

Creation of a Virtual Museum for Historical Anatomical Artefacts

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Increasing numbers of museums are making their collections viewable online, providing virtual tours that enable visitors all over the world to appreciate their treasured artefacts. Displaying historical and valuable objects in this way prevents further deterioration while allowing close-up observations. Whilst an Anatomical Museum no longer exists at the University of Cambridge, there is still a sizeable collection of historical specimens which are currently in storage. These include “exploded skulls”, produced by a technique developed by the French anatomist Claude Beauchêne in the mid-1800s, and sectioned skulls with casts of blood vessels, produced by Maison Tramond of Paris in the late 1860s. There are large numbers of individual osteological specimens, with fetal, juvenile and adult bones, both normal and pathological. A number of spirit preserved potted specimens also exist. A photographic catalogue of the collection has been produced, comprising over one thousand items. As space restrictions preclude a physical display, this project seeks to create a virtual museum comprising these objects. Items are placed on a turntable for 360° photography, enabling the objects to be rotated and examined from all angles. These images are then converted into a 3-dimensional object which can be rotated by the online user who can also zoom in on any special features. Where relevant, labels will be applied to direct the user to significant structures. The completed virtual museum will enable students to learn from this extensive archive, avoiding damage caused by physical handling and providing a way to permanently preserve this valuable collection.

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