



Rowlandson's painting of Fredrick Accum lecturing at the Surrey Institution in London

Science in Art

LECTURES AT THE SURREY INSTITUTION - - -

AS PORTRAYED BY THOMAS ROWLANDSON

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THE ROYAL INSTITUTION of Great Britain was founded in 1799 by Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford, for the purpose of "diffusing the knowledge and facilitating the general introduction of useful mechanical inventions and improvements, and for teaching by courses of philosophical lectures and experiments the application of science to the common purposes of life."

"The application of science to the common purposes of life" gradually ceased to be a primary object of the Royal Institution, and its school for mechanics, workshops, models and journals gradually died away. The

laboratories, lectures and library became the life of the Institution, and its purpose "the diffusion and extension of useful knowledge in general."

"Lectures on scientific subjects, to be given in a lecture room with the most up-to-date facilities for experiment and demonstration" were a part of the original scheme for the Royal Institution, and these lectures played an important part in the life of London during the whole of the nineteenth century.

The success of the Royal Institution, together with the rapid growth of London south of the Thames, led



Rowlandson's caricature of the scene he painted in the picture on the left

in 1808 to the establishment of a similar project on Blackfriars Road. The purpose of The Surrey Institution, as it was called, was the same as that of the Royal Institution and the building which housed it contained likewise a library and reading rooms, a chemical laboratory, conversation rooms and a spacious anteroom for the display of scientific apparatus, in addition to an elaborate lecture room. This theater, which seated approximately 500 people, was considered one of the finest rooms in London.

Accum's lectures

Friedrich Christian (Fredrick) Accum, best remembered as a pioneer in the field of gas lighting, but also known as a dealer in scientific supplies, a scientific investigator, a pure-food agitator and an industrial expert, was professor of chemistry and mineralogy; and his lectures, which were begun in November, 1808, were well attended. The project was not long successful, however, and by 1823 it was abandoned.

The picture on page 16 gives a very adequate idea of the lecture theater with its two galleries, the uppermost

supported by eight Doric columns of Derbyshire marble. It is reproduced from one of the 104 magnificent aquatints, depicting every phase of the colorful life in London under the Regency, which appeared in that most distinguished of color-plate books, *The Microcosm of London; or London in Miniature*, published by Rudolph Ackermann in 1808-1810. The drawings themselves are the work of Augustus Charles Pugin, one of the best architectural draftsmen of the period, and Thomas Rowlandson, the caricaturist who portrayed "the high and low life of his time with incomparable gusto and charm."

The picture on this page is a caricature of the same scene, also by Rowlandson. A fair likeness of Accum is provided, but the other figures have not been identified, if indeed they were intended to represent actual persons. "Wonder and interest are expressed by the faces of the stylishly dressed audience" and "one old enthusiast, who watches the lecture with his head and hands resting upon a cane, has a book marked 'Accum's Lectures' thrust in his side-pocket." This is probably typical of the interest which London society took in such lectures. The original print, which is quite rare, is 13x9 in. in size and brightly colored.