Justice or Price were the men portrayed in the paintings.

The paintings are of Dragging Canoe and his son, Young Dragging Canoe. Dragging Canoe was the stepson of Attakullakulla (Little Carpenter), civil chief of the Cherokee Nation.[5] Known as Ukwaneequa (White Owl) during his youth, Little Carpenter was the youngest of seven Cherokee men who first visited London in 1730 to meet with King George II and establish the Cherokee–British alliance.[6] In 1758, the alliance temporarily deteriorated, resulting in the Anglo–Cherokee War.[7] Oconostota captured Fort Loudoun and when peace was negotiated Ostenaco, Cunne Shote and a third warrior (believed to be the 30-year-old Dragging Canoe under a nickname) travelled to London in 1762 with Henry Timberlake to reaffirm their alliance with the king.[8]

Sir Joseph Banks, naturalist, botanist and patron of the natural sciences, who introduced the Cherokees to John Hunter and William Hodges (Getty 92832494)

Exerpts from the Indian Treaty, signed by James Madison on March 8 1816. The last signature on the documeent (left) was by Cheucunsene. Courtesy of the National Archives (NAID: 162246305)



It was in 1775 that Dragging Canoe became a legendary figure in American frontier history by standing up during the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals and declaring war on the Americans. Going against the treaty that Attakullakulla and Oconostota were both agreeing to sign, he denounced them as old men willing to sell their country (Kentucky) because they were no longer fit to fight, hunt or even fish for themselves.[9] Remaining a firm ally of Britain throughout the war, he and his followers were referenced in the Declaration of Independence as "merciless Indian savages" unleashed upon the frontier by King George III. The only man who could bring the Chickamauga War to an end was the founding war chief, who declared the war and formed the Tsikamagi pan-Indian confederacy as an ally of the king.

Two venerable Cherokee elders, Old Tassel and Old Abram, were brutally murdered while unarmed and under a white flag to discuss peace in 1788.[10] Enraged by the massacre of two elders, and two peaceful towns of women and children, the entire Cherokee Nation united around Dragging Canoe and he unleashed the full body of his warriors on the settlements. Thousands of warriors swarmed like angry hornets throughout the Appalachian Mountains, the rivers ran red with blood for over a year and settlers fled back into the colonies.

In an attempt to put a stop to the unrelenting and ferocious guerrilla massacres, a message was sent to Dragging Canoe, Little Turkey and Hanging Mane that their children were safe, were cared for and would be returned if they agreed to meet.[11] All three immediately dispatched a formal letter to Governor Samuel Johnston of North Carolina on 10 March 1789 expressing their willingness to "end the effusion of blood" and discuss a lasting peace.[12]

Shortly after sending the letter, Dragging Canoe and Young Dragging Canoe left Tennessee with Bowles, travelled to Nassau and stayed there for ten months with Lord Dunmore, governor of the Bahamas, while arrangements were made for their trip to England.[1] From Nassau, they sailed to Quebec and from there to London. When they returned, Dragging Canoe signed the Treaty of Holston on 2 July under his civil name, Cheakoneske (Otter Lifter). On 7 February 1792, the Treaty of Holston was ratified and Dragging Canoe stepped aside as war chief on 1 May after dancing all night the night before. It was then officially announced by Enola (Black Fox) that Dragging Canoe had "walked on" and "left our world", and American historians interpreted this as meaning he had died.[13]

Thanks to John Hunter, William Hodges and the Hunterian art collection, these historical treasures have been preserved and the research by Dr Pearson made identifying them possible.

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