

British Satirical Prints

The Department of Prints and Drawings holds the national collection of British single-sheet satirical prints from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. These prints, for the most part, are listed and described in the *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the British Museum* by Frederic George Stephens (four volumes covering prints up to 1770 and published 1870-1883) and Mary Dorothy George (seven volumes covering prints between 1771-1832 and published 1935-1954). This catalogue has formed the basis for all later studies of British caricature and graphic satire. A microfilm reproducing most of the prints published by Chadwyck-Healy, Cambridge in 1978 can be consulted in the Department, and at the British Library and elsewhere.



Above: James Gillray, *French Liberty/British Slavery*, 1792, hand-coloured etching, 250 x 355mm, BM Sat. 8145

Caricature, the exaggeration of an individual's physiognomy or person for comic effect, was practised in Italy early in the seventeenth century when artists increasingly drew for pleasure and entertainment. It was introduced into England in the eighteenth century by gentlemen returning from the Grand Tour. George Townshend (1724-1807), an aristocratic amateur, was among the first to use personal caricature in political satires. The great satirist William Hogarth (1697-1764), however, distanced himself from caricature preferring to portray what he saw as the true 'character' of his subjects.

The 'golden age' when James Gillray (1756-1815), Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827) and George Cruikshank (1792-1878) were active, occurred between 1780 and 1830. Most satirical prints were produced in London and were sold singly by publishers and booksellers, such as S. W. Fores and William Holland, who also put together collections for clients and even hired them out. A wide range of prices reflected the very different sizes and degrees of sophistication of satirical prints. In 1807 the publisher Thomas Tegg started a business selling cheap, crudely coloured prints aimed at a wide market. Later in the nineteenth century the work of John 'HB' Doyle (1797-1868) and the journal *Punch*, founded in 1841, inaugurated a milder form of graphic satire. Prints ceased to be published as single sheets, but rather as part of newspaper and periodical illustration. The term 'cartoon' came into general use in the second half of the century.

The core of the Department's representation of British satires is the collection of more than ten thousand prints put together by Edward Hawkins, Keeper of Antiquities in the British Museum, that was purchased in 1868. Other important groups of prints came from Sarah Sophia Banks (1818), William Smith (1851) and George Cruikshank, whose widow left a huge collection of his prints together with more than four thousand preliminary drawings. There is an ongoing acquisition policy and much new material has come into the collection since the publication of the George catalogue. For example, one thousand items, including many by Richard Newton (1777-1798), came in 1948 from the social historian Francis Klingender, with a further group by the same artist from the collection of Kenneth Monkman in 2001.

Other Collections

London	British Library Guildhall Library Museum of London National Portrait Gallery Victoria and Albert Museum Wellcome Institute
UK	Whitworth Gallery, Manchester
France	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

Germany Wilhelm-Busch-Museum, Hanover
USA Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California
Library of Congress, Washington, DC *
New York Public Library
Pierpont Morgan Library, New York *
Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington, Connecticut *
Yale Center for British Art, New Haven

* *Microfilms available for consultation in the Department of Prints and Drawings, the British Museum*

Further Reading

Atherton, H.M. *Political Prints in the Age of Hogarth*. Oxford University Press, 1974

Bindman, D. *The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution*. British Museum Press, 1989

Bindman, D. *Hogarth and his Times: Serious Comedy*. British Museum Press, 1997

Donald, D. *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*. Yale University Press and London, 1996

Gatrell, V. *City of Laughter: sex and satire in eighteenth-century London*, Atlantic Books, 2006

George, M.D. *English Political Caricature*. 2 Vols. Oxford University Press, 1959

Godfrey, R. *English caricature: 1620 to the Present*. Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984

Godfrey, R. *Gillray and the Art of Caricature*. Tate Publishing, 2001