

The milky glass skylight illuminated the room, casting an afternoon glow over the quiet operating theatre. Dust motes floated in the air. The room was large, with a horseshoe-shaped wooden seating area three rows deep, each row elevated above the one in front so medical students could have a perfect view of the surgery below. This made the back row high above the floor, near the skylight that comprised the ceiling.

Rails in front of each section provided not only assistance in standing and getting to one's seat on the steep rows, but also something to grip for those who might feel faint during the procedure. Eager students, thirsty for blood or angling for the clearest possible view, always occupied the front row. More squeamish students would sit higher up. But now the old hospital was closed up forever. There would be no more surgeries, no more terrified patients. Below, the double doors from the ward were closed, as was the door at the top of the back row, where students usually entered. The muted sounds of builders, hammering and carting bricks along St. Thomas's Street, could just be heard. Otherwise, it was silent.

The body sat upright in the second row of seats, staring downward. Inside the horseshoe, sawdust usually covered a slotted floor, so that blood and fluids could be collected. Now it was bare. In the middle of this area, a rectangular table was situated. Here patients would be strapped for the procedure.

It was this table on which the dead man's gaze was fixed.