ACCESSING ENLIGHTENMENT:
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WHY THIS STUDY GUIDE?
In December 2003, as part of its 250th anniversary celebrations, the British Museum opens a new permanent gallery: *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*. Unlike all other displays in the Museum, this one aims to recreate the experience of a museum visitor in the early years of the British Museum (from its foundation in 1753 to the death of George III in 1820). It is not an exact reconstruction, since the original building in which the Museum was first housed, Montagu House, no longer survives; but the new display is housed in the King’s Library, the principal room of the current Neo-Classical building, which was completed in 1829. However the themes of the display, the labelling of the objects and the choice of books all relate to an understanding of the world which an 18th century visitor would recognise.

If you want to find out more about the themes of the gallery, or about the objects displayed, there is a book to accompany the display: *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Kim Sloan, and many of the key objects are on the website, at www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass.

This study guide has a different aim: to link the experience of being a museum visitor now and in the 18th century. If you had wanted to visit the British Museum in 1789, for example, how would you have got in? Would you have come in a school party? Could you have brought your family? Were you more likely to be a Londoner; if you were a tourist, how far might you have come? What kind of educational background would you have; how would it have helped you to make sense of your visit? What other leisure activities did people who visited museums in the 18th century go in for? - what other venues was the Museum of that day in competition with?

This study guide cannot hope to address, let alone answer, all these issues. But we hope it will at least open up the questions, and perhaps encourage the contemporary arguments which museum managements, and we as museum visitors, wrestle with today, to be conducted in a more historical - and realistic - light.

WHO IS THIS STUDY GUIDE FOR?
people studying a range of topics in cultural history:
• museology:
  visitor studies, exhibition display, taxonomy
• consumer studies
• 18th century cultural history

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE
We have produced this study guide in loose leaf form, so that you can add your own material to it. We hope it will encourage you to develop the contents in a direction of your choice. If you find anything particularly relevant which you think would be of interest to other users, please let us know so we can include it in future editions.
WHO WERE THE PUBLIC?
The British Museum was the only public Museum of any size which, following 18th century Enlightenment principles, aimed to have universal collections, belonged to the nation and, in theory at least, granted admission to all ‘studious and curious persons’.

Its founding documents, Sir Hans Sloane’s Will and the British Museum Act of 1753, stipulated that the Museum should be open to the public. The interpretation of the word ‘public’ however was left to the Trustees’ discretion, and since the British Museum was the first of its kind, there were few precedents for them to draw on.

So as they drew up the Museum’s Statutes and Rules the Trustees fiercely debated the issue of what was meant by the public. They also had to take account of Parliament, the custodians of the government grant and, to a certain extent, the public’s representatives. Their understanding of the public also developed with experience over the period, especially as their fears of public disorder, which had initially led them to restrict access, proved groundless.

WHAT WERE THE BARRIERS TO ACCESS?
The study guide tries to assess both external and internal barriers determining the level of public access to the Museum. Factors determined by society in general are such matters as the level of public education, the state of public transport and public perception of security levels in London; factors under the Museum’s control include such essential issues as opening hours, whether or not to charge for entrance, public facilities (heating, lighting, lavatories and refreshments) and information provision (organised displays, labels and publications).

We should bear in mind, though, that this is very much a 21st century list; 18th century visitors would not have had the same expectations.

HOW DO WE KNOW?
A major handicap in trying to reconstruct the Museum’s audience is the fact that neither the letters written to request tickets or the admission registers have survived, which makes it very difficult to do any quantitative analysis. There are, however, a variety of anecdotal accounts, which we have drawn on wherever possible for a qualitative analysis.

The letters requesting access to the British Museum’s Reading Room in this period have not survived, but the admission registers have, so it is possible to be slightly more quantitative with this category of the Museum’s users. Presumably though they would have formed a more scholarly group than those visiting the Museum as a whole.

HOW MUCH DID THE PUBLIC UNDERSTAND?
The Enlightenment Gallery aims to illuminate the state of knowledge and learning at the time the Museum was set up - as represented by the collectors whose objects created the founding and early collections (Sloane, Banks, Hamilton etc) and the first curators who displayed them.

So this study guide also attempts to interrogate the audience evidence to see what their understanding of these issues was. How wide a social and educational spread did the Museum reach? Were visitors equipped by their education to understand issues of enlightenment thought, universal collections, taxonomy etc? Did a visit to the Museum help to clarify these issues for them?
1.0 PHYSICAL ACCESS

Montagu House, engraving by Sutton Nicholls, London, around 1714
HOW WOULD YOU HAVE KNOWN ABOUT IT?
To some extent the Museum relied at first on word of mouth among the learned classes. However the opening times were frequently published in the press and magazines and the Museum authorities also on occasion published the Statutes and Rules. The Museum frequently featured in guidebooks to London, or in published travellers’ accounts. For instance, in A New History of London, including Westminster and Southwark by John Noorthouck in 1773, the British Museum is said to be ‘for the free inspection of all curious and studious persons...’

GETTING THERE: TRANSPORT
It is impossible to tell how many of the Museum’s visitors came from inside or outside London. Some, like the poet Thomas Gray, lived within walking distance: he wrote to a friend, James Brown on 8 August 1759 ‘Come and see me in my peaceful new settlement (Southampton Row) from whence I have the command of Highgate, Hampstead, Bedford-Gardens and the Musaeum’.

For those coming from outside London, travel within Britain had become much easier in the second half of the 18th century, due to the stage coach system and the improvement in road surfaces through the Turnpike Trusts. In the 1770’s the operation of the turnpikes was farmed out to the highest bidder, an early example of privatisation. Arthur Young, a writer on agriculture and rural life, wrote in his Farmer’s Letters in 1768: ‘But now! a country fellow, one hundred miles from London, jumps on a coach box in the morning, and for eight or ten shillings gets to town by night, which makes a material difference; besides rendering the going up and down so easy, the numbers who have seen London are increased tenfold’.

GETTING THERE SAFELY?
One might, however, be put off trying to come to London by fear of crime and personal violence. During the 18th century the population of London had increased from half a million to close on one million, with resulting higher crime levels and no proper police force. Around 1750 the Midlands poet William Shenstone wrote: ‘London is really dangerous at this time: the pickpockets, formerly content with mere filching, make no scruple to knock people down with bludgeons in Fleet Street and the Strand, and that at no later hour than eight o’clock at night; but in the Piazzas, Covent Garden, they come in large bodies, armed with couteaus and attack whole parties, so that the danger of coming out of the playhouses is of some weight in the opposite scale when I am disposed to go to them oftener than I ought’.

In 1751 the novelist Henry Fielding submitted, at government request, his ‘Enquiry into the Causes of the late increase of Robbers, etc, with some Proposals for Remedyng the Growing Evil’, which led to the setting up of the Bow Street Runners, the country’s first police force. Soon there were up to twelve Bow Street Runners, with a support force of about 70, patrolling the streets in groups of four armed with cutlasses or pistols.

Whether or not it put off the potential visitor, fear of mob violence was certainly cited by some Trustees as the main reason for trying to limit access. John Ward, the elderly Professor of Rhetoric at Gresham College, warned that if there was to be an Open Day, there should be ‘a Committee of themselves attending with at least two Justices of the Peace, & the Constables of... Bloomsbury &... a Guard, Such a one as usually attends at the Playhouse & even after all this many Accidents must & will happen’.

This reference to the theatre evoked memories of the riots at the Haymarket in 1738, Drury Lane in 1744 and 1755 and Covent Garden in 1763. There was one episode in 1764, on the occasion of a visit by the Duke of Brunswick, when several persons got into the Museum and forced their way through the rooms despite the officers’ best efforts to keep them out. But otherwise, the most serious moment for the Museum turned out to be the Gordon Riots of 1780, when the house of a former Trustee in...
nearby Bloomsbury Square was burned to the ground. However a regiment of 600 soldiers was stationed at the Museum, and it was not touched by the rioters. A military guard was reintroduced as the Bloomsbury area was developed in the early 19th century, which came in useful during the Corn Riots of 1815, when the Lord Chancellor’s house in Bloomsbury Street came under attack. From 1837 the guard was supported by the Metropolitan Police.
1.2 PHYSICAL ACCESS

Getting into the Museum

WHEN WAS IT OPEN?
The Museum was open ‘every day’, with however substantial exceptions: Saturday and Sunday; Christmas Day, Easter and Whitsunday and one week after each; Good Friday, and ‘all days specifically appointed for Thanksgivings or Fasts’. It was closed in August and September.

The opening hours were 9:00 am - 3:00 pm from September to April. From May to August it was open during the same hours on Tuesdays to Thursdays, but on Mondays and Fridays it was open from 4:00 pm - 8:00 pm. This late afternoon slot was ‘calculated to accommodate for a few months persons of a different class’.

WOULD I HAVE TO APPLY TO GET IN?
Yes, to enter the Museum, you had to apply for a ticket and give your name, ‘condition’, and place of residence, and the day and hour you wish to be admitted. You had to hand in your application to the porter before 9:00 am or between 4:00 pm and 8:00 pm on some preceding day. He put the names in a register and gave it to the Principal Librarian or an Under-Librarian for authorisation. The visitor then had to come back to collect the ticket, and probably return on a third day for the actual visit.

HOW MANY TICKETS WERE THERE?
At first there were just 10 tickets (for two groups of five) for each hour of admittance; this was soon increased to 15. Five at a time was thought to be the maximum for safety: ‘If more be admitted at a time the Officers Assistant cannot have a sufficient eye over them.’ Tours were given at 9.00, 11.00 and 1.00 and for the afternoon sessions, at 4.00 and 6.00. This allowed for a visitor rate of between 60-75 people a day. If a tour was already fully booked, you could name another day and hour.

WAS THERE A WAITING LIST?
Yes, of course. When Dr Matthew Maty, as Principal Librarian, gave evidence to a House of Commons Committee in 1774, all tickets were taken for a week ahead, and some 300 people were waiting. The previous year there had at one time been a waiting list of 2000, and a three months delay in getting your ticket. In August 1776 Reverend Samuel Harper, the Keeper of Printed Books, wrote in a memorandum, ‘The applications of the Middle of April are not yet satisfied. The Persons applying are expected to send weekly to the Porter to know how nearly They are upon the List.’

Between 1759 and 1774 Maty claimed there had not been a vacant day, but there clearly were seasonal variations. In 1784 the Museum acknowledged that ‘the applicants in the spring and summer months are generally very numerous but that in the winter there are often too few applicants’. It was also easiest to get in first thing in the morning: the 9.00 tour frequently had to be cancelled for lack of support.

DID I NEED TO KNOW A TRUSTEE PERSONALLY?
Certainly if you want to read a book. See below for the Reading Room.

COULD I GO MORE THAN ONCE?
Yes, you can go as often as you please, but you have to reapply for another ticket.

CAN I FIDDLE THE RULES?
When people did not pick up their tickets, the officers and messengers would give them to people or relatives who had waited around on the offchance. People who arrived with another person’s ticket could get in, as long as they advised the officers to change the name, for part of their job was to turn away anyone that trying to enter ‘under a fictitious Name or Character’.

It was strictly forbidden for any of these unclaimed tickets to be sold, but the Trustees suspected this practice was going on; they frequently complained that the officers, especially the porter, were letting people into the Museum contrary to procedures, and
threatened them with dismissal if caught. Ticket touts were less subject to Trustee pressure: in 1784 one visitor from Birmingham complained he had had to pay two shillings to a tout for a ticket.

**SO HOW DO I GET TO READ A BOOK?**

From the beginning (draft regulations 1757) it was agreed that ‘a particular room be allotted for the persons so admitted (to undertake research), in which they may sit, and read or write, without interruption, during the time the Museum is kept open’.

But the rules for entry here were even stricter, and relied heavily on personal recommendation. Originally you had to have the permission of the Trustees granted in a General Meeting or Committee Meeting; in 1760 this was relaxed so that the Principal Librarian could grant admission. But everything still depended on personal recommendation. In 1804 the regulations still demanded that a prospective reader must ‘if not known to any Trustee or Officer.... produce a recommendation from some person of known and approved character as it might be dangerous, in so populous a metropolis as London, to admit perfect strangers’. And it could be embarrassing if you presumed too far; in 1818 one W. H. Hone received a letter from Lord Grenville, to the effect that he did not think himself ‘at liberty to exercise the privilege of personal recommendation, except in the cases of those individuals of whom I had, more or less directly, some personal knowledge, and this is the answer which I have felt myself compelled to make on former occasions, as on the present’.

If you were not a serious scholar, you could apply to be a ‘temporary reader’, those ‘having occasion to consult or inspect any Book, Charter or Deed for Evidence or Information other than for Studying’ - but such readers could only consult a book or manuscript in the presence of the Principal Librarian himself, or of one of the officers of the department to which it belonged.

Tickets were issued for no longer than six months at a time. Not surprisingly therefore people continued to use their tickets beyond the expiry date, as Panizzi, the Principal Librarian, admitted to the Royal Commission in 1849.

**THIS ALL SOUNDS VERY RESTRICTIVE: CAN I COMPLAIN?**

Well, you could try writing to The Times...

**DID IT GET BETTER?**

After the appointment of Joseph Planta as Principal Librarian in 1799 the relaxation of the Rules began, but it took a long while for these measures to be effective.

1803 Individuals were allowed to claim up to 12 tickets immediately, provided they produced a list of names and addresses - which no doubt did wonders for the local ticket touts.

1805 To stop ‘the practice of monopolizing tickets which has heretofore been too prevalent’, the issue of advance tickets ceased and tickets were handed out to individuals as they signed in. Numbers were also increased - five groups of up to 15 would now be admitted hourly between 10.00 and 2.00, but only on three days a week. This still didn’t work - the day’s tickets were snapped up in minutes and some ticket holders had to hang around for two or three hours until it was their turn to see the galleries.

1808 Now eight groups of 15 were admitted between 11.00 and 2.00 on four days a week. But as they all had to go round the same route, this meant ‘the others (were to set off) in succession, as fast as there are Attendants at liberty to conduct them; leaving, however, a sufficient interval for the preceding company to clear the first two rooms in its progress through the house.’
1.2 PHYSICAL ACCESS

Getting into the Museum

1810 unlimited and unescorted admission for ‘persons of decent appearance’ was finally introduced on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (Open Days) between 10.00 and 2.00. Once inside the new Townley Gallery of antiquities, people could then stay there until the Museum closed at 4.00 pm.

The access debate continued:

The Times correspondence 1823-5

Letter to The Times, October 1823 ‘The reading rooms of this great establishment are hermetically sealed against the majority of those who wish to frequent them for scientific purposes’

Letter to The Times, 1825 ‘a kind of rookery for certain favourites and dependents, where each has a snug nest and a comfortable maintenance, and each will do as little as he possibly can for his bread and butter’

NOTES
2.0 THE VISITOR PROFILE

Exhibition Stare Case, print by Thomas Rowlandson, showing visitors to the Royal Academy at Somerset House, London, around 1811
2.0 THE VISITOR PROFILE

OVERALL VISITOR NUMBERS
Dr Maty reported to Parliament in 1774 that the British Museum received 10,000 visitors a year, and claimed that there was no other museum in Europe with such visitor numbers. However it was not until the abandonment of the ticket system in 1810 that numbers seriously started to rise.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Visits</th>
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<td>1819-20</td>
<td>55,614</td>
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<td>1820-21</td>
<td>62,543</td>
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<td>1821-22</td>
<td>91,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822-23</td>
<td>98,751</td>
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AUDIENCE SEGMENT ANALYSIS?
Access to the Museum was never based on wealth, property ownership or religion, nor did it officially demand any particular level of intelligence.

However it is clear that the Trustees distinguished clearly between scholarly and non-scholarly visitors. They drew up their first draft set of Rules proposed to be Observed in making the Collections of proper Use to the Publick in 1755, ‘In Order to prevent as much as possible persons of Mean & low degree & rude or ill behaviour from intruding on such who were designed to have free Access to the Repository Viz. for the Sake of Learning or Curiosity tending to the Advancement & Improvement of Natural Philosophy & other Branches of Speculative knowledge & in Order to render the said Repository of such Use to the Publick as by the Act for that purpose was meant & Intended.’

Despite this Trustee bias in favour of ‘Learned & Curious persons’ and the difficulty of access for ‘persons of Mean & low degree’, it is clear that the lower class were succeeding in getting in. In 1774 Maty commented that combining persons of different ranks and interests in the tours was often disagreeable, and that it was unpleasant for the officers to have to take round the Museum ‘the lower Kind of people’, who in many instances have behaved improperly to them.

In 1784 the trustees acknowledged that the majority of visitors ‘consisted chiefly of Mechanics and persons of the lower Class, few of whom would probably have been at any expense to satisfy mere curiosity.’

CHILDREN
The first Statutes and Rules state firmly: ‘That no children be admitted to the Museum’, a ban no doubt connected both to the fear of damage to the objects and the lack of public lavatories. This was not relaxed at all until 1837.

TOURISTS
These were the days before mass tourism, but there were clearly many foreigners among the general visitors, as well as those who came under the heading of specialist visitors, for whom special access provision was granted.

The Museum was always conscious of the need to accommodate ‘Foreigners of eminence not at leisure to stay...’ (General Meetings, Minutes, June 1759) and it is striking that these form the majority of the published visitors’ accounts. In 1760 they made a provision to allow certain persons to consult with the officers out of their usual touring hours in order to have a closer inspection of the collection. At first
this was done specifically for foreigners, but within a few days they had amended this to extend the privilege to the native population.

‘SELECT COMPANIES’

At least from 1808 at least one day was reserved for ‘Persons distinguished in Learning, Science or Art,... and foreigners and other persons of eminence who may be desirous of examining any part of the collection more minutely and attentively than can be done in the crowd who are necessarily admitted on the public days’. At first Fridays were reserved for this group; after 1810 it was Tuesdays and Thursdays.

ARTISTS

Also in the ‘select company’ group were up to 20 Royal Academy students. The whole question of drawing in the galleries was frowned on at first, and only gradually allowed.

READERS

On the opening day there were just eight people in the Reading Room, and numbers remained low for most of the 18th century. However under Planta’s rule, admissions went up from 200 a year in 1799 to 500 a year by 1820.

Readers were mainly clerics, physicians and lawyers. From the start they included some famous names: Sir William Blackstone, the jurist and MP, David Hume and Thomas Gray. Dr Johnson was granted a ticket in May 1761, though there is no evidence that he ever used the Reading Room itself: he was a friend of the Keeper of Manuscripts, who had recommended him, so may have used his private office.

COPYING

The issue of permitting copying does not just date from the advent of the photocopier. On 3 February 1759 the Trustees ordered Dr Templeman, the first Keeper of the Reading Room, not to ‘suffer any person to be brought into the reading room by persons who have leave to study therein, in order to make copies or make drawings from them, without their having obtain’d leave of the Committee for that purpose’.
3.0 THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The Hall and Stair Case, British Museum, etching by Augustus Pugin and Thomas Rowlandson of the interior of Montagu House, first published in Rudolph Ackermann, Microcosm of London 3 vols. (1808-9), vol. 1
3.0 THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

THE TOUR

For most of these years, and for most of the public, the Museum visit consisted of a tour, in a group of 15. At first the tours lasted three hours, an hour in each department (Manuscripts, Medals and Coins; Natural and Artificial Productions; and Printed Books), but visits were soon shortened to two hours and visitors might decide amongst themselves where they would spend the most time. This was to avoid their having to waste time among ‘books or manuscripts which few care for, and most are highly disgusted with’ and so that they ‘will be for the greater part employed in seeing things, which are the chief, if not the only object of their curiosity’.

If a member of the tour wanted to see a book or other part of the collection, the officer could remove one item at a time from the cases for closer inspection. And it was even possible for the minority to linger in one room whilst the others went ahead.

THE ROUTE

(The following description is taken from Edward Miller, That Noble Cabinet, page 65, which itself draws on an early guide to the Museum, in London and its Environs Described, (volume 2, Dodsley, 1761).

Having arrived on the landing and noticed the bust of Sir Hans Sloane at the top of the stairs, the party was conducted into a handsome saloon, furnished with a curious selection of miscellaneous objects, for the most part the Egyptian antiquities presented by the Lethieullier family, including the first of the Museum’s famous collection of mummies, various species of coral, a vulture’s head in spirits, and the stuffed flamingo.

Here the visitor could await his turn to be conducted around the building, no doubt looking the paintings on the walls and ceiling, examining the exhibits, or gazing through the tall graceful windows onto the elegantly laid out gardens or across the fields, crisscrossed by hedges and by the pipes of the New River water company, to the wooded hills of Hampstead and Highgate.

His turn at length come, the visitor would pass into a suite of rooms belonging to the Department of Manuscripts, Coins and Medals, the first of which contained part of the Royal Library, together with the Cottonian manuscripts, including Cotton’s copy of Magna Carta. Next followed three rooms filled with the Harleian collection, including the Harleian medals, whilst in a fifth room were the medals belonging to Sloane’s collection, to the number of over 20,000, whilst in the sixth and last room of the department were to be found Sloane’s manuscripts, mostly scientific or medical. The next room contained the greater part of the antiquities and then, the visitor entered the west wing, in which were housed Sloane’s natural history collections.

Descending to the ground floor, by means of a secondary staircase, the perambulation was continued through two rooms devoted to the bulk of the Royal Library, and then through the spacious and handsome suite, which contained the printed library of Sir Hans Sloane. Finally, after going through the Trustees’ room, the party would be conducted back towards the entrance by way of Major Edwards’ library and the remaining portion of the old Royal Library, the rest of which had already been seen at the western extremity of the building.

THE GUIDES

In June 1801 the officers of the Museum were relieved of the ‘unimportant office of daily exhibiting the curiosities’. Three attendants were engaged to do this, with the help of a guidebook.

THE LABELS AND THE DISPLAYS

As the Hutton quote indicates, some of the collections were labelled in the 18th century. But this was done more systematically from the early 19th century. In 1806 it was decreed that all the cases should bear proper inscriptions, indicating their respective contents; in 1807 the curators were told to keep the botanical collections in proper sequence and in 1808 Dr George Shaw, the Keeper of Natural History, was told to reorganise the
basement rooms, where much of the natural history collection was stored, so as to move objects likely to interest or instruct the visitor upstairs and to move duplicates downstairs.

NOTES
4.0 VISITOR RESPONSES

The Townley Collection in the Dining Room at Park Street, Westminster, watercolour by W. Chambers, London, 1794-95
4.0 VISITOR RESPONSES

‘Above all the British Museum pleased me best’, John Coltman (aged 12) 1780

(i) ‘THE BLUESTOCKING’

Catherine Talbot (1721-1770) had a preview visit on 15 August 1756:

‘One evening was spent at Montague House, henceforth to be known as the British Museum. I was delighted to see Science in this Town so Magnificently and Elegantly lodged; perhaps You have seen that fine House and Pleasant garden: I never did before, but thought I liked it much better now, inhabited by Valuable Mss, Silent Pictures and Ancient Mummies, than I should have done when it was filled with Miserable Fine People, a Seat of Gayety on the inside and a place of duels without…

Nothing is yet ranged but two of three rooms of Mss. Three and Thirty Rooms in all are to be filled with Curiosities of every kind. A number of Learned and Deserving Persons are made happy by the places bestowed on them to preserve and show this fine Collection: These have Comfortable Apartments in the Wings, and a Philosophic Grove and Physick Garden, where at leisure hours they may improve their health and Studies together.’


Poet and essayist Catherine Talbot belonged to the literary set known as the Bluestockings. She was a good friend of Bishop Butler, the Earl of Bath, Lord Lyttleton, William Pulteney, Mrs Montagu and Samuel Richardson. She contributed to Samuel Johnson’s Rambler and achieved fame with her Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week (1770).

(ii) THE FRENCH TOURIST...

Pierre Jean Grosley speaks warmly of the Museum, both ‘of the treasures which it contains and of the eagerness of the English to raise it to the utmost perfection’ but complains about the inadequate arrangements for viewing the collections, despite ‘the obliging readiness’ of the staff.

Grosley also commented about the locals: that ‘the English walk very fast; their thoughts being entirely engrossed by business, they are very punctual to their appointments, and those, who happen to in their way, are sure to be sufferers by it; constantly darting forward, they justle them with a force proportioned to the bulk and velocity of their motion.’

A Tour of London, 1772: volume 2, pages 20-5

(iii) THE FRENCH MUSEUM PROFESSIONAL

Barthélemi Faujas de Saint-Fond, an eminent French geologist, professor in the Museum of Natural History in Paris and later to be the sponsor and chronicler of the first flight in a hot air balloon (by the Montgolfiers in 1783), commented:

‘The British Museum contains many valuable collections in natural history, but nothing is in order, everything is out of its place; and this assemblage appears rather as an immense magazine, in which things have been thrown at random, rather than a scientific collection, destined to instruct and honour a great nation’

Travels in England, Scotland and the Hebrides, London 1779, volume 1 page 89

(iv) THE GERMAN TOURIST

The German writer Carl Philip Moritz visited England in 1782:

‘The contents of the Museum must be made available to the general public, since, ‘tho’ chiefly designed for the use of learned and studious men, both native and foreigners, in their researches into the several parts of knowledge, yet bring a national establishment… it may be judged reasonable, that the advantages accruing from it should be rendered as general as possible’

‘The company who saw it, when and as I did, was various and some of all sorts, and some, as I believe, of the lowest classes of the people of both sexes; for, as it is the property of the Nation, everyone has the same right to see it that another has.’

‘I am sorry to say that it was the room, the glass cases, the shelves… which I saw; not the Museum itself, so rapidly were we hurried through the departments.'
The gentleman who conducted us took little pains to conceal the contempt, which he felt for my communications when he found out it was only a German guidebook, which I had... So rapid a passage through a vast suite of rooms in little more than one hour of time, with opportunity to cast but one poor longing look of astonishment on all the vast treasures of nature, antiquity and literature, in the examination of which one might profitably spend years confuses, stuns and overpowers the visitor’.


Moritz was struck by one particular difference between England and Germany. His landlady, a tailor’s widow, read Milton, while in Germany, only the educated, prosperous class read their national literature. In England, it was ‘plain beyond all comparison’ that the common people read more than their equivalents in Germany, and that ‘this improves the lower classes and brings them nearer the higher, so that there are few subjects of general conversation among the latter on which the workers are not able to form an opinion’.

He describes his amazement at the number of English people who wore spectacles, the amount they drank, the dreadful food they ate, the expense of a simple salad, the drunkenness of the dons, the riotous behaviour in Parliament and the high level of education among the ordinary people.

(v) THE BIRMINGHAM ANTIQUARIAN

William Hutton, entrepreneur and local historian, visited the Museum in 1785:

‘We assembled on the spot, about ten in number, all strangers to me, perhaps to each other. We began to move pretty fast, when I asked with some surprise whether there were none to inform us what the curiosities were as we went on? A tall genteel young man in person, who seemed to be our conductor, replied with some warmth: ‘What! Would you have me tell you everything in the Museum? How is it possible? Besides, are not the names written upon many of them?’ I was much too humbled by this reply to utter another word. The company seemed influenced; they made haste and were silent. No voice was heard but whispers... It grieved me to think how much I lost for want of a little information. In about thirty minutes we finished our silent journey through this princely mansion, which would well have taken thirty days. I went out about as much wise as I went in....’

Journey to London, 1784

Hutton (1723-1815) was in his early 60s at the time of his visit to the Museum. Born into a Midlands family, which fell on hard times when his mother died and his father became an alcoholic, he went to school at the age of five, but was apprenticed early, first in a silk-mill and then as a silk-stockinger. In his 20s he taught himself to bind books and in 1750 opened a bookshop in Birmingham, followed in 1756 by the first paper-warehouse in the city. Through his paper-selling business he became a wealthy man, and built himself houses both in the city and outside. Having begun his writing career as a poet, writing verses for magazines, he published his History of Birmingham in 1781. At the time of his journey to London, he was probably working simultaneously on local, medieval and legal history: within the next few years he published his History of the Court of Requests (of which he was elected president in 1787), his Battle of Bosworth Field and his History of Blackpool.

(vi) THE WEALTHY FREANCH AMERICAN

Louis Simond was a Frenchman who had left France for the US before the Revolution and became a successful merchant in New York.

‘You have to wait in the hall of entrance till fourteen other visitors are assembled, for the rule is that fifteen persons are to be admitted at one time, neither more not less. This number completed a German ciceroni took charge of us, and led us, au pas de charge, through a number of rooms full of stuffed birds and animals - many of them seemingly in a state of decay’, ‘treating the company with double entendres and
witticisms on various subjects of natural history, in a style of vulgarity and impudence which I should not have expected to have met in this place and this country’.

Journal of a Tour and Residence in Great Britain during the years 1810 and 1811, Edinburgh, 1815.

RESPONSE TO PARTICULAR OBJECTS OR COLLECTIONS

Although the published guides, of which the earliest was Edward Powlett’s General Contents of the British Museum was published as early as 1761, give detailed descriptions of particular objects and collections, most visitors, like those quoted above, describe their experience only in general terms. Some of the guides, though, give more personal descriptions than would be usual in a guide book today:

‘Further on are some Talismans and Abraxas, a Kind of Spells or Charms with which some superstitious or artful people in the first Ages of Christianity pretended they could cure all Diseases, the Parties afflicted wearing them about their Persons: It was likewise imagined they were a Protection from Witchcraft and Enchantments’.

Edward Powlett’s General Contents of the British Museum, 1761

‘In the left corner (of the South Sea Room, established in 1778) is the mourning dress of an Otaheitean lady; opposite are rich cloaks and helmets of feathers from the Sandwich Islands. Over the fireplace are the Cava bowls and above them, battoons (and) various other implements of war. The idols of the various islands present, in their hideous rudeness, a singular contrast with many of the works of art’.

David Hughson (ie David Pugh) London, being an Accurate History of the British Metropolis, 1805-9 volume 4, page 390

THE READING ROOM EXPERIENCE

Provision for readers changed at least five times during the period 1753 - 1820.

The first reading room was ‘the corner room No. 90 in the base storey’ (ie. ground level), in the SW angle of the building. It had two windows looking out over the garden, ‘a proper wainscot table, covered with green bays in the same manner as those in the libraries’ and twenty chairs. There were cases of stuffed birds lining every wall. In 1765 the floor was provided with rush matting and the window frames were repaired and made tight.

At first only one book could be ordered at a time, and at least one day’s notice had to be given. On 27 June 1760 ‘a Complaint having been made that the Duty of the several officers and servants has been rendered burthensome by disorderly applications from the Reading Room for Books of which no previous notice had been given the day before’, Templeman, the Keeper, was ordered to enforce the rule that a day’s notice must be given for any book or manuscript.

Despite these pressures, Thomas Gray wrote on 7 August 1759: ‘This last (the Museum) is my favourite Domain, where I often pass four hours in the day in the stillness and solitude of the reading room, wch is uninterrupted by anything but Dr Stukeley the Antiquarian, who comes there to talk nonsense; & Coffee-house news; the rest of the Learned are (I suppose) in the country, at least none of them come there, except two Prussians and a man who writes for Ld Royston. When I call it peaceful, you are to understand it only of us Visitors, for the Society itself, Trustees & all, are up in arms, like the Fellows of a College.’

In 1774 the second Reading Room was established in the two corner rooms ‘the South-West-angle room upon the first State Story’. This continued in use until 1803.
Isaac D’Israeli, son of a Venetian immigrant, author of ‘Curiosities of Literature’ and father of Benjamin Disraeli: (published in 1838, but relates to earlier experience?) ‘I passed two years in agreeable researches at the British Museum, which then was so rare a circumstance, that it had been difficult to have made up a jury of all the spirits of study which haunted the reading room... There we were, little attended to, musing in silence and oblivion; for sometimes we had to wait a day or two until the volumes, so eagerly demanded, slowly appeared’.

In 1803, with many new readers including refugees from French Revolution, a third Reading Room no XIV, was adapted. It was another corner room, with three large windows on the north side and one on the south. The Gentleman’s Magazine wrote in 1803: ‘An officer is in attendance to assist the readers... in general, I have found much more alacrity in fetching the books and manuscripts that are called for’.

In 1809 there was a fourth change: two other rooms were used, but these also soon proved inadequate, and in 1817 in a fifth change, room no 5 on the upper floor, previously used for the Harleian MSS, was brought into play. There were to be further additions in 1823 and in 1825.

However though all these changes of room were in response to increased reader numbers, the system of application, as we have seen, continued to arouse the ire of those excluded.

NOTES
Creamware plate decorated with a scene from Aesop’s *Fables*, ‘The Cock and the Fox’, Staffordshire, England, about 1770-75
Within these different audience groups, how much would people have known about the objects they were about to see? How might the Enlightenment climate of the time have affected the experience of their visit?

**LITERACY**

The first requirement, if visitors had to apply in writing, was clearly that they had to be literate.

**Percentage of people who were illiterate 1750-1784.** (Schofield, 1981)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gentry, Professional and Officials</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in Retail</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husbandmen</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in Construction and Mining</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers and Servants</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EDUCATION**

What sort of education would people have had in the 18th century? To what extent did it address the fields covered by the Museum’s collections: natural history, ancient history, the scientific world etc.?

As the figures above show, education in England in the 18th century was largely for the nobility and gentry. Towards the end of the century philanthropists and educationalists like Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster were forming educational societies, for the education of the poor, such as the Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor, founded in 1796, but it was not until 1802, in the Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, that the state intervened, requiring employers to educate their apprentices in basic mathematics, writing, and reading.

Most women, however, were only offered training in ‘accomplishments’, that is the various skills that contributed to the moral development and the decorative qualities of a wife: music, drawing, singing, painting and so on.

**ENLIGHTENMENT IDEAS ABOUT EDUCATION**

‘Sapare aude! Dare to know! Have the courage to use your own intelligence’ Kant

The Enlightenment writers had different ideas of how people learned. Locke took the view that at birth we are *tabula rasa*, a clean slate on which the ideas of knowledge are scribed, whereas Kant’s view was that human understanding builds up through the process in which each generation builds on the knowledge of the previous one. How do these ideas relate to the idea and process of visiting museums?

**NEWSPAPERS**

At the beginning of the 18th century newspapers started to appear in some numbers: the *Daily Courant* in 1702, the *Evening Post* in 1706, the *London Journal* in 1723. However it was after the London press won the right to publish Parliamentary debates in 1771 that the greatest expansion took place: the *Morning Post* appeared in 1780, *The Times* in 1785 and the *Observer* in 1791.

Newspapers could be read in clubs and coffeehouses, but it wasn’t necessary to sit down; there were shops where you could stand to read the papers for a penny or even a halfpenny, and then continue on your way. All this presumably made for mass circulation, especially in urban areas. Newspapers also often worked their way down from master to servant in many households.

**SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY**

The discovery in 1781 of the planet Uranus, the first planet to be discovered since antiquity, by Frederick William Herschel, a German refugee working as an organist and music teacher in Bath, generated huge public interest and won him a knighthood, the title of king’s astronomer and a pension of £200 a year. Can we demonstrate any evidence of the impact of these discoveries on museum visits?
GRAND TOUR

The collections displayed in the Enlightenment Gallery clearly owe a great deal to the popularity of the Grand Tour in the 18th century, and the Grand Tourists recorded their experience in journals and letters home. Since the tour could last for several months, it was only open to the wealthy nobility and gentry. How many of them went on to become regular museum visitors on their return?
A MUSEUM FOR LEARNING

To what extent did the Museum in the 18th century understand itself to be a learning institution?

Sir Hans Sloane had a very clear idea that the purpose of his collections was to show the greater glory of God:

‘They [products of natural history] afford great Matter of Admiring the Power, Wisdom and Providence of Almighty God, in Creating, and Preserving the things he has created. There appears so much Contrivance, in the variety of Beings, preserv’d from the beginning of the World, that the more any Man searches, the more he will admire; and conclude them, very ignorant in the History of Nature, who say, they were the Productions of Chance.’

Parliament, on the other hand, hoped for more practical results from their investment:

‘And whereas all Arts and Sciences have a Connection with each other, and Discoveries in Natural Philosophy, and other Branches of speculative Knowledge, for the Advancement and Improvement whereof the said Museum or Collection was intended, do and may, in many Instances, give Help and Success to the most useful Experiments and Inventions.’

What had the Enlightenment stress on learning from experience to say about how people might learn from museum objects?

‘When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance, let us ask, ‘Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.’

David Hume, An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, 1758
6.0 ALTERNATIVE ATTRACTIONS

William Hogarth’s gold admission ticket to Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, probably from London, around 1740
6.1 ALTERNATIVE ATTRACTIONS: Museums, galleries and exhibitions

ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, OXFORD
When drawing up the British Museum rules, the Trustees had specifically considered access arrangements at just one other museum, the Ashmolean in Oxford. This was open from 8.00 - 11.00 and 2.00 - 5.00 in summer and 1.00 - 4.00 in winter; there was a fee of a shilling for a single visitor; those in groups, regardless of the size of the party paid six pence each.

ROYAL ACADEMY
The first major contemporary art exhibition in London took place in 1760, and was staged by the Society of Artists. The Royal Academy held its first exhibition in 1769, but it was not until 1780 that the Academy exhibited at the newly rebuilt Somerset House, where Sir William Chambers designed a new complex of government buildings with the Royal Academy as its centrepiece. The first exhibition attracted 61,381 visitors. Thomas Rowlandson’s famous print is probably based on a drawing done c. 1800. It draws attention to three aspects of the gallery-going experience: that an architect is often more interested in the visual effect of his building than in its practical utility; that some female visitors came to be seen as much as to see and that some male visitors were more interested in real flesh than in the painted variety.

AUCTION HOUSES
James Christie held his first sale at Pall Mall in 1766.

PRIVATE EXHIBITIONS
The same practice of opening one’s private collection to one’s friends continued through the 18th century, but there was no obligation on such householders to allow full public access. Dr Mead of Great Ormond Street allowed students to copy his pictures every morning, and opened his house to members of the nobility, scientists and philosophers for free, but there is no evidence that he considered admitting the public at large.

Sir Ashton Lever placed a notice in the newspapers that because he was ‘tired out with the insolence of the common People who had visited his museum, he would refuse admittance to the lower class except they come provided with a ticket from some Gentleman or Lady of my acquaintance,’ and people of the lower class would not be admitted ‘during the time of Gentlemen and Ladies being in the Museum’.

TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS
One-off exhibitions were held at various London venues. One which directly related to the British Museum’s collections was held in March 1799, just off Old Bond Street. ‘The real embalmed head of the powerful and renowned usurper, Oliver Cromwell, with the original dies for the medals struck in honour of his victory at Dunbar, are now exhibited at No. 5, in Mead Court, Old Bond Street; a genuine narrative relating to the acquisition, concealment and preservation of these articles to be had at the place of exhibition’. The same premises had displayed a rattlesnake the previous year.

Oliver Cromwell’s head was apparently sold many times until the 19th century. It was finally buried in Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge in the 1960s.

NOTES
Libraries: When drawing up the British Museum rules, the Trustees specifically considered access arrangements at several other libraries:

The Bodleian, Oxford, was free for all graduates of the university; undergraduates and others could use it by permission and on paying a small fee. All persons could transcribe from printed books or manuscripts, but no book could be removed from the library. It was open during vacation as well as term time, except on holy days, from 8.00 - 11.00 and from 1.00 - 4.00 (winter) and 2.00 - 5.00 (summer).

The University of Cambridge Library was only open to graduates, but they were allowed to borrow on a quarterly basis.

Sion College Library was largely used by London clergy, but any person, clergy or lay, could study there by recommendation from a minister of a London church; there was an admission fee of 6 shillings. It was open from 8.00 - 12.00 and 2.00 - 5.00. Books could only be lent under exceptional circumstances ‘under the hand of a Governor’, for one month within the city and suburbs of London.

Learned societies: The 18th century saw the mushrooming in London of learned societies; membership was by ballot, but non-members could attend by invitation. The Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries, both based at Somerset House, were mainly scholarly in purpose; but others encouraged wider participation.

The Royal Institution, in Albemarle Street, was founded 1799 ‘for the Purpose of diffusing the Knowledge, and... application of Science to the common Purposes of Life’. Its lecture room could seat over 1000, and it had a library and a room for reading the newspaper. It was funded by its 400 proprietors, paying 100 guineas each, and its life subscribers paying 30 guineas.

NOTES
6.3 ALTERNATIVE ATTRACTIONS: Sight-seeing

THE TOWER OF LONDON

The Tower combined the attractions of historic site, museum (the armoury, with its display of weapons and the Jewel Office, housing the Crown Jewels) and zoo. The royal menagerie included lions, tigers, leopards, panthers, a laughing hyena, the Spanish wolf, the ant bear and some mountain cats and racoons. There were also monkeys, until one of them attacked a small boy and they had to be removed. There was an entry charge to the Tower, and the zoo keeper charged a shilling to show visitors round. The more official parts of the Tower, such as the Mint, however, were closed to visitors.

ST PAUL’S CATHEDRAL

St Paul’s had taken about 40 years to build; the dome was eventually completed in 1711. Entry was free at service times: 6.00 am, 9.45 am and 3.15 pm; the rest of the time it was shut, but visitors could knock at a door in the north portico, and would be allowed in for a small payment. The cathedral did not yet have many monuments, and its vaults were still of brick, rather than the later mosaic, but extra highlights included inspecting the Great Bell and its 14-foot pendulum (2d); and climbing the 534 steps to the highest gallery (4d).

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

In the 18th century the House of Commons was still housed, as it had been since the Middle Ages, in St Stephen’s Chapel. There was a public gallery along the west end. Access during sittings was through a Member of Parliament, by introduction or a written order, or by paying a fee to the doorkeeper. Women were not admitted during sittings. There was however a kitchen, which served light-refreshments, and a coffee-room where visitors could dine.

The experience of watching the Commons seems not to have changed a great deal since the 18th century:

‘It is not unusual to see a Member stretched out on one of the benches while the rest are in debate. One member may be cracking nuts, another eating an orange or whatever fruit may be in season; they are constantly going in and out. Whenever one of them wishes to leave the chamber he stands first before the Speaker and makes him a bow, just like a schoolboy begging permission of his teacher’

Carl Moritz, Journeys of a German in England: A Walking tour of England in 1782

NOTES
6.4 ALTERNATIVE ATTRACTIONS: Theatres and concerts

THEATRES

When the British Museum was set up the Trustees, as we have seen, were clearly anticipating a similar audience. From 1737 theatres were tightly controlled by the Crown, through the Lord Chamberlain. In London only two ‘patent’ theatres were licensed.

Covent Garden, which opened in 1732, was the larger, seating 2000 people. There were no reserved seats, and while doors opened at 5.00 pm, the play did not start until 6.00 pm, so the playgoer either had to sit it out, or hire someone to occupy his seat for him. Henry Fielding thought the audience came in any case merely to be seen: ‘They talk continually no matter of what, for they talk only to be taken notice of, for which reason they raise their voices to be taken notice of by those who pass by’.

_A Trip through the Town_ (1735)

Drury Lane attracted the widest social group. It held 900 people, and the programme was arranged to meet a wide range of tastes: It could be a Shakespearean tragedy, with a display of tightrope walking in the interval, followed by a pantomime or comedy. In 1744 a riot over a proposed rise in ticket prices caused more than £2000 worth of damage and in 1755 after a free fight with gallants with drawn swords and a mob smashing seats and scenery, the damage cost £4000 to put right. David Garrick ran the theatre and performed there from 1742 to 1776; he was succeeded as manager by Sheridan, and on the stage by Sarah Siddons and John Kemble.

The Theatres Act had curtailed the activities of the _Theatre Royal in the Haymarket_, which after carrying on illegally for some years, in 1766 was allowed to stage drama through the summer, from May to September, when the patent theatres were closed.

Similarly at _Sadler’s Wells_, where there had been a ‘Musick House’ since 1683, theatre had to take second place to the drinking establishment. But in 1765 Thomas Rosoman opened a new theatre, concentrating on opera and topical entertainment.

Since the area was still rural, the manager advertised the fact that performances were scheduled for moonlit nights, and even in 1793 hired a patrol of horse and foot to escort his patrons as far as the Tottenham Court Turnpike. And its audiences still left something to be desired: The Public Advertiser commented: _‘It exhibits a mockery of dramatic entertainment to crowded mariners and their red-ribboned Mollies, where the convivial pint of Portugal wine... wet the lips of the tar and his temporary wife.’_

CONCERTS

The _Academy of Music_ opened in 1710. It was originally made up of composers and performers, with a subscription of £2 guinea. As it expanded ladies were admitted, and the meetings became public concerts. They took place at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand, though from 1785 to 1799 they moved to the Freemason’s Hall in Great Queen Street. The season began in January, and held eight fortnightly concerts.

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NOTES

Accessing Enlightenment - an introductory study guide
MONTAGU HOUSE GARDENS

Montagu House already had extensive gardens behind the house, with grassy plots, gravelled paths and ornamental sculptures. When the British Museum took over the building, these were neglected, but the Trustees made an agreement with the gardener, Mr Bramley, for ‘Rolling, Mowing, Watering, Planting, Digging, Pruning the Trees’, and by 1755 it was reported that ‘The whole garden has been mowed, weeded and cleared of the Anthills; the Gravel Walks and borders restored, the Slopes made less steep and together with the borders planted; the Kitchen Garden trenched; a Tool House built in it; and the Basin repaired.’ By the year 1800, 600 species of plants were established.

From 11 March 1757 the gardens were open to the public, two years before visitors were admitted to the Museum itself. Admission was free, but visitors had to apply for admission tickets. Soon these became so popular that annual season tickets were issued. In 1769 the Trustees minuted that the garden might be open from 7.00 in the morning until half an hour after sunset, when a handbell would be rung to announce its closing. Those not leaving at once would not be allowed in again.

However by 1814 the Duke of Bedford had built houses on three sides of Montagu House, and the Townley Galleries had been built onto the house’s north-west corner. In the end, the gardens disappeared completely under the present-day British Museum building.

MARYLEBONE GARDENS

These were among the earliest pleasure gardens to open in 1737-8. Entrance was free, but they started to charge a one shilling entrance fee in order to keep the company select - though the visitor was entitled to receive one shilling’s worth of refreshments. In 1753 a bowling-green was added, breakfast was served, and there was a free opening on Sunday evenings, for ‘gentle company’, at which light refreshments were provided.

VAUXHALL GARDENS

This 11-acre ‘ridotto al fresco’ or open-air pleasure ground had been flourishing since the time of Charles II. It was a family business, started by Jonathan Tyers. The gardens were decorated with paintings, and an orchestra and organ played. Admission was one shilling, more for special events. It was open from mid May to the end of August; doors opened at 7.00 pm, and the concert started at 8.00 pm. Average attendance was 5,000, but could be 15,000 on special occasions.

Oliver Goldsmith wrote in 1760: ‘The satisfaction which I received the first night I went there was greater than my expectations; I went in company of several friends of both sexes, whose virtues I regard and judgements I esteem. The music, the entertainments, but particularly the singing, diffused that good humour among us which constitutes the true happiness of society’.

RANELAGH GARDENS, CHELSEA

These most fashionable of London’s pleasure gardens flourished from 1742 to 1804. The main feature was the huge Rotunda of William Jones, which had a large floor for dancing and concerts, with tiers of boxes. Admission was one shilling during the day; half a crown in the evening; a five shilling ticket included a supper of beef, ham, savoy cake, veal, pastry, jelly and blancmange (wine was extra).

Horace Walpole in 1748: ‘Ranelagh is so crowded that in going there t’other night in a string of coaches, we had a stop of six and thirty minutes’. Employers complained that apprentices were being lured from their work, so the opening hour was changed to the early evening. The entertainment included masqued balls, firework displays, puppet shows and concerts. There were booths for tea and wine, and food and drink could be served in the boxes. There were also souvenir shops, selling Dresden and Japanese china - long before these became a feature of museum visits.
6.6 ALTERNATIVE ATTRACTIONS: Sport

CRICKET

Cricket was seen as an aristocratic sport in the 18th century. Aristocrats and noblemen first played on White Conduit Fields at Islington, London. There was plenty of opportunity to gamble: around £20,000 was bet on a series of games between the Old Etonians and England in 1751. However as London’s population grew, crowds gathered to watch them play, and the nobility sought to retain their exclusivity by asking Thomas Lord, an entrepreneur and a bowler, to set up a new private ground. On 31 May 1787 he staged his first match, Middlesex v Essex, on a ground on Dorset Fields in Marylebone (modern Dorset Square), thus creating the Marylebone Cricket Club. Its Code of Laws, published a year later, was adopted throughout the game. In 1814 Lord’s moved to a rural site over an old duck pond in St John’s Wood, its present site. The new ground was so successful that Lords had to build a Pavilion and refreshment stalls, and when the Pavilion, housing scorecards, records and trophies, was destroyed in a fire in 1825 it was rebuilt the following year.

HORSE-RACING

Horse-racing had begun to become a professional sport during the early 18th century, as racecourses sprang up all over England, offering increasingly large purses to attract the best horses, which in turn made breeding and owning racing horses profitable. In 1750 racing’s elite meeting at Newmarket formed the Jockey Club, which wrote the rules of racing and sanctioned racecourses to conduct meetings. Standards defining the quality of races soon led to the designation of certain races as the ultimate tests of excellence. The ‘classics’ (for three-year-old horses) were identified in 1814: the 2,000 Guineas, the Epsom Derby and the St Leger Stakes; with two races open to fillies only: the 1,000 Guineas and the Epsom Oaks. In 1791 James Weatherby’s Introduction to the General Stud Book traced the pedigree of every horse racing in England.

WATER SPORTS

The river was seen as a major source of entertainment. Westminster Bridge, newly built in 1750, was the scene of one London regatta: ‘(the bridge) was crowded with people, while the avenues at both ends were covered with gaming tables. The boats on the river were supplied with drink in great abundance, but very bad and in short measure. Every passage to the waterside was guarded by men who took tool, from a penny to half a crown. Scaffolds were erected on the banks, where seats sold for large sums. In a word, the town had gone off its head for a new thing.’

BLOODSPORTS

Cock-fighting

This attracted people of all classes. Entrance was by season ticket; the wealthy had theirs personally inscribed. Boswell wrote of one he attended in 1762: ‘I looked round to see if any of the spectators pitied them when mangled and torn in a most cruel manner, but I could not observe the smallest relenting sign in any countenance’.

Public executions

Executions were still a public spectacle. Permanent triple gallows had stood at Tyburn since the mid 16th century. As the area became more residential, moveable gallows were put up and taken down for each execution. This system lasted from 1760 to 1783, after which the gallows were moved to the Old Bailey, outside Newgate Prison. But 281 people were executed during the 1750s. Seats for the public on the galleries erected round the gibbet were let at high prices, and for a lower price, people could perch on lamplighters ladders were pushed together to form a stand.

NOTES
The 18th century was certainly the age of shopping as entertainment. As Oxford Street and Piccadilly were laid out, shops developed rapidly to supply the needs of the residents of Mayfair. Fortnum & Mason’s was set up in 1707; Thomas Chippendale in 1753, first in Long Acre and then in St. Martin’s Lane; Josiah Wedgwood in 1768 at Great Newport Street and Hatchards on Piccadilly in 1797. There were no restrictions on shopping hours - the shops opened before breakfast, and stayed open until the shopkeeper went to bed.

Sophie von la Roche, the German novelist who visited in 1788, gives particularly vivid accounts of the shopping possibilities:

‘We strolled up and down lovely Oxford Street this evening, for some goods look more attractive by artificial light. Just imagine, dear children, a street taking half an hour to cover from end to end... Behind great glass windows absolutely everything one can think of is neatly, attractively displayed, and in such abundance of choice as almost to make one greedy... Up to eleven o’clock at night there are as many people along this street as at Frankfurt during the fair, not to mention the eternal stream of coaches...’

And again, this time in the afternoon: ‘There was a woman buying shoes for herself and her small daughter: the latter was searching among the doll’s shoes in one case to fit the doll she had with her. People, I noticed, like to have their children with them and take them out into the air, and they wrap them up well, though their feet are always bare and sockless...’

Sophie succumbed to the temptation, but rather than eat them on the street, repaired to a nearby inn.

Carl Moritz on the other hand was unimpressed by both English food and drink:

‘I would advise anybody who wants to drink coffee in England to mention beforehand how many cupfuls should be made from a half-an-ounce, otherwise he will get an atrocious mess of brown water set before him, such as I have not yet been able to avoid in spite of all my admonitions. Their fine wheaten bread, along with butter and Cheshire cheese, suffice for my meagre midday meal. Here they content themselves generally with a piece of half-boiled meat and a few cabbages boiled in nothing else but water, on which is poured a sauce concocted of flour and butter. This, I assure you, is the general way they prepare vegetables in England.’

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COFFEE HOUSES AND RESTAURANTS

Opinions varied whether passing time in this way could count as entertainment. Sophie von La Roche ate mainly in private homes, though with one notable exception when she encountered a load of oysters just arriving at the fish market near the Customs House: ‘some people were eagerly buying and carrying them off, while others had them opened and were eating them, for innumerable bread and lemon vendors were present, offering their services.’
7.0 ACCESS POLICY ISSUES

Landing the Treasures, or Results of the Polar Expedition!!!, cartoon by George Cruikshank, London, 1819
How conscious were the Museum authorities of ‘access’ issues in the mid 18th century?

THE FOUNDING DOCUMENTS
The British Museum was set up by the will of Sir Hans Sloane and the British Museum Act of 1753 (cf. Key Documents 1 and 2). Both stipulated that it should be open to the public.

STATUES AND RULES
The draft Rules of 1755 have already been quoted (section 3 Visitor Profile) to show the distinction made between the ‘learned and curious’ and the wider public. The Rules continued:

‘Tho the principal Intention in founding the British Museum is for the Use of learned and studious men, as well natives as foreigners... As the principal view and intention in founding the British Museum was to encourage and facilitate the Studies & Researches of learned Men from whose labour and application under such advantages as greater progress in the several branches of useful Knowledge may be expected & thereby the good of the publick & the honour of the nation very much promoted...’

For the final version in the preamble to Statutes and Rules 1757, see Key Documents 4.

PRINCIPAL LIBRARIAN’S COMMENTS
Gowan Knight, the Principal Librarian, wrote in 1757 that as the Museum had been founded at the public’s expense ‘it may be thought reasonable that its use should be made as general as possible, consistant (sic) with that principal Intention, the preservation and, duration and security of the several parts of the collection...’

TRUSTEES’ COMMENTS
Dr John Ward (1679-1758) had been a clerk in the Navy Office, a schoolmaster and professor of Rhetoric at Gresham College, London. He commented in 1757:

‘General liberty allowed ordinary people of all Ranks and denominations is not to be kept within bounds, and many irregularities will be committed that cannot be prevented by a few Librarians, who will soon be insulted by such people if they offer to control or contradict them, and any rules or directions given to the Librarians to keep such visitors in order, will by them be treated only with contempt and set at nought; and if any such people should be in liquor or misbehave, they are rarely without their accomplices, and may be joined by others, who out of an Idle vanity in exerting what they will call their liberty, will side with them and promote mischiefs...’

‘I find nothing in the act of parliament, which countenances public days. The collections and library were for ‘public use’, but it was ‘explained by saying that free access shall be given to this Repository to all studious and curious persons... as the Trustees shall think fit.’

ACCESS TO READING ROOM
‘As admission into the Reading Room is by all regulations hitherto made, entirely left to the Committee, they think it necessary to observe that the liberty of studying in the Museum is the part of this Institution from which the Publick is likely to reap the greatest benefit; and that therefore admission into the Reading Room should be made as convenient as possible: that as the number of persons applying for the liberty of the Reading room or at least of those making use of it when granted has not hitherto caused any inconvenience the only case necessary at present is to prevent improper persons from being admitted’

General Meetings, Minutes, volume 2, page 327, 19 January 1760

NOTES
Then, as now, the financing of the Museum had a major impact on access issues.

'THE PEOPLE’S MUSEUM?'
Since the Museum’s capital and most of its running costs were lottery-financed, there was a widespread understanding that the general public was particularly entitled to access.

Sylas Neville visited the Museum in April 1769 and wrote that it was ‘the property of the people of England, and to all the citizens who can be entertained by it. What a shame it is that other collections (also public property) are not equally accessible!’

Sylas Neville lived in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, and was an avid book collector: he often frequented London booksellers and his correspondence with one of them, Thomas Davies, in the year following his British Museum visit mentions Hutchinson’s Xenophon and the search for a one volume Vatican Virgil ‘which is not to be had in all London’. Davies also says, intriguingly, ‘I have made you creditor of a pamphlet of the Museum and shall send ye Magazine as soon as possible’.

The Museum was not the only public project supported by lottery funding in the mid 18th century. Westminster Bridge, only the second bridge over the Thames (after London Bridge), was opened in 1750 at a cost of £400,000, half of which was raised by a lottery, the rest by government grants.

FREE ENTRY
Free entry, then as now, was one of the key features of the British Museum, and occasioned much approval and surprise...

In 1788, when the Museum had been open for almost thirty years, The Times was still commenting on the novelty of free access, ‘...the British Museum, the first cabinet of curiosities in the world, is free to the public, and not one farthing exacted for seeing all that it contains.’

For visitors to many historic buildings, country houses for example, even when there was not an entry charge it was frequently obligatory to tip the servants who showed the guests around. The fact that this too was not the case at the British Museum also occasioned comment.

Count Frederick Kielmansegge from Hanover, who was in London for George III’s coronation in 1761, wrote, ‘Everybody can obtain a ticket, and receive permission to enter the Museum daily for some time to look over the books, and no servant or warder, etc., is allowed to receive a penny under penalty of dismissal.’

Sophie von La Roche, the German novelist, was even more ecstatic. ‘...Just think of seeing so many useful things without its putting the connoisseur or the merely curious to the least expense, for all gratuities are strictly prohibited.’

GOVERNMENT GRANT
At first the Trustees relied solely on the interest from their invested lottery money for the running costs of the Museum, but soon had to apply for Government support. From 1762 onwards Parliament granted every two years the sum of £2000; in 1775 this was increased to £3000.

There was a strong lobby in Parliament, led by Edmund Burke and John Wilkes, that this was completely inadequate for a national collection; they thought it should be increased to £5000. Annual government funding started in 1801.

ATTEMPTS TO CHARGE
In 1774, in response to a British Museum request for more funds from Parliament, a Parliamentary committee recommended that the trustees be permitted to charge admission on certain days of the week, though still reserving some hours for free access. This proposal was defeated by a narrow majority (56-53 votes), and in response the government increased the grant to £3000 in the following year.
However ten years later the problem had recurred. On 6 December 1783 the Trustees reconsidered the question of charging, and as well as examining assets and expenditure, they considered the number and quality of the people who had been admitted during the previous three years. The average annual expenditure was £2,242 3s. 8d.; the deficit came to £1,092 19s. 8d., and the number of visitors admitted ‘when all the Tickets that may be granted according to the subsisting regulations are taken out’ was 12,000. However since they considered that they were already satisfying demand (in winter there were often too few applications to fill the slots) and that most of those who came would have been put off by an entrance charge (since they ‘consisted chiefly of Mechanics and persons of the lower Class few of whom would probably have been at any expence [sic] to satisfy mere curiosity.’) they decided: ‘That it appears to them that no dependence can be placed on the regularity of revenue that might accrue from admitting persons to the sight of the Museum for money, and even if the amount of such revenue could be in any ways ascertained…. it would be but a small proportion of the deficiencies of the regular expenditure of the Museum...’ General Meetings, Minutes, pages 858, 9 January 1784. So the Trustees, as they were to do on many future occasions, reaffirmed their decision not to ask Parliament for permission to impose entrance charges.

It is arguable, of course, that they were underestimating the demand, and hence the amount that could have been raised by charging, had they been willing to issue more tickets.

THE INCOME TAX ISSUE

When income tax was introduced in 1798 the Trustees were presented with a demand for £675 16s 6d - and they pointed out that their whole regular income was £1,149 1s 0d. They succeeded in getting the Commission to levy a more moderate tax.
The Museum had to use the invested lottery income for running costs as well as capital expenditure; one consequence was that, then as now, they had only a very limited amount to spend on new acquisitions. Thomas Gray wrote in 1759 ‘the Trustees lay out £500 more than their income; so you may expect, all the books & the crocodiles will soon be put up to auction’. However they were lucky from the 1770s on to receive a stream of important material to enhance all the major collections.

Did the public come to see the founding collections or were they attracted in greater numbers by all the new material? To what extent does this parallel the current debate about the relative appeal of the core collections versus temporary exhibitions?

THE NATIONAL COLLECTION

The collectors who gave generously to the British Museum in the later 18th century considered that they were ‘collecting for the nation’.

Horace Walpole expressed the opinion that a collector who ‘should destine his collection to the British Museum’ would feel ‘he was collecting for his country...’

And Solomon Da Costa, a Dutch Jew from Amsterdam who settled in England, and had acquired a collection of Hebrew manuscripts and early printed books which had been in the royal collection, gave it to the Museum in 1759 ’as a small token of my esteem, love, reverence and gratitude to this most magnanimous nation; and as a thanksgiving offering in part for the generous protection and numberless blessings which I have enjoyed under it’ (Miller 74)

To what extent did the public who visited the Museum feel these sentiments?

NEW ACQUISITIONS

What were the significant new acquisitions from the public’s point of view?

In natural history, for example, there was the Hatchett collection of minerals in 1799 and the Greville collection of minerals, consisting of 20,000 specimens, in 1810.

In printed books, the Garrick Collection, works of popular literature, plays, popular tales and ballads, which arrived in 1779, supplied a major deficiency in the Museum’s collection. It also included the Roubiliac statue of Shakespeare.

In antiquities, the spectacular finds began with the antiquities captured from the French in Egypt, including the Rosetta Stone, which arrived in 1802. There was nowhere to put them in Montagu House and they were stored in wooden sheds in the garden, where Louis Simond spotted that he was looking at something unusual: ‘We remarked a treble inscription on a large block of dark porphyry, brought from Rosetta... All three saying the same thing serve as a glossary to each other’. (Simond, volume 1 page 83)

In 1808 the Townley Gallery extension to Montagu House, the first purpose-built gallery of the Museum, provided a suitable setting not only for the Townley collection of marbles, bronzes and terracottas, and the Egyptian material, but also most of the existing antiquities collections. There were 13 rooms in all, including a principal display room on each floor.

Many of the objects coming into the Museum at this time had already been on display in London, so had already caught the public’s attention. The Portland Vase for instance, deposited on loan in 1810, had been the subject of great interest when Sir William Hamilton sold it in secrecy to the Duchess of Portland.

And the Parthenon marbles, which had started to arrive in England in 1802, had been put on display by Lord Elgin from 1806 in Burlington House. When they arrived in the Museum in 1816, there was once again nowhere to put them, so they were housed in a temporary shed until a purpose-built gallery was ready in 1831.

1819 saw the arrival of Sir John Ross’ polar bear and the Apotheosis of Homer relief. One wonders which would have had the greater appeal to the public.
The Museum had become a copyright library with the acquisition of the Old Royal Library in 1757. However, as the Garrick collection had shown, it had significant gaps in its contemporary collections of printed books. So when the new Copyright Act was passed in 1814, the Trustees were determined to take full advantage of it. In 1815 the Keeper of Printed Books was told to secure all new books from Stationers’ Hall; in 1816 the Assistant Keeper protested that they weren’t being delivered, and that he was ‘authorised... to demand the same on best paper, of the respective Publishers, for the use of the Public Library’. However the situation remained unsatisfactory until the passing of the 1842 Copyright Amendment Act, which Panizzi was finally able to enforce.

DE-ACCESSIONS OR SPLITTING THE COLLECTIONS?

Conversely, the scale of the new acquisitions also gave rise to the problem of lack of space, and the idea that the collections needed to be dispersed to separate venues for more convenient access and display. One voice for this opinion as early as 1772 was the Frenchman, Pierre Jean Grosley. He considered the Printed Books to be ‘the most inconsiderable part of this immense collection’. If the library were to be made truly ‘worthy of so great and magnificent a metropolis’, he thought it could not be contained in the inadequate space available at Bloomsbury and should be transferred en bloc to the ‘Banqueting-house, in Whitehall, where there would be ample space, not only for the existing stock but for all necessary expansion’.

In 1809 objects of a medical or anatomical nature ‘unfit to be preserved in the Museum’ were actually disposed of to the specialist medical collection at the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow. According to Miller ‘they were a mixed bag: the oteological collections; ‘monsters in spirits’; anatomical preparations, injections and paintings; a few tattered stuffed quadrupeds, hitherto kept out of sigh in the basement, and all the remaining duplicates’. Sir Joseph Banks supervised the clearing out of the basements, and the burying or burning of zoological rubbish, at which ‘some persons in the neighbourhood complained and threatened with an action, because they thought the moths were introduced into their houses by the cremations in the Museum gardens.’

The process of splitting off the collections was of course to gain ground during the 19th and 20th centuries, starting with the decision to create a separate National Gallery, founded in 1824.

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8.0 KEY DOCUMENTS

British Museum Act (26 Geo. II cap. XXII),
opening page, London, 7 June 1753
8.1 KEY DOCUMENTS
Sir Hans Sloane’s Will (extract)

Whereas from my youth I have been a great observer and admirer of the wonderful power, wisdom and contrivance of the Almighty God, appearing in the works of his Creation; and have gathered together many things in my own travels or voyages, or had them from others, especially my ever honoured, late friend William Courten, Esq; who spent the greatest part of his life and estate in collecting such things, in and from most parts of the earth, which he left me at his death... And whereas I have made great additions of late years as well to my books, both printed as manuscript, and to my collections of natural and artificial curiosities, precious stones, books of dryed samples of plants, miniatures, drawings, prints, medals, and the like, with some paintings concerning them...

Now desiring very much that these things tending many ways to the manifestation of the glory of God, the confutation of atheism and its consequences, the use and improvement of physic, and other arts and sciences, and benefit of mankind, may remain together and not be separated, ... where they may by the great confluence of people be of most use.

CODICIL, 26 DECEMBER 1751

Having had from my youth a strong inclination to the study of plants, and all other productions of nature; and having through the course of many years with great labour and expense, gathered together whatever could be procured either in our own or foreign countries that was rare and curious; and being fully convinced that nothing tends more to raise our ideas of the power, wisdom, goodness, providence, and other perfections of the Deity, or more to the comfort and well being of his creatures than the enlargement of our knowledge in the works of nature, I do Will and desire that for the promoting of these noble ends, the glory of God, and the good of many, my collection in all its branches may be, if possible, kept and preserved together whole and intire ... at, in, or about my manor house at Chelsea aforesaid, which consists of too great a variety to be particularly described...

To have and to hold to them and their successors or assigns for ever...

[The trustees were to] meet together from time to time as often as shall be thought fit, and there make, constitute and establish ... such statutes, rules, and ordinances, and to make and appoint such officers and servants for the attending, managing, preserving, and continuing of my said musaeum, or collection... And I do hereby further request and desire, that the trustees hereby appointed... in promoting this my intention, and of perpetuating my said collection as afore mentioned... for making a provision or fund for maintaining and supporting the same for ever... And I do hereby declare, that it is my desire and intention, that my said musaeum or collection be preserved and kept... and that the same may be, from time to time, visited and seen by all persons desirous of seeing and viewing the same, under such statutes, directions, rules, and orders, as shall be made, from time to time, by the said trustees... that the same may be rendered as useful as possible, as will towards satisfying the desire of the curious, as for the improvement, knowledge and information of all persons...

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'the said collection be preserved... with free Access to view and peruse the same at all stated and convenient Seasons, agreeable to the Will and Intentions of the testator and under such Restrictions as Parliament shall think fit... and that the said collection may be preserved and maintained, not only for the inspection and entertainment of the learned and the curious, but for the general Use and Benefit of the Public... under such Rules as by the said Trustees.

And whereas all Arts and Sciences have a Connection with each other, and Discoveries in Natural Philosophy, and other Branches of speculative Knowledge, for the Advancement and Improvement whereof the said Museum or Collection was intended, do and may, in many Instances, give Help and Success to the most useful Experiments and Inventions.'

The British Museum Act (1753),
26 George III Chapter 22
As the Study of Nature and the Improvement of knowledge were the Employment and pleasure of his [Sloane’s] life, the Desire next his Heart was, that his collection might be kept together for the instruction and Benefit of others engaged in the same pursuits. And tho’ the intrinsic value of it was too much to be given away entirely from his own children, he left it to the public on such easy terms, as he thought would readily be complied with, since his Coins and Medals of Gold and Silver only, consider’d merely as Bullion are worth near 7000£ of the 20000£ which he charg’d as the purchase of his whole Musaeum and whoever but casts an Eye on the general Heads of it annex’d to the copy of his will must be immediately convinced how very much the Sum demanded falls short of the intrinsic worth...

He may justly be stil’d the Father of Philosophy in these Kingdoms and perhaps in Europe for at the time when he began to search after, and collect the productions of Nature, the Knowledge of and even Relish for such matters were confin’d to very few. But the Encouragememnt which he gave to Mariners, Travellers and others to bring them to furnish him with whatever they could meet with of that Kind and his Example and the Sight of his Musaeum excited many ingenious persons to study Natural History and collect the materials of it; whereby a Desire of Knowledge being propagated from one to another, many useful collections have been made both in Great Britain and other Kingdoms.

The Treasure, which he bequeath’d to his country, and which is now purchas’d for it by the Parliament, may be attended with numberless Advantages to the Public. Here the young Physician, Chemist and Apothecary, may become well acquainted with every substance, Animal, Vegetable or mineral, that is ever employ’d in medicine. The curious in Ores and Metals by viewing specimens of every sort will be instructed in what Beds of Stone or other matter they usually are found, and by that means will be enabled [sic] to judge what Metals or metallic Bodies the Rocks or Mountains which they examine may probably contain, whereby rich mines, with which Great Britain unquestionably abounds, may more easily be discover’d. Even the Clays, Okers, Sands Stones, Marbles, Earths, etc. may lead to the finding better materials for the Potter, the Painter, the Glass-maker, the Lapidary and many other artists to improve their manufactures. In short, the Naturalist will find in this Musaeum almost every thing which he can wish, and will be greatly assisted in his Inquiries and Observations by the Catalogue of it in 38 volumes in fol and 8 in quarto containing short accounts of every particular, with References to the Authors, who have treated of them.,

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8.4 KEY DOCUMENTS
The Statutes and Rules (extract)

‘This Museum being of a more general and extensive nature, than any other before established, may require some particular rules and regulations for its management and security, suited to the manner of its institution... For altho (sic.) it (the British Museum) was chiefly designed for the use of learned and studious men, both natives and foreigners, in their researches into the several parts of knowledge; yet being founded at the expence (sic) of the public it may be judged reasonable, that the advantages accruing from it should be rendered as general, as may be consistent with several considerations above mentioned.’

Preamble to the Statutes and Rules, 1757
Ward, Papers relating to the British Museum, Additional MS 6179, folios 18-25

NOTES

**Preface**

As I am quite sensible that something will be expected by way of Preface to the following Sheets, I will not, by omitting it, disappoint any of my Readers. Curiosity almost universally prevails: many therefore will, in all Probability, want to know my Reasons for this Publication; why I have not been more full in my Descriptions, and more systematical in my Manner. Of these, as well as many other Particulars, the Reader shall be informed; but I must first bespeak his Patience, till something is said of the Museum itself.

It is difficult to determine, whether this Excellent Foundation reflects more Honour on his late Majesty, who was pleased to bestow on it a large and valuable Library, collected by his Royal Predecessors; on Sir Hans Sloane, who with great Knowledge, Expence, and Trouble, procured the most curious Part of what is here deposited; or on the British Parliament, who made it a lasting Monument of Glory to the Nation. Certain it is, the Public is greatly indebted to them all, as well as to the Right Honourable and Honourable the Trustees, and the Officers of the House, by whose Superintendance it is conducted under such wise Regulations, that it is as great in Perfection as it was in Design. The Officers are remarked for being a sensible and learned Set of Men, all equal to the Employment, being well versed in the Business of their several Departments, and at all Times willing to gratify the Curiosity of the Inquisitive, with any Information that can be required of them.

I am not without Hopes that the time may soon come, when every public-spirited Collector of rare Medals, Minerals, Animals, Plants, Insects, or Stones, and, in fine, of every thing that either Nature or Art produces worthy the Observation of the Curious, will deposit the Produce of his Labour in this most valuable Cabinet. If he is of ample Fortune, the Public will accept of them as a Present, and convey his Name to the latest Posterity; if, on the contrary, he is poor, though ingenious, such is the Generosity of this happy Nation, that I dare venture to say they will, on all such Occasions, according to the Merit of the Person, remove that great Obstacle to Science, besides affording him a proper Share of Honour.

Learning was for many Ages in a manner buried in Oblivion; a dark Ignorance spread itself over the Face of the whole Earth; and, what was still worse, did any noble Spirit endeavour to rouse himself and others from the general Lethargy, he was presently charged with publishing new Opinions, and perhaps branded with Infamy, under a Pretence of his attaching himself to the study of the Magick Art. Indeed, numberless were the Obstacles to the Resurrection of Learning; a dark Ignorance, a blind Infatuation, an obstinate Prejudice: Yet so hard a matter is it to fetter the human Mind, that it rose superior to all Difficulties. Literature [sic] is once more recovered from its long Swoon, and now shines in its pristine Lustre; Nay, there are in these our happy Times many Things generally known, of which the Ancients had not the least Notion; and many others by them only guessed at, or known in Theory, which we have reduced to a mathematical Certainty.

Nothing can conduce more to preserve the Learning which this latter Age abounds with, than having Repositories in every Nation to contain its Antiquities, such as is the Museum of Britain: But, in order more effectually to prevent our falling back again into a State of Ignorance and Barbarism, it were to be wished that the Plan of it were enlarged, that the Buildings were more extensive, and that a Fund were established, sufficient to answer the Purpose of encouraging ingenious Men in every useful Art, in every Science; and I know of nothing that can be done that will tend more to the Honour of our Country, when it shall please God to give us the Blessing of Peace, than to have such a large Fund appropriated for the Encouragement of Ingenuity.
and Learning. When we read over the List of the Names that compose the Royal Society, the Trustees of this Museum, and that numerous Train of Britons, who with so much to encourage every Art, Science and Manufacture, can we possibly be at a loss for Trustees to manage with Impartiality and Propriety a more general Establishment? I could mention several, every way qualified, who would have too much public Spirit to refuse undertaking it, if invited by their Country to the Trust. From the united Labours of such a Society, what might we not hope for? Modest Merit would once more raise its drooping Head, assured of a did Hearing from such able Judges; every Manufacture would soon be brought to the greatest Perfection, Agriculture be held in proper Esteem, and the Sciences more than flourish; for it would even be unfashionable to be illiterate. But this is a Point of too great Importance to be brought to bear without the Interposition of Parliament; it is sincerely to be wished they may at a proper Time take it under their Consideration; no Age is so likely as the present, in which so much Encouragement is given, in most Things that are worthy of Praise: Yet, though they are encouraged, a regular Establishment for the Purpose is certainly much wanted...

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8.6 KEY DOCUMENTS
A dramatic interlude (extract)

Pleasing Recollection or A Walk through the British Museum. An Interlude of 2 Acts Nobly devoid of all Scholastick Rules and free from the Shackleds of dramatick punctilio
By the Reverend Weeden Butler, British Library
Additional MS 27,276 [extract]

Scene: British Museum
Time: Monday 16 July 1767 4 o’clock ...

[folios.20-1]

Dr G---d ‘You see that Series of glazed frames over the Chimney inclosing a sort of grove of small trees. You may recollect I presume the opinion of the philosophers, that the Scale or Chain of Being is composed of a variety of Degrees or Links.’

Stranger ‘I do Sir, our celebrated countryman Mr Pope is mightily fond of it, and has beautifully expatiated upon it in his Essay on Man...’

Dr G---d ‘Well Sir, Those production which you see arranged there though as under the appellation of Corallines, They convey the idea of inanimate petrified matter, Yet are indisputedly allowed to be Animal. Here, then, you may suppose more lifeless inert Matter to connect with Animation and to ascend to the next Degree of Being ...’

Stranger at the medal Glass by the Window ‘Pray Dr What is this?’

Dr G---d ‘By your leave, Gentlemen, Oh that Sir is an Indian Nabob’s Letter written on a palmetto Leaf, the only vehicle of epistolary correspondence in that country, and answering to the ancient papyrus of the Egyptians which’

Index ‘Bless me Ladies! Whither have you sent all your Inquiries? No curiosity? All sworn to silence – for a whole Quarter of an Hour?’

Dorothea ‘Where wonder Feasts, tis Reason to be mute. Deep Thought and Meditation have no Tongue, And who can hear – nor, as Sweet Mason rings; Let rapt attention faint in heedless Extasy!’
Teaching from the Collections, engraving reproduced in the Illustrated London News, London, 1881
9.0 TIMELINE

1687    Building of Montagu House
1686    Rebuilding or refurbishment of Montagu House after fire
1739    Drawing up of Sir Hans Sloane’s Will
1753    11 January, death of Sir Hans Sloane; 7 June, passing of the British Museum Act
1755    5 April, Montagu House bought for the British Museum
1759    15 January, British Museum opens to public
1761    First guidebook to Museum published: ‘The General Contents of the British Museum’
1764    Mozart’s visit to London, including the British Museum
1766    Christie’s first sale
1777    Parliamentary debate on whether Britain should have a National Gallery
1780    Gordon Riots
1801    Sir Joseph Banks tried to introduce charging to keep the uneducated out of the Museum
1802    Attendants first appointed to escort visitors, instead of curators
1803    Start of decade of experimenting with ticket system and opening hours
1808    First in-house guidebook published: ‘Synopsis’
1810    Museum abolished ticket system; anyone now allowed to enter on Monday, Wednesday & Friday; Tuesday & Thursday still reserved for ‘select companies’
1812    Extension of issue of Reading Room passes
1815    Rioting mob attacks Lord Chancellor’s house in Bloomsbury Street
1823    George IV presents George III’s library to the nation; start of new British Museum building by Sir Robert Smirke
9.0 TIMELINE

1824 Founding of National Gallery
1829 Completion of King’s Library
1835/6 Select Committee hearings on the British Museum
1837 Start of redisplay of collections in new British Museum building; children over eight allowed in; Easter Monday: first opening on a public holiday (24,100 visited in one day)
1848 Chartists’ demonstrations in Russell Square; security precautions at Museum
1850 Children (but not babes in arms) allowed in, first public lavatory for ladies
1851 Special opening of the King’s Library to coincide with the Great Exhibition
1855 Museum opens on Saturday afternoons
1857 King’s Library opened as a public gallery; opening of Round Reading Room
1865 First public lavatory for gentlemen
1877 Historic portraits collection transferred to National Portrait Gallery
1879 First use of electric light in Round Reading Room: could now stay open until 7.00 pm in winter; opens all day on Saturdays; abolition of ‘closed days’; babies allowed in
1880 Start of transfer of natural history collections to South Kensington
1890 Electric light installed in exhibition galleries; galleries open until 10.00pm (but limited power supply, so east and west sides open on alternate evenings)
1896 Museum opens on Sunday afternoons
1898 Evening openings given up through insufficient public demand
1960 Creation of British Museum Friends
1989 Evening openings restarted for British Museum Friends
1998 King’s Library books to new British Library building at St. Pancras
2000 Museum opens on Sunday mornings
2003 250th anniversary
A Man Sleeping in the King’s Library of The British Museum,
a black chalk drawing by Eyre Crowe, London, 1882
10.0 FURTHER READING


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