

Chapter V

The Trustees and Officers of the British Museum: Their Attitudes and Practices From the Death of Planta to the Committee Hearings

As the evidence has indicated, Joseph Planta was fairly even-handed about access. He worked diligently on the statutes to ease the procedures, and he admitted to having given temporary passes to people he did not know until they could produce a recommendation from someone else. He based the decision on the conversation he had with them. Planta's successor, Henry Ellis, continued the practice, but while Planta was progressive, Ellis preferred the status quo. He did not want a redefinition of the public that would enlarge the number of readers. Ellis, who had been an officer since 1805 and served as Principal Librarian from 1827 to 1856, was a very cautious and reactionary man. He became concerned that the Museum's original purposes were becoming distorted by the variety of readers and Parliament's attempts to make access greater. He wanted a public that was more intimate, so the possibility of theft at the Museum and admitting someone of bad character were measures Ellis used for defining the museum public.

A year after becoming Principal Librarian, Ellis asked the secretary to tell the trustees that he had declined admitting Harrison Denniss upon the recommendation of the Rev. Edward Edwards, who had used the Reading Room for the past three years, because he did not know Edwards. Ellis went on to say, "I have sent over to Chelsea and have reason to think that the person recommended is respectable: but . . . it would be highly imprudent in me to receive recommendations from Readers of whom nothing more is known than that they study there." Ellis proceeded to justify the decision. A Mr. Barron had used the Reading Room from 1823 up to the last few months, and Ellis had "received his recommendation of one or two persons but he has since been sentenced to seven years transportation as a Swindler." A woman who had

studied for a year or two in the Reading Room had her recommendation withdrawn a few months ago by the person who gave it, because she had been a robber in a private dwelling-house, "yet she had ventured to recommend another person to me for a Reading Ticket."¹ The trustees praised Ellis' caution and had the secretary advise Denniss on that point.² (It was certainly in Ellis' favor to inundate the message with stories of convicted criminals but who never stole from the library.) In the end the trustees granted the ticket without having Denniss submit another recommendation, and the praise for Ellis and the rigorous system became tarnished.

The efforts to screen the Reading Room from unsuitable applicants did not stop with the recommendations. The Chief Attendant of the Reading Room had the responsibility to make himself acquainted with the persons admitted, so he could, according to Ellis, "detect interlopers, attempts of persons to creep in without Tickets being far from infrequent. . . ."³ The entire system must have been at times very hard on the employees. They had little input on the formation of the rules but had to enforce them and to endure criticism from the press, the government, and frustrated applicants. Even Ellis, who was very zealous in the responsibilities, was not sheltered and had to endure the public's discontent. The Principal Librarian could grant readers temporary passes which were valid until the next Board meeting where they would consider the application. Frequently, he turned people away who wanted to use the library but did not have the credentials. Ellis tried to rewrite the Chief Attendant's job description to have him "go out and ascertain the respectability of Persons who apply for Reading-Tickets, who give References to or bring Recommendations from persons who though they may be respectable are

¹Original Letters and Papers 6 (12 December 1828).

²Committee Minutes 11 (13 December 1828): 3136-37; Original Letters and Papers 6 (16 December 1828).

³Officers' Reports 13 (29 April 1830): fol. 8. (For a humorous account of one who crept in without a ticket see Washington Irving's "The Art of Book Making," in The Sketch of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. (1820), p. 149-65.)

entirely unknown: under which circumstances the Applicants are referred (rarely without discontent) to the production of further testimonials." Ellis thought it would "allay the rancour of Persons, who, however courteously received, are disappointed if delayed till another Recommendation comes."⁴ If the trustees had agreed, the Chief Attendant would have filtered the applicants, so that Ellis would have seen the qualified ones and would have been spared the tension of turning away the unqualified ones.

Early in the Museum's history, if readers had removed objects but returned them, there would be no serious consequences if they could convince the authorities that it was done by accident or by a misunderstanding. Even as late as 1821 a Mr. Yarnold claimed to have accidentally taken home a manuscript on the basis of bad vision, and Planta and Ellis accepted the account.⁵ Ten years later, Ellis, who was in charge of the Museum and was concerned about the increase in theft, was not as forgiving and set about making such incidents examples to the public. He reported that an artist had taken home a bronze statue to draw it there. Although Ellis did not think the student was dishonest, "the Ease with which access is now had to every part of the Museum requires any such abduction as is here complained of to be marked by very strong reprobation, lest so bad an Example should be followed by other persons." Based on the report, the trustees withdrew the artist's permission "to pursue his professional occupations" inside the Museum.⁶ A few years later, a reader lost his ticket because he was caught returning a book he had removed. Ellis relayed the incident to the trustees and informed them of who had recommended the student (Mr. Roe, M.P. for Cashel), and clearly indicated his indignation at the kind of readers using the library. "Sir H. Ellis has to observe that whenever an occurrence of this

⁴Ibid., fol. 9.

⁵Ibid., 8 (11 June 1825): fol. 1895-96.

⁶Ibid., 13 (10 December 1831): fol. 2963; Committee Minutes 11 (10 December 1831): 3418.

kind has taken place it has been uniformly with Novel Readers; never with persons who come upon sober researches."⁷

As other cases occurred, Ellis became more derogatory towards the perpetrator and critical of the readers and the statutes. An attendant found a missing book in a pawnbroker's shop, and Ellis had him buy it and inquire where it came from, who pawned it, and if others had been pledged. When the pawnbroker claimed that he had received the book honestly and that the claim ticket was destroyed, Ellis sent the attendant with a police officer back to the pawnshop to examine all the books at the shop, but none from the Museum were found. Ellis was satisfied with the pawnbroker's honesty but commented acidly, "Our Readers have very greatly increased in numbers: and I think there is an occasional diminution in the respectability. Perhaps, instead of Dexter [the pawnbroker] we may, presently, find a Sinister among the Pawnbrokers, and that may lead to greater discovery than we have been able to make today."⁸ Henry Baber, head of the Department of Printed Books, was far calmer over the affair. Based on Ellis' recommendation, when the trustees directed him to report on the number of missing books within the last ten years, the number was forty, and Baber thought the majority would eventually show up in the wrong presses and shelves.⁹

The relationship between theft and Ellis' concepts of a museum public and access reached a climax in the summer of 1835. Since 1807 a sergeants guard had been stationed at the Museum for protection. On 1 July the sergeant of the guard sent Ellis two language dictionaries, valued at two shillings, belonging to the King's Library which had been found in one of the soldier's caps. Ellis had the soldier arrested where he was committed to trial, convicted, and

⁷Original Letters and Papers 11 (6 May 1834).

⁸Ibid., 12 [22 September 1834?]. See also Officers' Reports 16 (11 October 1834): fol. 3701.

⁹Committee Minutes 11 (8 November 1834): 3886; Officers' Reports 16 (8 November 1834): fol. 3728.

sentenced to six months imprisonment.¹⁰ The Principal Librarian's comments were a justification of all that he had done and a chilling warning to anyone who might consider stealing from the Museum. "Sir H. Ellis thinks the publicity which has been given to this occurrence may eventually be of service to the Museum; as one or two suspicious appearances have been of late noticed: and the public Visitors are now so numerous as to have amounted on one day in last Week to 6138."¹¹

The case involving the soldier was climatic in another way, because it indicated a double standard between theft and punishment and the classes who used the Museum. In 1779 a Mr. Brooke confessed to having torn and cut several pieces from the Harleian Manuscripts, but because he returned the pieces, the trustees did not pursue the matter.¹² Deighton was not prosecuted for the theft of prints, and nor were Mr. Yarnold for taking home the manuscript, the artist who took home the bronze, or the student who took home the book. The significance of the cases lies in the fact that the perpetrators were people who had recommendations to use the Reading or Print Room or the Gallery of Antiquities. They were students or researchers. The soldier who stole the dictionaries was prosecuted and sent to prison. He was not a student who was recommended by someone, nor was he let off lightly with a firm warning like the students. The books were worth 2 shillings versus Deighton's £400 prints, so monetary value was not a contributing factor. Consequently, the procedures taken against the soldier were based on class.

In many letters and reports Ellis referred to the growing number of unsavory types who attended the library. With broader, straighter streets and the popularity of the collections, there had been a rise in ticket holders and visitors since the beginning of the century, and it was in the

¹⁰Committee Minutes 11 (1 August 1835): 4036.

¹¹Officers' Reports 17 (11 July 1835): fol. 3967.

¹²Committee Minutes 6 (9 July 1779): 1663.

large attendances that Ellis feared the worst. The public had become an unidentifiable mass where there could be little intimacy between the officers and the visitors. There were many visitors whose presence caused no threat to the Museum. It was the 'suspicious appearances' that alarmed Ellis. He did not elaborate, and the people may not have been threats in themselves, but their acts left Ellis not knowing what they were thinking or their purposes, and therefore not trustful of them.¹³

While Ellis had to worry about the problems that came with a larger attendance, he had to contend with pressure for greater access, which could alter the purpose of the Museum and establish a new kind of public. In consequence of a debate in the House of Commons on 8 March 1830, the Board of Trustees asked the Principal Librarian to study the practicability of extending the hours of admission to the Museum and the Reading Rooms during those months of the year with longer daylight hours, because they were "under the impression that it would be more consistent to that portion of the Public whose attendance in the Reading Rooms is most frequent."¹⁴ Ellis recommended that the Museum remain open until 5:00 p.m. from 1 March to 1 October. He thought the plan could work by having the officers work in rota during the extra hour, and paying the attendants the same rate per hour for the extra hour. The M.P., Henry Banks, had suggested that the Reading Rooms stay open until 6:00 p.m. from 1 March to 1 October, but on 9 March Ellis examined the rooms at 6:00 p.m. and found them too dark because the windows were too high. Ellis was against keeping the Reading Rooms open so late for other reasons too. "Readers who come to a Library like that of the Museum, are men who do not use one, but many, and sometimes multitudes of Books at the same time." There would not be

¹³Goffman, *Relations in Public*, p. 306. See the entire chapter 'Normal Appearances' for an examination of people's conduct in public.

¹⁴*Committee Minutes* 11 (27 March 1830): 3234-35.

enough time to replace the books for the people who arrived at 10:00 the following morning, which would create inconvenience for the readers and confusion for the attendants. Furthermore, the attendants would have to be paid for two hours extra work closing at 6:00 p.m., instead of for one hour closing at 5:00 p.m. Ellis went as far as applying sympathy and guilt to win the argument when he stated that the attendant in the Reading Room was old and that working eight hours would injure his health. He advised the trustees to study the hours of the great public foreign libraries. "They, like our own, are Libraries of Research and Reference, not Libraries for idle and desultory reading."¹⁵

Ellis provided statistics of European libraries to back the claim that the British Museum should not stay open till 6:00 p.m. The Vatican Library was closed from Christmas Eve until mid-January, one or two weeks at Carnival, Holy Week and Easter Week, a few days or perhaps the whole week at Whitsuntide, mid-September until Martinmass, all great festival days, anniversaries of the Pope's election and coronation, and Sundays. On open days the hours were 9:00 a.m. to noon. The Imperial Library in Vienna was open during the summer from 9:00 a.m. to noon and 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and during the winter from 9:00 a.m. to noon and 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. It was closed on Sundays, other festivals, and vacation times. The Royal Library in Paris was open from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., except Sundays, festivals, and a vacation from 1 September through 16 October. The Royal Library in Berlin was open from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. from 1 April through the end of September, and from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. from 1 October until 31 March.¹⁶ Ellis' report successfully persuaded the trustees, and they ordered that the

¹⁵Officers' Reports 13 (13 March 1830): fol. 2609-11.

¹⁶Ibid., fol. 2612-13.

hours be changed to 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. from 1 March until 1 October commencing 25 March.¹⁷

As soon as the readers heard about the alteration in the opening hours, ninety-two of them signed a petition asking the trustees to rescind the order. In the petition they stated that the majority of readers were constant in attendance, that they came early, and that they were engaged in research that could not be prosecuted elsewhere. To them, the extra hour in the morning was more beneficial when the spirits and mind were fresh than an extra one at the end of the day when they would be tired. It was the occasional reader, they claimed, who came late and to him only would this change be convenient. At present it took half an hour from the noise of entrants, of taking seats, and the delay of book delivery before the readers could begin study. By the change to 11:00 a.m., it would be 11:30 a.m. and half the day gone before any work could commence. It was unreasonable to have different opening times for summer and winter. They cited that public offices, places of business, and public libraries in Britain and the rest of Europe were open by 10:00 a.m. By the change the student would either lose an hour, or remain until 5:00 p.m., "whereby that time for exercise and recreation which is essential to health, before Dinner, will be lost."¹⁸ When Mr. Hannay, the leader, advised the Principal Librarian of the discontent among the readers, Ellis asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to suspend the new time change while he studied the problem.

Before he had been approached, Ellis had taken statistics for the number of different people who came to the rooms, and the data tended to corroborate the readers' demands.¹⁹

¹⁷General Meetings, Minutes 6 (13 March 1830): 1361-62.

¹⁸Original Letters and Papers 7 (26 March 1830).

¹⁹Officers' Reports 13 (27 March 1830): fol. 2631.

Hours	Mar. 15	16	17	18	19	Average
10 to 11	22	31	18	30	26	25
11 to 12	19	27	21	19	25	22
12 to 1	36	25	29	21	29	28
1 to 2	18	26	23	22	11	20
2 to 3	17	14	12	14	14	14
3 to 4	4	8	12	4	6	7
Totals	116	111	115	110	111	112

After talking with some readers Ellis relayed to the trustees that many would prefer the Reading Room to be open at 9:00 a.m. and continue to 4:00 p.m., and "that the clamour for late hours has chiefly originated with some Office-Clerks."²⁰ The statistics were quite impressive, but to an extent they were misleading. The tallies were for the number of people who came to the rooms, not the number who were abiding in them at the beginning of the hour and when the library closed. The petitioners stated that if the closing hour were changed to 5:00 p.m., they would either lose an hour or have to stay and lose an hour of exercise and recreation. From this statement it was evident that many remained at the library until 4:00 p.m. The last hour of the day had the smallest number of entrants, and compared to the earlier hours it would indicate that there would be fewer people if the closing hour were extended to 5:00 p.m. To an extent, the supposition had validity, for the times people went to the library depended on life style, transportation, and convenience, but it is also important to consider the nature of the library. The petitioners were readers who spent several hours a day at the library, and, as they said, it took about thirty minutes to receive the first books.²¹ A serious researcher who arrived at the Museum an hour before closing could not expect to accomplish much. If it were late in the day,

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Original Letters and Papers 7 (26 March 1830).

many would forgo a visit until the following day. As a result, the last hour, no matter when it was, would have the smallest number of readers.

It was not surprising that Ellis, who had originally been in favor of the change to 5:00 p.m., sided with the readers when he discovered that it was office-clerks who had wanted the later closing hours. Novel readers and office-clerks may have had the same rights of access, but as Ellis' remarks and previous actions indicated, the library had been intended for scholarly purposes. He thought clerks intruded on people who used the Museum for important research. When the trustees received the petition and Ellis' report, they ordered that the Reading Rooms should continue to open at 10:00 a.m.

The trustees had wanted to make the Reading Room as accommodating as possible to a larger public, so under pressure from Parliament the trustees tackled the problem from a different perspective. In the spring of 1831 they asked Ellis to study the necessary arrangements for opening the library on Saturdays. Not only might it help alleviate crowding on weekdays, it would pay tribute to the office clerks and others who had lost the battle to have later hours. Ellis consulted with Henry Baber, the head of the Department of Printed Books, who stated that he would need four additional attendants to get and return books. The readers placed reservations for books, and the attendants got them on Saturdays, and Baber claimed that if the library were open on Saturdays, the attendants would have to fetch books back and forth daily. Because they would not have time to return everything on Saturdays as before, it would create a backlog of work, and the students would murmur because they had to wait longer. Also, the attendants would have to devote time to the library on Saturdays, and he would lose considerable man hours in the Department of Printed Books.²²

²²Officers' Reports 14 (13 April 1831): fol. 2847.

Baber had an ally in Ellis, who did not favor opening the library for similar reasons. He cited the increasing number of students and the number of books that had to be restored at the end of the week. It was vital to have Saturdays free. On some days 150 readers had been present in the course of the day, and if three or five volumes were allowed per person, he asked the trustees to imagine the work that occurred replacing things for the ensuing week. Should the trustees consider a Saturday opening to be indispensable, Ellis said that the chief attendant in the Reading Room would have to work six days a week and be paid extra for the sixth day. There were three under-attendants who already worked on Saturdays, and from the transfer of employees two more would have to be hired for Printed Books and one for Manuscripts. "In short, it will be found upon minute Enquiry, that the advantages to be gained by Students in having the Reading Room of the Museum open upon Saturdays, are by no means commensurate with the Inconvenience which will be occasioned to the service and arrangements of the House as they regard the Printed-Books and Manuscript Departments."²³ In spite of Baber's and Ellis' apprehensions the trustees went ahead with the idea and ordered that the library be opened at the same hours on Saturdays throughout the year as the other weekdays.²⁴ The effects of opening an additional day demonstrated how useful but ill equipped the library was to satisfy the public, for by the end of the year, Ellis and the trustees were again discussing the lack of accommodation.

Opening the Reading Room on Saturday was a victory for greater access for those whose work prevented their coming at other times. It also showed how the research minded were favored over the other classes, for the Museum remained closed to the public on Saturdays. In line with the Museum's original goals, the trustees had favored the readers and artists over the

²³Ibid., 14 (16 April 1831): fol. 2841-42.

²⁴General Meetings, Minutes 6 (25 April 1831): 1388.

general public. There were now six days to use the library, while the public had three days for the Museum. Also, with the exception of the three holiday weeks, the library was open year round, while the Museum was closed an additional two months for the summer holidays. It was a time to give the staff vacation leave, but it was ironic that in the busiest time of the year the Museum was closed. July and October had the highest attendance records, and there had been critical articles citing the inconvenience to vacationers, especially foreigners, who found the Museum closed when they came to London in August and September. The trustees took notice, and in April 1833 ordered that the Museum "should not close before the 1st September, and should be reopened on the 1st October in every year."²⁵

In the first half of the 1830s people had been grumbling about the management of the British Museum. The building program begun in the 1820s for the King's Library and other additional space had been expensive and was still not completed, and there had been accusations of improper storage of the collections.²⁶ Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas had published a scathing attack on Sir Henry Ellis' lack of appreciation of the Baron de Joursanvault collection of manuscripts and the Museum's failure to purchase it.²⁷ John Millard, who had been fired from the Department of Manuscripts for inefficiency, had made enough noise over the affair to attract the attention of some M.P.s. As a result, in 1835 Parliament set up a committee to investigate the condition, operations, and management of the British Museum, and because they were not satisfied with the evidence, they held another set of hearings in 1836. They interrogated witnesses on a variety of topics, but it is the questions to the staff relative to access, the Museum's purposes, and the public that are pertinent here.

²⁵Committee Minutes 12 (20 April 1833): 3592.

²⁶Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal 38 (May 1823): 379-98.

²⁷Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, Observations on the State of Historical Literature, and on the Society of Antiquaries, and Other Institutions for its Advancement in England (London: William Pickering, 1830).

The Committee directed most of the questions on access to Sir Henry Ellis and Josiah Forshall, head of the Department of Manuscripts and secretary to the trustees. Part of the investigation involved answering straight forward questions to the rules of access that could have been found by looking at any of the numerous publications or the statutes on the Museum's walls. Many questions and answers required clarification, however, and in cases when witnesses were badgered, and the policies were criticized, the elaboration they provided gave insights into the officers' opinions on the public and the rationale for the statutes.

Ellis had a clearly articulated definition for the British Museum library, which offered him the opportunity to relate it to his concept of the public. "A public library is a place of consultation and reference; it ought not to be a receptacle for mere idle readers."²⁸ Ellis illustrated what he meant by the term 'public' library when he described the procedures at the Paris library. Readers were not sent romances, plays, frivolous literature, or political pamphlets except by special favor from the conservators, and then, only for declared purposes of historical or particular research. "That regulation shows the distinction which is very properly made at Paris between a public and what we call a circulating library."

To Ellis librarianship at the British Museum meant assisting research and aiding those who were more professionally devoted to knowledge, writing, and compiling works.²⁹ When the Committee suggested having the library remain open until 8:00 p.m., Ellis objected on two grounds. He recited the clamor that was raised in 1830 when the trustees tried keeping the library open till 5:00 p.m. Researchers preferred coming early in the day, and a different class of readers, such as lawyers' and merchants' clerks and readers of light literature, would come in the

²⁸Great Britain, Parliament, *Parliamentary Papers* (Commons), 1835, vol. 7, "Report from the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Condition, Management and Affairs of the British Museum," par. 249.

²⁹*Ibid.*, par. 1314, 2507.

evening hours. They were "a class I conceive the Museum library was not intended for, at least, not for their principal accommodation", and a circulating library could provide the books they needed.³⁰

When the readers at the British Museum became a more diffuse body in the 1820s and 1830s, the class distinction or intellectual status of the readers became less distinct. Because the library stood to lose some of its prestige and value, Ellis drew distinctions between readers and reading habits. He categorized readers by who they were (clerks vs. researchers) and what they read (novels and light literature vs. scholarly works). He attempted to maintain a way of reading that would break the threat that the newer kinds of readers with their frivolous literature imposed on the library. He sided with the petitioners in 1830 to have the hours returned to 10 to 4 o'clock, he was against opening the library on Saturdays, and as he testified at the hearings, he was firmly against opening the Reading Room in the evenings.

Ellis testified that the British Museum had two private days set aside for artists to draw from the sculptures. He drew the line for opening the Museum to the public five days a week, because of the impossibility of making drawings, and "the utility of the Museum would be materially injured if the public were admitted on what are called the private days."³¹ On open days, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the artist had to yield to the public, and when it was crowded, it was impossible to commence with any drawing, because they often had to position themselves in the center of the room to work, and they would not be able to place the drawing stands where they wanted.

The Committee questioned Ellis on the necessity of closing the Museum to the public on Saturdays and holiday weeks, and a confrontation of wills took place when Ellis' fear and

³⁰Ibid., par. 1313-14.

³¹Ibid., par. 251-54.

contempt of the lower classes spilled into the testimony. Since its opening, the Museum had been cleaned daily before opening hours, but it was necessary to give it a thorough cleaning on Saturdays. The condition of London's smoky atmosphere and rainy climate and the dust discharged from the Museum's heaters produced dirt and grime. When the Committee suggested altering the work by closing the Museum on a weekday and opening it on Saturdays, Ellis defended the practice with statistics that showed that Saturday had the fewest number of readers.³² He drew the conclusion and convinced the Committee that Saturday would have the fewest number of visitors if the Museum were opened on that day, so it was the best day for cleaning. They failed to note that the kind of persons who came on weekdays were researchers, students, and professionals. They could afford not to come on Saturday, especially if they had spent all week at the library.

In later testimony he offered the same explanation for the necessity of cleaning the Museum thoroughly during the holiday weeks and added that during the Easter week, the staff collated and arranged one or two year's supply of newspapers for binding. The Committee was not satisfied and asked if it was "a sufficient reason for excluding the public at a time when so large a portion of the people are at leisure?" Ellis thought the most mischievous portion of the population was about at such a time, and when asked if problems would arise even with sufficient attendants, he replied, "Yes, I think the vulgar class would crowd into the Museum." He did not think that improving the vulgar class was one of the Museum's greatest objects.³³ His attitude hit a nerve with the Committee, who examined him not only to extract information, but to condemn his opinions as well.

³²Ibid., par. 255, 257, 259-62.

³³Ibid., par. 1319-22.

Are there not more people about whom you should be anxious to instruct and amuse during those holidays than at any other portion of the year?--I think the more important class of the population (as far as we are concerned) would be discontented at such a change as the former question contemplates. [changing the week's cleaning to another time of the year]

Will you describe what you mean by the more important part of the population?--People of a higher grade would hardly wish to come to the Museum at the same time with sailors from the dock-yards and girls whom they might bring with them. I do not think such people would gain any improvement from the sight of our collections.³⁴

The Committee could not coerce Ellis to relinquish his circular argument. For Ellis there were too many 'wrong sorts' using the library and entering the Museum. As a result, there was an increased rate in theft. To combat the trend and to keep the Museum on its original path, Ellis did not initiate or champion changes in access policies.

The British Museum had been under heavy fire for being exclusive, and Ellis' attitude confirmed the unflattering picture, so the Committee was anxious to determine the mood of the officers and their interpretations of the Museum's function and access. The Rev. Josiah Forshall was the next witness. To him the library must be confined to persons of literary or scientific pursuits who had some serious purpose in coming to consult the collections; therefore, it was sufficiently open for the purposes for which it was designed, a library of research. He rebutted the charge that it was difficult for people who were engaged in morning occupations with the answer that it was not a library of education.³⁵ Although the British Museum had the reference material, the library was intended for people who were able to spend long periods of time reading and researching, which would include students and serious scholars, and not necessarily for those people whose occupations made the use of the British Museum an occasional necessity to pop in to get quick answers to questions. Like Ellis, Forshall saw the Museum as a research

³⁴Ibid., par. 1328-30.

³⁵Ibid., par. 1288-89.

institution, but he was in direct contradiction with Ellis' view that the vulgar classes received no benefit from the Museum. "I have always looked upon the Museum as the great national storehouse of materials for literature, art and science, and that its chief object is to assist persons engaged in any of these pursuits; but it is also important as a place of innocent and instructive amusement for the population of the metropolis; and I think it confers some other not inconsiderable benefits upon the public."³⁶ Forshall's view of the public was broader than Ellis', for in this case 'population' and 'public' meant populace.

While Ellis did not want the 'vulgar classes' to visit the Museum, George Samouelle took the initiative and stood up for them. Samouelle was not an officer but an employee who was hired to work specifically with the entomology collection. Samouelle responded that he was pleased with the public's general good feeling exhibited on all occasions. Police officers, soldiers, sailors, artillery men, livery-servants, and mechanics visited the Museum, their conduct was good, and the 'ignorant' were brought into awe by what they saw. Since his employment in 1821 there had been only two panes of glass broken by visitors, and in both cases it was accidental.³⁷ The testimony counteracted any assumptions that the public was unruly and destructive.

With a sufficient number of attendants to monitor the public, Samouelle thought it would be beneficial to open on holidays for those who could not visit at another time. He did not expect any mischief to occur with the large crowds as long as the intoxicated were kept out. People who had more free time could come another day, while the holidays were the only opportunities for a large number of people to visit the Museum.³⁸ Ellis' view of a museum

³⁶Ibid., par. 612.

³⁷Ibid., par. 3915-16.

³⁸Ibid., par. 3917, 3919-23.

public was more restrictive, because he shuddered to think that those who would attend on the holidays would likely drive the middle and upper classes away. Samouelle's concept of a museum public as a mixture of classes comes closest to reflecting Richard Sennett's definition of the public which included a relatively wide diversity of people who were strangers and who might regularly meet in places such as coffeehouses, urban parks, and theatres.³⁹

John E. Gray was an officer in the zoological branch of the Department of Natural History, and his opinions echoed Samouelle's. He had no reason to complain of the public's conduct, and with a greater number of attendants, it would be an advantage to the public to let them attend on the holidays, because many could see the collections at no other time. Even so, Gray did not want to be bothered with triflers and idlers. He regarded himself and the collections as being at the disposal of men of science for research and consultation and did "not encourage those, (of whom there are too many), who come often on the most trivial occasions, and occupy the time of the officers with frivolous questions."⁴⁰

Henry Josi was the last Museum employee introduced to the Committee. As Keeper for the Department of Prints and Drawings, the members were especially keen to question him on access to the Department, and whether there had been complaints. The Print Room had about six or seven artists and students a day with an occasional amateur, but he was not in favor of granting the public greater access to the prints, because he did not think it was difficult getting a letter of introduction, and foreigners would have access through their consuls or ambassadors.⁴¹ Josi answered that there had been complaints during the last two years, because Mr. Ottley's (the

³⁹Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, p. 17.

⁴⁰"Report from the Select Committee appointed in the following Season to consider the same subject," par. 2501, 2511-12, 2694.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, par. 5252-53.

former keeper) bad health prevented his attending, and the keys could not be entrusted to a 'common assistant'. Since he had been appointed, Josi believed there had been no more complaints.⁴²

The Committee had questioned the Museum's purposes and how the institution could best serve the public. The Museum had gone through considerable change since its foundation. Access had been simplified to the Museum, and readers could use third party recommendations to obtain a ticket. The officers and trustees were confronted with a reassessment of who should be allowed to use the Museum. The officers agreed that the Museum's primary function was to further knowledge and learning. They differed over the extent it should serve the public. Ellis preferred keeping the institution and the statutes designed for the scholarly only, while the other officers were more inclined to make alterations to let a broader spectrum use the Museum. The opinions represented the established and an alternative view towards the British Museum.

Henry Ellis wanted a 'known' and respectable public. From the time he assumed the position of Principal Librarian to the Committee hearings, he did not initiate or encourage changes to access policies. When the trustees planned to close the Museum at 5:00, Ellis sided with the ninety-two petitioners to stop the action. When the trustees planned to open the library on Saturdays, Ellis tried, but failed to talk them out of the idea. His motives were based on the Museum's purpose to further knowledge, and he assumed that the Museum was not for the vulgar class or novel readers. The large crowds at the Museum frightened Ellis. They could not be easily watched, and he said that some of the visitors acted suspiciously. The Reading Room public included clerks and novel readers, and Ellis thought that there was a diminished respectability among the readers. As a result, Ellis was against any changes that would make

⁴²*Ibid.*, par. 5231-32.

access easier for the vulgar classes or for people who would use the library for purposes other than serious research.