



James Gillray (1757-1815), British caricaturist and printmaker was famous for his etched political and social satires, mainly published between 1792 and 1810. Gillray is revered as one of the most influential political caricaturists of all time, and among the leading cartoonists on the political stage in the United Kingdom.

Scientific Researches!—New Discoveries in PNEUMATICKS!—or—an Experimental Lecture on the Powers of Air

Published May 23, 1802 by H. Humphrey, St. James's Street.

The print depicts a lecture on nitrous oxide given at the Royal Institution. The lecturer is believed to be Thomas Young (1773-1829), physicist, physician, and Egyptologist or Thomas Garnett (1766-1802), Professor of Natural Philosophy, who is conducting an experiment on Sir John Coxe Hippisley, Manager of the Royal Institution, political writer and M.P. Hippisley had been given a baronetcy for arranging the marriage of the Princess Royal to the Prince of Wurttemberg in 1797. Humphrey Davy (1778-1829) is caricatured as the assistant operating the hydraulic bellows filled with laughing gas.

Davy, who almost died in 1800 by attempting to inhale carbureted hydrogen (methane), gave lectures on pneumatic chemistry in 1801 and administered nitrous oxide gas to a number of men. Eight days after the publication of this caricature (1802), Davy, at the age of 24, was made Professor of Chemistry. In 1812, Davy was knighted and was created a baronet in 1818. In 1820, Davy succeeded Sir Joseph Banks as President of the Royal Society.

The Royal Institution was set up in 1800 and was intended to make scientific study more accessible to the public.

The spectators shown in the picture are (clockwise from the right): Count Rumford (Sir Benjamin Thompson), the founder of the Institution (standing in the doorway), Isaac D'Israeli, Lord Gower (the Marquess of Stafford), Lord Stanhope, Lord Pomfret, and Sir Henry Englefield. The lady next to Englefield is identified as Mrs. Frederica Augusta Locke, wife of William Locke of Norbury. The man pressing his walking stick to his lips is said to be poet William Sotheby. Behind him is Peter Denys, a former fellow student at the Royal Academy Schools.

