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250 years of visitors to the British Museum

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‘You will scarce guess how I employ my time . . . Sir Hans Sloane is dead and has made me one of the trustees of his museum . . . We are a charming, wise set, all philosophers, botanists, antiquarians and mathematicians; and adjourned our first meeting because Lord Macclesfield, our chairman, was engaged to a party for finding out the longitude. One of our number is a Moravian . . .’

Horace Walpole

For all studious and curious persons:
250 years of visitors to the British Museum

‘What does it mean to be a world museum?’
This was the question posed by Director Neil MacGregor in a public lecture at the British Museum (BM) in January 2009. Looking at the founding of the BM and its Board of Trustees, he considered the nature of the BM’s role today and its continuity over the past 250 years of responsibility to the public realm.

For it was 250 years ago, on 15 January 1759, that the BM first opened its doors to the public. The British Museum Act six years earlier had ensured that the founding collection of Hans Sloane – over 71,000 objects, as well as his library and herbarium – 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’. A building was found, Montagu House on Great Russell Street, and the Sloane collection gradually moved in under the supervision of the ‘Officers of the House’ and the Board of Trustees.

The stewardship of the Trustees stipulated in Sloane’s will has been an essential ingredient in making the BM the cosmopolitan institution it is. Operating on behalf of the government, but at one remove from it, the board made certain that the BM was neither an arm of state nor a royal prerogative (as in other countries) but a genuinely public museum – the world’s first encyclopaedic museum on such a scale. The number and variety of Trustees from that earliest group in the 1750s have always ensured that the institution has been governed by a plurality of opinions and ideas.

The BM is one of the marvels of the Enlightenment. Access to the greatest achievements of humanity was made free to all, and what was once the preserve of privilege became the right of everyone. Annual visitors grew from 5000 to 12,000 in the 18th century; there were nearly 300,000 a year by the mid-1830s; 5.93 million visited in 2008.

As the demand on resources has grown, so has the institution. Sloane’s collection has expanded a hundredfold to seven million objects. The BM’s history has become in part an architectural one, and Montagu House has long since given way to the new structures that replaced it – the beautiful King’s Library and Reading Room in the 19th century, the Great Court at the beginning of the 21st – and newer ones still to come.

The Northwest Development, planned to start construction later this year to designs by architects Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, is one of the BM’s largest building projects in recent times. Piecemeal expansion has meant that BM facilities have over time been dispersed and often located in buildings no longer suited to their present purposes and technological demands. A Georgian house is a fine thing, but not to house elements of one of the top research facilities in the world, equalled in size and expertise only by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Louvre in Paris. As part of the BM’s long-term masterplan, the Northwest Development will combine an international centre and studios for conservation and scientific research, modernised facilities to send and receive national and international loans (an increasing component of the BM’s work) and a cutting-edge exhibitions venue that will free the BM of the need to adapt the Reading Room.
In 2008/9, visitors to the BM included schoolchildren from Camden and scientists from Nottingham, curators from Africa and conservators from China, tourists from almost every country in the world. The 250th anniversary of the public opening reminds us that the BM is a world collection for the world – for experts and the general public, for anyone who might choose to enter its doors. And those doors are not merely a gateway in Bloomsbury. Beyond its popularity in London, the BM is accessed online by 13 million visitors annually. Their presence increasingly redefines the BM today as an international online space where records of more than 1.25 million objects can be consulted and high-quality images freely downloaded by anyone at any time. The collection is also taken across the UK and the globe by means of the BM’s Partnership UK programme; its Africa, Asia and Middle East programmes; and the World Collections Programme, which seeks to strengthen links between the great collections of the UK and partner institutions around the world.

The BM is grateful for the financial support it receives from government, foundations, sponsors and private donors, as well as the involvement of colleagues nationally and overseas. Without these, and the hard work of staff and volunteers, the BM could not continue to be a lively cultural forum for understanding world history and our world.

‘1759 proved to be an annum mirabilis . . . By creating institutions such as the British Museum and Kew Gardens, this country firmly planted the ambition for a public realm in which intellectual and cultural life was open and accessible to all. This principle would later give birth to the BBC, the Open University and even the world wide web.’

The Times, 2009
The Great Staircase of Montagu House led from the Entrance Hall to the upper rooms, where visitors could see manuscripts, medals, antiquities and natural history specimens. Visitors originally applied for tickets and went round the building with an Under-Librarian as guide. From 1810, tickets were no longer needed. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays people were free to walk around the BM by themselves. Tuesdays and Thursdays were reserved for guided tours.

In the early 19th century, the purchase of collections such as the Townley Marbles meant that for the first time, major sculptures from ancient Greece and Rome were accessible to those who had not travelled abroad or received a classical education. The Townley Collection is as relevant today as it was then, and featured alongside loans from Turkey, Denmark, France, Italy, Georgia and Israel in the BM’s 2008 exhibition, Hadrian: Empire and Conflict.

Museums have always been places of social mixing. A humorous aquatint of the 1830s shows visitors dressed to impress and as keen on viewing one another as they are at looking at the BM’s sculptures.

‘There are only a handful of museums in which national cultures can be compared. Of these the BM is the most comprehensive and . . . the most ambitious.’

Sunday Times, Bryan Appleyard, 2009

‘The visitors pouring through the doors of the British Museum represent the triumph of an idea born in the white intellectual heat of the Enlightenment – as valuable today as it was 250 years ago when the museum first opened . . .’

The Times, Ben Macintyre, 2008
The public stand outside the gates of the new BM forecourt and entrance along Great Russell Street. Designed by Robert Smirke and finished by his brother Sydney, the new building opened in 1847.

Visitors take in Assyrian reliefs at the BM. This engraving is one of many that appeared in the Illustrated London News throughout the 19th century, showing visitors in the BM galleries, teachers with their students and archaeological discoveries, such as those from excavations at Nineveh and Nimrud in the 1840s and 1850s.

The Easter Bank Holiday opening of 1873 shows the great variety of visitors who thronged to the BM in the 19th century.

The public galleries continued to be improved and by 1890 the BM was fully lit by electricity. In 1922 a Research Laboratory was established, part of a long tradition of scientific study and conservation at the BM. This 1920s photograph shows the BM’s impressive Egyptian gallery.

‘Great Russell Street, not Heathrow, is London’s passport to the world’

Jewish Chronicle, Jeremy Isaacs, 2008

‘the best museum in the world, a museum that is inventively exploring and flaunting the breadth of its collection’

The Times, 2008

‘the mother of museums’

Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2009
Children visit the BM in 1969 as part of a school outing. That year, the ground floor classical sculpture galleries reopened to visitors following a seven-year refurbishment. An education service was initiated at the BM in 1970.

2005

The public is at the heart of the BM today. In June 2005, Africa Live was attended by over 24,000 people. The BM’s Africa 05 programme included exhibitions on African culture, family events and community programmes.

2007

Participation is vital to the BM’s public engagement with all cultures. Thousands filled the Great Court in 2007 to mark the 200th anniversary of the UK abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

2008

For Chinese New Year in 2008, 35,000 visitors turned up — so many that the forecourt gates had to be shut during the day for the first time since the Chartist Riots of 1848.

‘This is exactly what a museum should be for: provoking us to reconsider the cultural underpinnings we can so easily take for granted.’

Guardian, Madeleine Bunting, 2008

‘an arena in which some of our most fraught and contentious contemporary political debates can be approached with a refreshed sensitivity’

The Times, Rachel Campbell-Johnston, 2008

‘the busiest showcase for civilisation anywhere on earth’

Evening Standard, Norman Lebrecht, 2008

‘the busiest showcase for civilisation anywhere on earth’

Evening Standard, Norman Lebrecht, 2008
Exhibitions not just in London, but throughout the United Kingdom increase the BM’s ability to display the collection to as many people as it can. Hadrian’s head toured to Hadrian’s Wall at Segedunum in Tyne & Wear prior to the BM major exhibition, Hadrian: Empire and Conflict.

Key work at the BM is often behind the scenes, including advanced conservation and scientific research. The BM’s exciting new Northwest Development will facilitate not just international research, but offer special opportunities for the public to observe.

Every year, international loans and tours carry the BM to audiences across the globe. Over two million visitors have seen the BM exhibition, Treasures of World Cultures, on its tour of Japan, Korea, Taiwan and China.

Family trails entice young people to tour the BM seeking out objects. They are among a wide array of activities for adults and children that ensure the BM remains “for the general Use and Benefit of the Public”, as its parliamentary founders hoped it would be 250 years ago.

‘MacGregor has turned the BM into a spectacular teaching aid that allows us to understand the present better by looking more closely at the past.’

Sunday Times, Waldemar Januszczak, 2009

‘I was in the museum again on Wednesday, having dashed there from the studio after the news, to chair a debate informed by the Babylon exhibition. On a cold winter’s night, 400 people were packed into the museum’s auditorium to discuss linguistics. Where else on earth would you find such a thing?’

Channel 4 News, Jon Snow
‘It is a global vision of cultural exchange and humanism . . . As a shining product of the 18th-century Enlightenment – which enunciated precisely those ideals of citizenship, cosmopolitanism and learning – the British Museum is uniquely positioned to make this case.’

The Observer, Tristram Hunt
‘Here, as in everything else, the public spirit of the English is worthy of remark: a considerable portion of the exhibits has been voluntarily given and every day new legacies are recorded.’

François de le Rochefoucauld

**Acquisitions**

The collection is the heart of the museum: growing, changing, reimagined by successive generations as intellectual currents and social and political concerns evolve. Research Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities Dyfri Williams wrote in *Apollo* magazine in February 2009 that each new object not only has its evocative individual presence, but reshuffles the rest of the collection, making us ‘reassess other objects and existing ideas and provid[ing] an opportunity to communicate afresh with the public through display or writing’.

The aspects of acquisition – their content, their future display – are both national and international. A group of 433 tokens issued in the City of London in the 17th century is interesting because of the coins’ very ordinary value in extraordinary times. When the royal copper farthings of Charles I ceased to be issued in 1644, new low-value currency was required, and it is this fascinating functional coinage issued out of need by various civic authorities and individuals (men and women, shopkeepers and publicans) that the BM has acquired, with the support of the BM Friends.

Japan featured prominently in the year’s acquisitions. A fine impression of Hokusai’s celebrated *The Great Wave* (1830–3) was acquired with support from The Art Fund. A group of 19th-century netsuke, accepted by HM Government in lieu of inheritance tax, was allocated to the BM. The 26 tiny carvings of ivory, horn or wood depict priests and devils, old women and babies, wolves and toads, and even two apes playing Go. The first installment of a superb collection of 1,879 woodblock prints by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861) was given by Professor Arthur R. Miller to the American Friends of the BM. On loan to the BM and displayed initially at an exhibition of the artist’s work at the Royal Academy in 2009,
the prints will also be made available online through digital photography provided by Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto.

A wide range of material from Africa entered the collection. Twelve Greek papyri from Roman Egypt form part of the evidence of the multilingual society of ancient Oxyrhynchus. They were acquired with support from the BM Friends. Embroidered clothing and textiles from the Hausa people of northern Nigeria were purchased, with important documentation derived from makers and clients. Among their unusual features are examples of female clothing embroidered by men.

Some acquisitions are linked to the BM’s international work. In the now flooded region surrounding the Fourth Cataract of the Nile, the BM undertook rescue work to assist the Sudan Archaeological Research Society. With support from Iveco and New Holland, rock art and rock gongs from 5000 BC to AD 1500 which would have been submerged were relocated to Merowe, as was an early Kushite granite pyramid, with its offering chapel and enclosure wall. They will ultimately feature in a new museum at Merowe dedicated to the cultures of the Fourth Cataract. In recognition of the BM’s work, Sudan’s National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums donated to the BM 20 blocks of early rock art showing human figures, camels, sheep and cows, as well as two rock gongs.
New galleries

Through the generosity of four major donors in 2008/9, the BM was able to refurbish several of its galleries and develop important new spaces in which to present the collection. It is immensely grateful to Sir Joseph Hotung, Sir Harry and Lady Djanogly, Sir Ronald and Lady Cohen, and Paul and Jill Ruddock for their support. The newest of the BM’s galleries is a beautifully redesigned space for the Percival David Collection of Chinese Art, made possible with the generosity of Sir Joseph Hotung. Containing over 1700 Chinese ceramics from the 3rd to 20th centuries, the collection is unequalled in quality outside China and makes the BM an unparalleled centre for the study of Chinese porcelain in the context of Japanese, Korean and European ceramics. The BM is very grateful to the trustees of the Percival David Foundation for the loan of the collection, which is renewable in perpetuity. The public gallery is part of the Sir Joseph Hotung Centre for Ceramic Studies, which includes facilities to use the collection for teaching. Writing in The Times, artist Grayson Perry admired the new space: ‘I find it heartening to see a new project dedicated to the high-quality display and study of a relatively rarefied subject such as ceramics... I was in constant danger of banging my nose as I leaned forward to drink in another delicious glaze.’ He concluded: ‘In this gallery, I felt like John Sergeant gazing on a performance by Darcey Bussell.’
The Sir Harry and Lady Djanogly Gallery of Clocks and Watches opened in November 2008. The BM holds the national horological collection of more than 900 clocks and 4500 watches. The gallery tells the story of European time-keeping from the earliest church and monastic clocks through the technological innovations of the 16th and 17th centuries to the advent of atomic timekeeping in the 20th century. It includes master timepieces by Breguet, Tompion and others. The Times called the accompanying book a ‘sumptuous survey’ and praised the BM selection as ‘right on the money’.

Automated clock in the form of a galleon, 1585

The new Sir Harry and Lady Djanogly Gallery for the BM’s large collection of clocks and watches includes this German clock by Hans Schlottheim. With sailors winding hammers to strike the hours, it was designed to trundle along a table to announce a banquet. (Height 99cm)
In January 2009, the celebrated Nebamun tomb-chapel paintings (which came to the BM in 1821) were newly displayed in The Michael Cohen Gallery of Ancient Egyptian Life and Death. Nebamun, who died about 1350 BC, was a grain accountant in the Temple of Amun in Karnak and the paintings vividly portray him at work and play, surveying his estates, banqueting, hunting in the marshes. Seven years of research and conservation have produced an imaginative redisplay that was widely reported in the press. Ahilaf Soueif writing in the Guardian praised the BM’s new approach as ‘empathetic, imaginative, highly professional and very post-colonial’. The Telegraph’s Richard Dorment wrote: ‘I don’t expect to see an exhibition in the next 12 months more moving than what is on view in the BM’s new gallery of ancient Egyptian art.’
Collecting

BM policies of acquisition and display are closely allied. An outstanding object in the new Paul and Jill Ruddock Gallery of Medieval Europe, which opened in March 2009, is a 14th-century astrolabe recently excavated in Canterbury, one of only eight quadrants of this type known to have survived from the Middle Ages and the only one definitely made in England. It was purchased in 2008, with support from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, The Art Fund and BM Friends. The instrument is one of many fine medieval objects, from devotional ivory figures to the Dunstable Swan Jewel, that tell the story of Europe from 1050 to 1550 in the new gallery.

Royal gold cup, 1370–80
Commissioned by the Duc de Berry, this medieval enamelled gold cup had various owners, from Charles VI of France to the Spanish Ambassador to James I. It is a highlight of the BM’s new Paul and Jill Ruddock Gallery of Medieval Europe. (Height 24 cm)
Gallery space also ventured outdoors in 2008/9 through a partnership with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, sponsored by Bank of Beijing. From May to October 2008, the BM forecourt was transformed into a *China Landscape*, through which any visitor to the BM could walk and admire bamboo, lacquer and handkerchief trees, and the picturesque elements of a scholar’s garden. (The plants were later donated to public spaces in Camden and a commemorative garden for a Chinese artist who lived near Hadrian’s Wall.) Both Kew and the BM have strong links with China and are partners in the World Collections Programme, funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which aims to share the UK’s world collections with Africa and Asia.

*China Landscape*

A visitor enjoys the BM’s 2008 outdoor summer display: a Chinese garden planted in the forecourt in partnership with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. 2009 sees an Indian garden in front of the BM.
‘Everything must be examined . . . without exception and without circumspection.’

Diderot

Conservation

Conservators and scientists at the BM are active both on-site in London and off-site nationally and abroad. Public aspects of their work encompass gallery talks, academic lectures and publications, and collaborative visits from scholars in the UK and abroad: jades were studied with scientists from Nottingham Trent University; colleagues from Kyoto visited the Hirayama Studio to assist in the preservation of Japanese scroll paintings. Teaching is a key feature: staff welcomed interns and students from UCL, Manchester and other universities in the UK and beyond, and the BM’s collaborative course with the Open University, Archaeology: The Science of Investigation, registered over 700 students from across the country.

The department works closely with curators on new galleries. The Nebamun tomb-chapel paintings from Ancient Egypt were singled out for the brilliance of their seven-year conservation and the ingenuity of their vibration-resistant redisplay. Among the many rarities painstakingly prepared for the new Medieval gallery was what may be Britain’s earliest surviving stringed instrument, a citole of 1300–30. Its intricate wood carving, and later association with Elizabeth I and the Earl of Leicester, were detailed in an article in the second BM Technical Research Bulletin, which explored the musical instrument’s complex historical conversions and restorations (it was at one point turned into a violin). The journal’s other subjects ranged from Neanderthal remains in Croatia to Parthian slipper coffins from southern Iraq.

A highlight of 2008 was an Asahi Shimbun Display called Conservation in Focus (11 September – 26 October), in which conservators put themselves on display by working on ceramics, metal, stone and organic material in Room 3, allowing the public to watch and encouraging them to ask questions. Its popularity was enormous, with 36,000 visitors attending over the six-week run. People praised the behind-the-scenes access. ‘It’s kind of a hidden activity that they do in their basement somewhere . . . I think it’s a wonderful idea,’ said one. ‘It’s great,’ said another, ‘like seeing a doctor during surgery.’

The exhibition included images of other conservation projects, not only of the BM’s collection from across the world, but of fieldwork abroad. Conservators visited Domuztepe in south-east Turkey to preserve finds from a Neolithic tell, a man-made mound rising 14 metres above the surrounding farmland, created by people living in one place for hundreds of years. Curator Alexandra Fletcher’s blog on the BM website kept the public abreast not just of the dig’s progress, but of the daily experience of working on such a site. The excavations are helping us understand better the beginnings of urban society.
Research

Study imbeds all aspects of museum life. Detailed cross-institutional research underpins the BM’s varied approaches to learning, and finds its way into everything from packs for teaching schoolchildren to the scheduling of films for adults. There are on average 10,500 formal visits by academics and researchers to the BM every year. Extensive market analysis ensures that visitors today have direct input in saying what they want from the BM’s public programme.

BM scholarship covers everything from prehistoric implements to contemporary bank notes. It has a public forum that ranges from gallery talks in London to lectures across the UK and the globe. In 2008/9, lectures given by BM curators and other specialist staff spanned Durham to Damascus, Liverpool to Lisbon, Harvard University to Holborn Community Development Project. The BM’s core research is in constant dialogue with both the general public and the scholarly community, and extends equally to the welcoming of expert and interested guests. The year’s work included special visitors from Thailand and Uzbekistan, Congo and Peru.

The topics are varied. Curator Richard Parkinson’s 2009 book, Reading Ancient Egyptian Poetry, drew on the BM collection to establish not just ancient texts, but an entire social history of how poetry was read. Pottery from Miletos, Turkey was studied, with support from the Leverhulme Trust. A public lecture in Lincoln explored the Trojan War. The value of having the public handle objects was analysed in a collection of essays on Touch in Museums. Collaboration is essential, and research links are both with other museums and cultural bodies – a BM lecture at Tate Modern discussed how to curate and collect contemporary art – and with universities.

Academic contacts in the UK in 2008/9 spanned Northumbria University in Newcastle to West Dean College in Chichester. International ties joined the BM to universities in Pisa and Ghent, Mosul and Philadelphia.

The BM’s research role now extends to post-graduate training. Fourteen doctoral candidates were affiliated to the BM in 2008/9 from universities in Cardiff, Newcastle, Reading, Southampton and eight other institutions. They are studying English and Classics, Archaeology and Geography, and work with the collection on topics such as medieval coin loss, Islamic trade in the Persian Gulf and male adornment in early modern Europe.

Exhibitions are a strong focus for renewed study. New investigation and the involvement of international colleagues result not simply in rich displays such as Hadrian, but in catalogues, books, academic articles, online resources, teaching materials and conferences. The AHRC funded research for the Shah Abbas exhibition, and unusually, funded post-exhibition research on Bablylon, so that the fullness of the preparatory material could be explored and made more widely available.

Publication

Each year BM staff publish on average 220 articles and books, sharing their research with fellow specialists and general readers. Books published by the British Museum Press (BMP) included 40 new titles in 2008/9. For children and families, there was V-mail, an introduction to the famous Vindolanda tablets, and a Pocket Timeline of Islamic Civilizations; for general readers, a photographic survey of Assyrian palace sculpture and a collection of satirical prints on love and marriage, as well as books on Rembrandt’s drawings and ancient art from the Americas.

Research publications catalogued Anglo-Saxon glass, Chairman Mao badges and Crimean jewellery and presented excavations at the Kom Firin temple in Egypt. Surveys included the geology of the Stones and Quarries of Ancient Egypt and a beautifully produced two-volume catalogue of the BM collection of Italian Renaissance Ceramics, which incorporates the BM’s wide range of scholarship, from scientific analysis of the clay to discussions of patronage and the history of collecting. Both BMP and staff publish extensively abroad, and BMP now works with publishers in 22 other languages, including Turkish, Czech, Polish and Chinese. With an Arabic edition published in 2008, the BM’s own souvenir guide is now available in ten languages.

Some of the most popular publications are allied to the BM’s public programme. Masterpieces: Medieval Art beautifully presents objects that can be seen in the new Medieval gallery. The exhibition catalogue for Hadrian: Empire and Conflict was among the year’s successes, selling 7000 copies in hardback and 18,000 in paperback. Hadrian and Shah Abbas DVDs narrated by director Neil MacGregor were produced, as were DVDs associated with the BBC4 television series Masterpieces of the
Caring

East. Press reviews were positive: the Good Book Guide said the catalogue for Babylon: Myth and Reality ‘is a fitting testament to a civilization . . . [and] brings the achievements of this people back from beneath the sands of time’. Nearly 15,000 copies were sold.

Publications and DVDs

Among the year’s prizes were the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Book of the Year, awarded to The Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia by John Curtis and Nigel Tallis, and the Antiquity Prize awarded to Roberta Tomber for her research article, ‘Rome and Mesopotamia: Importers into India in the First Millennium AD’. For its contribution to the understanding and appreciation of the art of the medal, the BM was awarded the 2008 President’s Medal of the British Art Medal Society.
Website

‘A marvellous service to higher education’ is what one University of Leeds lecturer called the BM’s free digital image service. ‘I will be showing your images in my lectures and seminars . . . I can’t thank you enough.’ This was the sort of outcome the BM Trustees hoped for when they decided to allow universal free access to high-resolution images of the collection. The online museum has raised the virtual BM from a gallery of selected objects to a pioneering long-term venture to make two million records available on the web. The result is that not just highlights, but the very breadth of the collection can be of service to students and teachers around the world as a comprehensive research tool. Accompanying images can be searched in multiple categories, the results compared, and images enlarged on screen to allow close scrutiny of the most minute details.

Additions to the database this year came from across the collection, including ancient Greece and Rome, Egypt and Sudan, Oceania and the Americas. By March 2009, the BM public database contained more than 1.25 million objects, a quarter of which had one or more images. From Prints and Drawings, a lead collection in this long-term project, 262,000 records are now accessible online, 153,000 of which have detailed images that can be freely studied, downloaded and used for teaching and non-profit reproduction.

Online access is an increasingly significant doorway to the BM collection. In 2008/9, there were 6.5 million website visits to www.britishmuseum.org, with visitors to the BM learning sites, Ancient Civilizations, bringing the figure to 13 million. In addition to the web-published BM Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan, a new online journal, Bronze Age Review, was launched, as were a world map showing BM fieldwork and online research catalogues on Russian Orthodox icons and ancient Cyprus. Elegant design with a strong focus on the user was the sort of high-quality feature that led the Digital Media Awards South to award the BM website ‘Best User Experience’ in 2008.

Learning for all ages is at the heart of the BM’s online work. The BM won a 2008 Jodi Award for Excellence in Web Accessibility for an innovative British Sign Language (BSL) project. Deaf children from Frank Barnes School in Camden created short video presentations using BSL to describe an Assyrian lion hunt and other BM artefacts. The webclips, as the judges noted, made for ‘an outstanding project’ and placed ‘participating children . . . at the heart of this resource’. Online courses for adults, run in conjunction with the Open University, included Art and Life in Ancient Egypt, which was shortlisted for the Learning on Screen Awards 2009.

Website

Frank Barnes School Award-winning videos in which deaf pupils make the stories of objects come alive can be seen on the BM website.

Exhibiting

Exhibiting fieldwork and online research catalogues on Russian Orthodox icons and ancient Cyprus. Elegant design with a strong focus on the user was the sort of high-quality feature that led the Digital Media Awards South to award the BM website ‘Best User Experience’ in 2008.

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Website

Frank Barnes School Award-winning videos in which deaf pupils make the stories of objects come alive can be seen on the BM website.
Exhibiting 4

‘that the same may be, from time to time, visited and seen by all persons . . . [and] rendered as useful as possible, as well towards satisfying the desire of the curious, as for the improvement, knowledge and information of all persons’

Hans Sloane

Exhibitions in London

RULERS AND THEIR WORLDS

From his passion for all things Greek to the well-known boundary he built across Britannia, the Roman Emperor Hadrian was a towering figure. From Scotland to Africa, Iraq to Spain, here was a man who, as one 4th-century historian boasted, ‘built something in almost every city’, not least the celebrated Pantheon at the very heart of his empire in Rome.

It was beneath the BM’s own Pantheon-inspired dome in the Reading Room that the BP Special Exhibition Hadrian: Empire and Conflict (24 July – 26 October 2008) was presented. This major exhibition borrowed widely (31 lenders from 11 countries) to blend striking loans, including marble statues from Paris and the Vatican, with objects on public show in the BM since 1805. From Tbilisi in Georgia came a silver bowl showing the head of Antinous, Hadrian’s beautiful young lover. Architectural fragments and frescoes from the emperor’s celebrated villa travelled from Tivoli. Jerusalem sent hand-written letters and personal items that had survived Hadrian’s suppression of the Jewish Revolt in AD 132–5/6.

Hadrian’s first act on coming to power was to withdraw his forces from Mesopotamia, present-day Iraq. He successfully dealt with the imperial overstretch caused by his predecessor by confining the Roman empire and consolidating its diverse interests. As the Sunday Times reported, the exhibition could not have been more timely and produced ‘an exemplary piece of storytelling, achieved with exactly the right mix of telling objects and great art’. ‘The military and political situation of Hadrian’s era seems eerily familiar to us’, noted the Wall Street Journal, unsurprised that Britain was in the throes of ‘Hadrian-mania’. With a popular BBC2 documentary by Dan Snow that drew

Hadrian, AD 117–38
Images of Hadrian appeared across the Roman Empire. Recent conservation work at the BM has revealed that the head and torso of this marble statue showing Hadrian in a Greek mantle did not originally belong together. (240cm)
Dish with dandy, early 1600s

The prosperity born of Shah Abbas’s consolidation of power in Iran encouraged a coterie of fashionable dandies, with large turbans and curling sideburns. (Diameter 38 cm)

The third in the BM’s quartet of exhibitions on world rulers, Shah Abbas examined the Safavid king who ushered in a golden age when he took the throne in 1587. His generous gifts to Shi’i shrines, artistic patronage, piety and military prowess forged a national identity that survives in the make-up of modern-day Iran.

As the exhibition showed, his capital in Isfahan saw many of the world’s finest things: exquisite calligraphy, delicate watercolours and luxurious silk carpets.

Exhibiting

4.8 million viewers, and over 253,000 visitors, Hadrian was, as the Guardian summed up, ‘Triumphant!’

Contemporary analogies were also explored in Babylon: Myth and Reality (13 November 2008 – 15 March 2009), supported by the Blavatnik Family Foundation. This ‘thrilling exhibition’ (as the Mail on Sunday judged it) developed out of a joint venture with the Musée du Louvre and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. With independent exhibitions in all three European cities, Babylon caught the public’s imagination, selling out on weekends and visited by over a million people overall in London, Berlin and Paris.

From Bruegel to Boney M, medieval illuminators to M.C. Escher, artists have been drawn to Babylon’s lasting associations: the captivity of the Jews, the Hanging Gardens, the Tower of Babel. One strand of the exhibition told the history of this fantasy city, demonised for its decadence. Babylon inspired generations of myth-makers, from 16th-century paintings of the Tower of Babel’s arrogant ascent to heaven to the vastly populated film set of D.W. Griffiths’ 1916 silent film, Intolerance, to Bob Marley singing ‘Chant Down Babylon’. Yet Babylon was once the great capital of a flourishing empire, and the exhibition contrasted its mythic narrative with this real history, told through potent artefacts such as the great lion panels from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 BC) and cuneiform tablets from as early as the 7th century BC, some of which could be heard read aloud as visitors stood before them. Babylon’s myths tend to efface the city’s real existence, and when the real site of Babylon was damaged during recent occupation by troops in Iraq, it was a terrible reminder of the risks that military action brings to cultural heritage. As The Times reported: ‘It was thanks to the international outcry, led by the BM, that the world was alerted to the looting of Baghdad’s museum treasures . . . The museum is still playing a key role in helping Iraq recover its archaeological heritage.’

‘This exhibition contains some of the most beautiful things you could ever wish to see,’ said the Guardian of Shah Abbas: The Remaking of Iran (19 February – 14 June 2009), presented in association with the Iran Heritage Foundation. Politics and poetry warred for centre stage among the glowing press reviews. Forbes praised the BM for its ability to borrow so many extraordinary items never before seen outside Iran: ‘a high-profile instance of cultural diplomacy between Britain and Iran’.

Babylon: Myth and Reality

A dragon with a snake’s head and eagle’s talons from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and a cuneiform world map were among objects from the 6th century BC that told the story of Babylon. (116 x 167, 12 x 8 cm)
ART EXHIBITIONS

Fine art at the BM began 2008/9 with over 3000 visitors a day to *The American Scene: Prints from Hopper to Pollock* (10 April – 7 September 2008), supported by the Terra Foundation for American Art and American Airlines. ‘I can’t praise the exhibition and catalogue . . . highly enough,’ wrote Richard Dorment in the *Telegraph*. The 147 prints surveyed art and society in the USA from 1905–60 and were all from the BM’s permanent collection. The show was seen by 413,000 people.

Kate Moss as Aphrodite, dead voles as mummified offerings – art took many forms in *Statuephilia: Contemporary Sculptors at the BM* (4 October 2008 – 25 January 2009), curated by Waldemar Januszczak and James Fox and sponsored by The Henry Moore Foundation, Linklaters and Channel 4. Complementing the television series *The Sculpture Diaries*, five modern sculptures by Antony Gormley, Mark Quinn, Ron Mueck, Damien Hirst and Noble & Webster were inserted into the BM galleries that inspired them, making explicit the links between ancient art and contemporary practice. As Gormley confessed, ‘Seeing as a child the great head of Ramesses and the Assyrian winged bulls at the BM was what made me become a sculptor.’ A complementary exhibition displayed *British Sculptors’ Drawings: Moore to Gormley* in the Prints and Drawings galleries.

*The Intimate Portrait: Drawings, Miniatures and Pastels from Ramsay to Lawrence* (5 March – 31 May 2009) was organised jointly with the National Galleries of Scotland. It appeared at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery before travelling to the BM. It was given four stars by the Scotsman, whose reviewer was impressed not only with these delicate Georgian and Regency portraits, but that the exhibiton was ‘drawn solely from the wonderful collections the two institutions hold’.

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**American Scene**

Some of the most original images of 20th-century American life were made by printmakers in the USA. This popular BM exhibition included Robert Gwathmey’s screenprint of sharecroppers (1944) and Louis Lozowick’s lithograph of New York (c.1925). (37 x 30; 36 x 29cm)

**Statuephilia**

*Siren* and *Mask II* were two contemporary sculptures displayed in the main galleries. A nearby Greek statue of Aphrodite looked back on Mark Quinn’s gold statue of Kate Moss. Ron Mueck’s impervious head was overseen by the powerful Hoa Hakananai’a from Easter Island.

**Princess Charlotte’s eye,** c.1817

Princess Charlotte, only child of George IV and Queen Caroline, died in childbirth in 1817. This memorial eye-portrait painted by Charlotte Jones on ivory is set on a lock of the princess’s hair. (Diameter 15mm)
THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

‘OBJECT IN FOCUS’ DISPLAYS

Displays in Room 3, sponsored by Asahi Shim bun, permit the BM to focus on single objects and themes to show the breadth of the collection and explain its broader cultural significance. Reflecting on Modern Japan: Photobooks from the Post-war Period (5 June – 10 August 2008) selected three examples of a large collection of photobooks acquired in 2007. These carefully orchestrated photographic essays by some of Japan’s leading 20th-century photographers blurred the boundaries between art and journalism, covering topics from Hiroshima to suburban Tokyo.

The BM’s live display of conservators in action, Conservation in Focus, was followed by The Sámi Magic Drum (27 November 2008 – 18 January 2009). Made in Scandinavia in the 1600s, the drum – painted with reindeer being herded and a man in a boat travelling to the underworld – would have been used by a Sámi shaman to protect his community and provide a portal to other worlds. The prized object was part of the BM’s founding collection donated by Hans Sloane in 1753. It was displayed to

honour the 250 years that the BM collection has been on show to the public.

To complement the Shah Abbas exhibition, Takhti: A Modern Iranian Hero (19 February – 19 April 2009) featured contemporary art by Tehran-based artist Hossein Hassanzadeh. Takhti is a hero in Iran, an Olympic champion wrestler who became equally known as a man of courage, kindness and honour. Hassanzadeh’s portrait ‘shrine’ was accompanied by a clay plaque depicting gymnasts in AD 600 and other Iranian artefacts from the BM collection. The exhibition will travel to Manchester’s Whitworth Art Gallery and the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle in 2009/10.

Reflecting on Modern Japan
The BM’s display of Japanese photobooks spanned the 20th century. They included this 1965 photograph from the series Kamakura by Hirono Edoh.

Ready to Order:

Takhti, 2007

Iranian artist Hossein Hassanzadeh used mixed media in one of the BM’s most recent acquisitions, a work focusing on the great Iranian wrestler and people’s hero, Gholamreza Takhti. (Height 1.5m; © Hossein Hassanzadeh)
GALLERY DISPLAYS

Five billion badges were made during China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–76) and worn as an expression of loyalty to Chairman Mao. The BM has been collecting the badges since the 1970s and presented a fascinating glimpse of their cultural history in Icons of Revolution: Mao Badges Then and Now (10 April – 14 September 2008). Ubiquity of a different sort was captured in Designing Change: Coins of Elizabeth II (18 September 2008 – 22 February 2009). Developed in collaboration with the Royal Mint, the display examined UK coin design, including the new ‘reverses’ issued in April 2008 for all coins up to £1, the first such redesign since decimalisation nearly 40 years ago. In conjunction with the Shah Abbas exhibition, UK coins made way for The Splendour of Isfahan: Coins from Iran (5 March – 5 July 2009), a window onto the Persian city that was known as ‘half the world’ for its beauty and splendour.

Between Tibet and Assam: Cultural Diversity in the Eastern Himalayas (25 October 2008 – 13 April 2009) sent visitors further east to explore the mountainous area of Arunachal Pradesh and its astonishingly diverse million-strong population of 35 tribal groups, 25 languages and a variety of beliefs. Rarely seen textiles and votive objects, masks and historical photographs set a fascinating context for recent, ongoing research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and undertaken by the BM and London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

As a special loan from China to the BM, sixty spectacular Treasures from Shanghai: Ancient Chinese Bronzes and Jades (30 January – 27 March 2009) travelled to London. The display of beautifully carved Neolithic jades and cast bronzes of the Shang and Zhou dynasties (1500–221 BC) was co-organised with the Shanghai Museum and the BM, with the guidance of the Chinese Embassy in the UK. It was sponsored by the Information Office of Shanghai Municipal People’s Government, and Foreign Affairs Office of Shanghai Municipal People’s Government and Bureau of China World Expo Coordination.

The BM continues to forge international ties through its exhibitions, with an Indian Summer season in 2009, sponsored by HSBC, and a major autumn exhibition, sponsored by Arcelor Mittal, on the Aztec ruler Moctezuma.
National exhibitions

BM exhibitions attract visitors from across the UK. Many more are reached by loans and tours across the country, from Swansea to Aberdeen, Belfast to Norwich. In 2008/9, the BM loaned 2669 objects nationally, an increase of 14% over the previous year. Outstanding among them was the long-term loan of Lindow Man, the 1st-century AD bog body seen by millions of visitors to the BM every year. It was on public display at Manchester Museum from April 2008 to April 2009 under the BM’s Partnership UK scheme, designed to foster joint work and exchange among collections across the UK. The loan was widely reported on television and in the press.

High-profile exhibitions in London are increasingly given national links, many through tours supported by the Dorset Foundation. A bust of Hadrian journeyed to Hadrian’s Wall prior to the major exhibition and was seen by 18,000 people. The American Scene went to Nottingham, the first of three tour venues after its immensely successful London run. Textiles from Ghana travelled to Gateshead, Bradford and Eastleigh in Fabric of a Nation. Romuald Hazoumé’s La Bouche du Roi continued its UK tour at the Horniman Museum in south London. Such displays are often collaborative. Britain’s industrial achievement was explored through banknotes, silver and other items in a jointly curated exhibition at the Barber Institute in Birmingham. Ikon Gallery in Birmingham initiated an exhibition of Hiroshige prints (chosen by the artist Julian Opie from the BM collection), which went to Blackpool and then was shown at the BM itself in October 2008.

The success of The First Emperor is being followed up by an exhibition tour to six venues in the UK, a China Now legacy project supported by BP. China: Journey to the East covers 3000 years of Chinese culture, organised around five themes aimed at schoolchildren and their families: play and performance, technology, belief and festivals, food and drink, and language and writing. More than 200 objects have been lent from the BM. These are complemented around the country by collection material from the host venues or others in their vicinities. At Bristol’s City Museum & Art Gallery, the first venue and lead partner for the tour, the exhibition incorporates items from the local collection within the main display and draws attention to Bristol’s dedicated gallery for Chinese glass, the finest collection of its kind in the UK.

Ancient Greeks: Athletes, Warriors and Heroes, funded through the DCMS/DfES National/Regional Museum Partnerships Education Programme for 2008/9 and the Dorset Foundation, completed the second phase of its tour, attracting record numbers of schoolchildren in Luton, Lincoln, South Shields and Glasgow.
BM exhibitions, loans and research projects across the UK and Ireland

**Exhibitions**

- Burrell Collection, Glasgow (1)
- Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh (12)
- Tyne & Wear Museums, Newcastle (14)
- Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle (2)
- Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle (8)
- Middleton Institute of Modern Art (13)
- Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool (3)
- Cartwright Hall, Bradford (17)
- York Art Gallery (18)
- Llandudno Museum (6)
- National Museums Liverpool (5)
- University of Liverpool Art Gallery (5)
- Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (4)
- Manchester Museum (4)
- Museums Sheffield: Weston Park (19)
- North Lincolnshire Museum, Scunthorpe (20)
- The Collection: Art & Archaeology in Lincolnshire (22)
- Djanogly Art Gallery, Nottingham (28)
- New Art Gallery, Walsall (21)
- Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham (21)
- The Herbert, Coventry (15)
- Bedford Museum (26)
- Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life (25)
- Wardown Park Museum, Luton (27)
- Alcester Roman Heritage Centre (7)
- Brent Museum (23)
- Bristol’s City Museum & Art Gallery (10)
- Chertsey Museum (40)
- Horniman Museum, London (28)
- Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro (11)
- Hampshire Museums Service Winchester (30)
- Brighton Museum & Art Gallery (29)

**Research projects**

- National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh (12)
- University of Newcastle (14)
- University of Durham (33)
- Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (37)
- University of Liverpool (5)
- University of Manchester (4)
- Creswell Heritage Trust, Derbyshire (16)
- University of Cambridge (41)
- University of Oxford (9)
- Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (9)
- University of Reading (39)
- University of Cardiff (36)
- Slough Museum (35)
- Courtauld Institute, London (28)
- Queen Mary, University of London (28)
- Institute of Archaeology, University College London (28)
- Royal Holloway, University of London (28)
- King’s College London (28)
- Birkbeck, University of London (28)
- SOAS, University of London (28)
- Sir John Soane’s Museum, London (28)
- University of Southampton (32)
- University of Sussex (29)
- University of Kent (42)
International exhibitions

Bernini in LA, Charles Darwin in Sydney, Benin in Berlin – BM loans internationally contribute to a world programme of cultural access and exchange. Among the many exhibitions to which BM loans were contributed were *The Caribbean before Christopher Columbus* in Santiago de Compostela, *The Lure of the East* in Istanbul and *Pharonic Renaissance* in Ljubljana. In 2008/9 the BM lent 1754 objects to 132 venues outside the UK.

Many are the BM’s own exhibitions, covering topics from Iran to America. *Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East* was first displayed at the BM. In 2008, its rare combination of contemporary art from across the Middle East – all from the BM collection – was shown in Dubai, supported by Dubai International Finance Centre. *A New World: England’s First View of America* took the BM’s much-praised exhibition of 16th-century watercolours by John White back to its place of inspiration, where 75,000 people saw the exhibition at New Haven, Connecticut and Jamestown, Virginia.

*Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the BM* transported an entire culture, from large sculpted reliefs to tiny clay tablets, to show its wealth of artistry and science. In Boston, 69,000 visitors saw the artefacts, which the *New York Times* praised as ‘so visually inventive, engrossing, even heartbreaking . . . more than 2600 years later you find yourself transfixed’.

Most popular of all the international exhibitions was *The Ancient Olympic Games*, a BM tour of Greek and Roman objects that included the first-ever loan of the celebrated marble sculpture, *The Discus-Thrower* (‘Diadokhos’) from the Townley Collection. Travelling to Shanghai and Hong Kong, the exhibition was seen by 430,000 people during its seven months in China.

![Image of visitors at the BM's *The Ancient Olympic Games* exhibition](Image)

The Ancient Olympic Games
One of the BM’s most successful tours, this exhibition of Greek and Roman sculptures and other objects was seen by nearly half a million people in China. Here audiences queue for entry in Shanghai.
Discussing

‘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.’

Edmund Powlett

Broadcasting

Public engagement with the collection takes many forms, some not available to those first visitors in 1759. Film and television in particular successfully introduce the collection to audiences worldwide, whether through international transmissions of series such as *The Museum*, the BBC2 behind-the-scenes look at the BM, or sales of BM DVDs linked to major exhibitions, including those on *The First Emperor, Hadrian* and mostly recently *Shah Abbas*.

Television and radio coverage ranged from reviews on *Newsnight* and *Front Row* – where host John Wilson praised the BM’s success in opening ‘a new diplomatic channel’ with Iran – to filming in the BM for external broadcasts. A crystal skull in the collection (and subject of a recent Indiana Jones film) was discussed by BM scientists in a documentary for Channel 5 and Smithsonian Networks/National Geographic International. Other outside filming included Czech and Abu Dhabi television and a Canadian history channel. The web too is a site of broadcasting, with web videos on the BM website including *Shah Abbas* videos in English and Persian. Animation created at workshops run at the BM can be seen on YouTube.

The BM has embarked on a major public-engagement broadcasting and online project with the BBC. At its core is a 100-part series for Radio 4 called *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. Presented by Neil MacGregor, the series begins with a handaxe made in Africa two million years ago and will come right up to the present, with an object which has not yet been chosen and indeed has perhaps not yet been made. Each 15-minute programme features an object from the BM collection, with contributions from a wide range of experts, conservators, makers and people who have strong cultural connections to the objects. The series will be transmitted over 20 weeks throughout 2010 and be supported by an extensive online site.

The *History of the World* project also encompasses a 13-part television series for children as well as activity all over the UK, with events and displays in museums and galleries focusing on their regional connections to the history of the world and a wide range of national and regional radio and TV programmes.

A History of the World The BM is collaborating with BBC Radio 4 to make a 100-part series telling a history of the world through 100 objects. It will be broadcast in 2010.
Civic space

Babylon to Bethnal Green was a 90-minute Guardian public debate chaired by Jon Snow and introduced by Neil MacGregor. Audience members exchanged views with five speakers – Tibor Fischer, Trevor Phillips, Tahmina Anam, Robert Evans and Peter Austin – over whether language unites or divides multicultural societies. Events like these characterise the BM as a civic space, where ideas can be freely exchanged and politics and culture discussed by the public.

Such events ran throughout the year. Prize-winning journalist Thomas L. Friedman spoke to a sell-out audience about the ‘green revolution’, with a lively Q&A session chaired by the associate editor of the Financial Times, Martin Wolf. Hadrian’s Wall prompted a political debate organised with the London Review of Books in which Neal Ascherson and others discussed how walls and architecture are used to manage territories and people. Describing the event in the New Statesman, Andrew O’Hagan praised the BM for ‘finding new forms of intellectual nobility in the here and now’. Hadrian’s Wall took on a closer UK resonance in a readers’ evening for the Spectator, in which editor Matthew d’Ancona chaired a discussion among Frank Field MP and others about Scottish independence and the English–Scottish divide.

Much of the BM’s public work involves community groups and those less likely to visit the collection. An innovative pilot project with Age Concern trialed visits for over-55s. Other work – including courses on literacy, numeracy and basic skills – reaches those whose second language is English, adult learners, refugees and asylum seekers. Community events are often supported by the BM’s team of nearly 500 volunteers, whose eyeOpener tours and hands-on object-handling sessions attract over 15,000 visitors each month.

Free community previews offer access to BM special exhibitions to audiences who might otherwise be under-represented. A Hadrian community preview on 20 July 2008 drew 500 visitors from partner organisations including Coram family support charity, Crisis homeless support charity, Holborn Community Association’s elders group, Camden Chinese Community Centre’s Youth Group, New Horizons homeless youth project, Hopscotch Asian Women’s Centre, local education colleges, English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) groups, Great Ormond Street Hospital and Sure Start centres. Three quarters said they were likely to return. An Iraqi visitor to the Babylon community preview was thrilled by ‘this amazing exhibition where I can find out things about my heritage and my background and be very proud of who I am and where I come from’. More widely, special events such as Kazakhs’ Day target specific groups and those interested in learning more about other cultures not just in the past, but as living communities. Ethiopia Family Day attracted 3000 people, including 600 Ethiopians who live in the UK.
Learning

There were 219,000 booked school visits to the BM in 2008/9, with 66,000 of those pupils coming from overseas. For all the BM’s work with young visitors, whether school groups or families, innovation is key to capture their interest, with multimedia approaches increasingly significant. The BM’s new Samsung Digital Discovery Centre, opened in March 2009, provides not just a venue for exploring world history, but an exciting methodology, using sound, photography and film to entice young people into finding new ways to engage with the collection throughout the building.

Learning programmes at the BM strive to fulfil its original purpose to address the needs and interests of all visitors. A successful initiative is Discover the Arab World, a teachers’ resource pack launched in print and online in 2008. With funding from the Karim Rida Said Foundation, the pack provides 30 full-colour reproductions of Arab objects in the BM collection, each with history, a glossary and starting points for discussion and activity on the reverse. It contains a guide for secondary school teachers of art and design, history, citizenship and religion. Supported by teacher training, e-marketing and school visits, the project will help deepen understanding of Arab history and Arab cultural achievements.

Another successful project was Talking Objects, in which young people from diverse backgrounds delved into a single BM object, talking to curators, handling real objects, debating relevant issues, using storytelling and drama to expand ideas. Piloted in 2008 around the Rosetta Stone, the scheme to inspire people through the collection will continue until 2012, with support from the John Lyon’s Charity. The year’s family events included weekends and week-long programmes linked by theme and, increasingly, event type (varieties of storytelling one weekend, arts and crafts the next). For a Persia-themed week in April 2008, sponsored by Magic of Persia, children and their families heard stories, met King Darius, reconstructed Persepolis and made magical winged creatures to compare with real Persian reliefs in the galleries. The culminating weekend attracted the Iranian community and others to dancers, musicians, jewellary workshops, films and games of backgammon. Elephants week drew 3400 people, while the summer’s Hadrian events attracted over 10,000 participants to meet the emperor, reconstruct his villa at Tivoli or have their photo taken as Hadrian or his wife, Sabina. With support from the Helen Hamlyn Trust, the Hamlyn family trails were updated, and two new ones added. The Paul Hamlyn library, a free reference area for visitors to the
Collaborating

Discover the Arab World

BM outreach work included designing this teachers’ pack.
It encourages using the collection to help children understand Arab history and culture.
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 . . . it may be judged reasonable, that the advantages accruing from it should be rendered as general as possible.’

Karl Philipp Moritz

Portable Antiquities Scheme

Every year, thousands of people across the United Kingdom uncover historic objects, some while out walking or working outdoors, some using metal detectors. The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) is a pioneering programme managed by the BM to secure knowledge of those objects and widen understanding at a national level of what is found and collected locally. PAS ensures that valuable information is not lost and the shared public heritage that is our history is preserved. Recorded objects are frequently acquired by local museums across the country.

PAS is funded largely by the DCMS through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. In 2008/9 it also received a three-year award of £150,000 from the Headley Trust for training assistants to the scheme. Its work ranges widely, from its much-used online database to specialist research. Its data are increasingly used for academic study, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is now funding five PhDs to work on PAS as a source of new information. As part of the increasing interest abroad in the scheme, the BM was invited in March 2009 to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg to talk about how PAS ensures that finds made by the public are recorded for public benefit.

In 2008, 56,000 finds were reported, with at least 800 of those potentially categorised as treasure under the Treasure Act. PAS brought to light several outstanding finds, including Anglo-Saxon gold finger-rings and cloisonné work discovered in Yorkshire, and 800 gold staters found in Wickham Market, Suffolk. Four 17th-century silver spoons, a goblet and a bell salt, hidden in a ceramic vessel during the Civil War, were found near Stowey Court, Somerset. In north Lincolnshire, a Roman patera or handled pan was discovered, beautifully decorated with enamel squares.

Female horse-rider, AD 50–300

This Romano-British figurine (shown from three angles) may represent Minerva and be linked to the Celtic goddess Epona

Roman patera, AD 100–250

A copper-alloy pan covered with enamelled squares was found in Lincolnshire in 2008. It has been acquired by the North Lincolnshire Museum. (Diameter 3cm)
Fieldwork

One of the BM’s perennial activities is digging. Fieldwork in the UK and internationally is usually collaborative, sometimes guiding, often supporting colleagues from other institutions and other countries. But the intellectual digging goes on long after the tents are packed away. BM curators and scientists can spend years exploring the complexities and reconfigurations new artefacts and new site information provide. For the general public, the application of this scholarly investigation is often incorporated into BM displays, such as the new Medieval and Nebumun galleries.

Fieldwork in the UK is wide-ranging. It includes recording valuable site information across the country for finds reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme and work on the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain (AHOB) – a collaboration with the Natural History Museum, Royal Holloway, Queen Mary and Durham University, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. AHOB is examining the earliest prehistory of Britain from the first human colonisers, about 700,000 years ago, up to the end of the Last Ice Age. Excavations of ancient deposits at Happisburgh, Norfolk are pushing back the dating of early human habitation in Europe, rewriting several hundred thousand years of history.

Studies of the results of past excavations at the port of Siraf in Iran are helping to clarify early patterns of Islamic trade. Among the finds of ceramics and ruined buildings was the discovery of East African cooking pots, which may suggest the early presence of migrant workers. Across the globe, President Raphael Correa of Ecuador awarded the BM’s 20-year project in Agua Blanca the 2008 Hernan Crespo Toral National Prize for Cultural Achievement. Staff collaborated with local residents to conserve and display the archaeological heritage of this important trading settlement. A site museum and cultural centre was built using traditional materials and techniques. The prize was awarded collectively to the community of Agua Blanca for their extensive work.

Planned excavations include a new dig in Sudan, looking at a site that was the colonial capital when Egypt conquered Nubia in the reign of Ramesses II; fieldwork in Ethiopia for an exhibition on Islam in Africa; a project with colleagues in Asia exploring the golden age of Gupta India; and an interdisciplinary study of the Indian Ocean, bringing together sites in China, South Asia, Africa and the Middle East to examine the history of trade and cultural exchange.
World Collections Programme

The World Collections Programme (WCP) is a unique alliance of UK institutions: the British Museum, British Library, Tate, V&A, Natural History Museum and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The programme is chaired by Neil MacGregor and has received £3 million over three years from DCMS. Its aim is to develop greater access to these six world collections and the body of expertise they represent among institutions and audiences in Asia and Africa.

In its first year, WCP supported 20 projects involving representatives from 14 different countries. These included 26 separate training and capacity-building activities, such as the BM-led sustainable redevelopment of cultural heritage storage facilities at the Nairobi Museum using locally sourced materials.

At the National Museum in Ethiopia, the BM conducted training workshops in exhibition display and textiles conservation. An ambitious museum management seminar in Damascus for Syrian, Jordanian and Palestinian museum professionals was delivered to coincide with the V&A’s World Ceramics exhibition. Representatives from five of the six WCP partners, including the BM, were present.

The World Collections Programme has toured a V&A-led exhibition, Indian Life and Landscape, to Mumbai and Jodhpur and enabled the development of an exhibition of digital photographs from the archives of the six WCP partners for the National Museum in Kabul (scheduled to open December 2009). It also funded 25 staff exchanges and six research and development exercises (including a significant focus on Middle Eastern contemporary art) to initiate a series of long-term partnerships across Asia and Africa.

International Programmes

The BM runs programmes of exchange, training and research worldwide, sharing its expertise with overseas partners, often with reciprocal benefits to the UK. Money in Africa, supported by the AHRC, moves across disciplinary and national boundaries to examine the history of money and trade in Africa. Work with African colleagues ranges from shared research to cataloguing collections in Africa and training. But the programme has also taken an innovative approach to using the work in Africa to establish ties with British African-Caribbean groups such as the Camden Black Parents and Teachers Association. The groups’ involvement has been praised by the AHRC and one of many outcomes of Money in Africa will be the shaping of new materials for teaching African history to schoolchildren in the UK.

The BM’s Africa Programme engages African museums to develop exhibitions, maintain collections and train staff. It is generously supported by the Ford Foundation, Leventis Foundation and others. Individual projects, such as a workshop for artists in Maputo, Mozambique, are balanced against longer term programmes, such as those in Kenya. These included ethnographic storage and a regional museum exchange between Kenya’s Meru Museum and the Museum for East Anglian Life in Stowmarket. West African programmes ranged from training in display and interpretation in Ghana to the development of a Collections Management Centre. Future work includes work placements for colleagues from Nigeria to prepare for an

Cultural partnerships
Delegates from the National Museums of Kenya visited the UK in October 2008 to mark the start of their involvement with the World Collections Programme.

Iraq, 2008
Keeper John Curtis and Major Hugo Clarke descend the ziggurat at Ur as BM staff and the British Army make a visit to monitor cultural heritage in Iraq. (© Crown copyright)

Memorandum of Understanding
BM Director Neil MacGregor signed a Memorandum of Understanding in July 2008 with the Director of the National Museum of Iran, Mohammad Reza Mehrandish.

International Curatorial Training Programme
Curators from nine countries attended the BM’s annual summer school in 2008 for training, research and professional development at participating UK museums.
exhibition of material from Ife and developing a higher education curriculum and digital resources in Sierra Leone.

National partners support many of the BM’s programmes, such as the International Curatorial Training Programme (ICTP), which brings together young curators from around the world for a summer school of training and research. The 2008 I CTP (funded by a consortium of trusts, private donors and the DCMS) saw 18 participants from Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Sudan, Turkey, Kenya, South Africa, China and India work not just with the BM but museums in Cardiff, Glasgow, Lincoln, Manchester and Newcastle.

The BM’s work in the Middle East was widely reported. In September 2008, the International Council of Museums, in association with the BM, published a Red List of Afghanistan Antiquities at Risk. In Iraq, the BM was involved in several projects to protect the country’s cultural heritage. In early June 2008, the BM and the British Army (Multinational Division), with the support of the State Board for Antiquities and Heritage in Iraq, undertook a joint project to assess the state of key archaeological sites in southern Iraq. John Curtis, Keeper of the Department of the Middle East, was part of the team which visited Ur, Larsa and six other sites to evaluate archaeological damage and propose measures to secure the areas. Photographs are posted on the BM website.

Plans for a new museum in Basra were unveiled, and the DCMS funded extended study visits to the BM by the director of the Basra Museum and two academics from Qadasiyeh University in Diwaniya. With the support of the Iraqi government, it is hoped that the new Basra Museum may soon become a reality.
BM activities across the globe

USA: Los Angeles (1)
The first North American exhibition on Baroque artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini included this drawing of a boy from the BM collection. Travelling afterwards to Ottawa, it brought together works from Paris, Rome, Berlin and London.

USA: Boston (2)
One of the world’s finest collections of Assyrian artefacts resides in the BM. The BM tour, Art and Empire, has shown them to audiences from China to Spain and, in 2008/9, the USA.

ECUADOR: Agua Blanca (3)
At Agua Blanca, the BM worked with local residents to preserve finds and build a cultural centre. President Rafael Correa awarded the project a prize in 2008 for cultural achievement.

NORWAY: Stavanger (4)
On the west coast of Norway, an exhibition at the Arkeologisk Museum featured several BM loans: a bronze mirror mounted with falcons, a silver ball and two 22cm wooden boats with their crews from Ancient Egypt.

BELGIUM: Brussels (5)
The European Parliament honoured Arab Week with a display of BM objects from the Middle East. It included 9th-century ceramics from Egypt and Iraq, and this Turkish astrolabe inlaid with silver and copper made by Abd al-Karim al-Misri in 1241.

CROATIA: Krapina (6)
Neanderthal remains up to 120,000 years old from a cave north of Zagreb were examined by BM conservators and scientists to assess past damage and future care.

NIGERIA: Lagos (7)
Conservators Kolawole Adeyera from Ibadan Museum (left) and Simeon Momoh from Lagos Museum held work placements at the BM to carry out treatment to a stone figure from Ilé for a major exhibition next year.

TURKEY: Domuztepe (8)
With the British Institute at Ankara and the University of Manchester, the BM excavated a late Neolithic site to study the transition from village societies to urban ones.

KENYA: Nairobi (9)
Ties with Kenya range from exhibitions to welcoming visiting scholars to the BM for research and training. Here designer Suzanne Wanjaria installs objects in the ‘Cycle of Life’ gallery at the National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi.

QATAR: Doha (10)
The Bengali Gazi Scroll, c.1800, was the BM’s loan to the new Museum of Islamic Art in Doha for Beyond Boundaries, Islamic Art Across Cultures. Twenty leading museums lent one prize artefact each.

INDIA: Udayagiri (11)
With colleagues from Bhopal, BM archaeologists studied an astronomical site from the 2nd century BC, later used by the Gupta kings to consolidate their imperial authority. Future research will reassess aspects of Gupta culture.

CHINA: Shanghai (12)
The BM sent Greek and Roman sculptures to China in The Ancient Olympic Games, a BM touring exhibition that included the celebrated Discobolus. It was seen by over 430,000 visitors in Shanghai and Hong Kong.
Fundraising and finance

Operating activity
In 2008/9, the UK government increased grant-in-aid for running costs to the BM by almost 3% to nearly £43 million. Operating expenditure was within budget and income.

The Trustees would like to express their thanks to all those who so generously supported the BM in 2008/9. Private philanthropy and corporate sponsorship remain of prime importance to the BM’s achievements. The BM continues to rely on the extraordinary generosity of a large number of individuals, international companies, trusts and foundations. Pledges totalling more than £8 million were received during the year, allowing significant investment to improve gallery space, essential work on the infrastructure to bring it up to international standards, conservation of and research into the collection, and a rich and varied public programme.

Galleries
This year saw the opening of four major new galleries at the BM to widespread acclaim. Significant areas of the collection can now be displayed in modern showcases, using new technology and multimedia to give visitors access to recent scholarship. This was possible only through the generosity of private donors – Sir Joseph Hotung, Sir Harry and Lady Djanogly, Sir Ronald and Lady Cohen, and Paul and Jill Ruddock – to whom the BM is enormously indebted.

Northwest Development
The Northwest Development will ensure the BM maintains its position as a leading institution for the study of human culture in London, the United Kingdom and the world. Through an upgrade of key facilities, the development will address urgent needs in terms of the BM’s infrastructure and will provide a new exhibition space, state-of-the-art conservation and science laboratories and studios, world-class accommodation for the study collection, as well as facilities to support the BM’s extensive UK and international loan programmes. It will allow the BM to enhance the exhibition experience, lend more artefacts and most importantly continue to preserve the collection for future generations.

Funding for the £135 million project is well underway, with £90 million already raised. The funds have come from a variety of sources, including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Trustees are confident the BM can raise the remaining funding to complete the project.

Partnerships
The new Samsung Digital Discovery Centre – a technological hub for children and young people to learn about and interact with the BM collection – is an example of how partnerships with the corporate sector allow the BM to deliver outstanding new projects. The centre opened in March 2009, but Samsung have partnered the BM for five years so that the project can continue to develop. The company has provided wireless technology for the centre that includes notebook computers, tablet PCs, digital video and stills cameras for use by pupils, as well as presentation equipment including LCD televisions and photo-frames, printers, projectors and DVD players. It is support from international companies such as Samsung that enables the BM to deliver improvements to its public services.

Acquisitions
The BM continues to enrich its collection in many ways, spending around £1.5 million on acquisitions during the year, as well as receiving significant donations. A relevant, dynamic and evolving collection is the lifeblood of any museum responsive to the ever-changing needs of society, taste and cultural perspectives. The Trustees are particularly grateful to the Patrons and Donors who generously supported this important area of BM activity.

Inflationary pressure and reduced funding opportunities have threatened this essential activity in recent years, but there is a huge potential across the UK for individual philanthropy. Tax relief now covers lifetime gifts of cash, stocks and shares, and land, but not of objects that would be valuable additions to museums, galleries, libraries and archives. The BM would be keen to build on the success of schemes such as acceptance-in-lieu by extending tax relief to lifetime gifts of significant cultural objects in order to preserve them for public benefit.

Commercial
A run of successful international exhibitions, in addition to cementing relationships with other museums across the world, continues to provide essential funding for new activities. On-site commercial activity also benefited from the exhibitions programme and strong overall visitor numbers, with profits of £1.4 million generated from retail and hospitality during the year.
organisations around more museums and England. Collaborative network comprising 17 Partnerships UK is a network comprising 17 major museum services and the National Trust site at Sutton Hoo. The partners cover Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the nine regions of England. Collaborative activities and loans are undertaken with many more museums and organisations around the UK.
## World loans

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<tr>
<th>City</th>
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*Between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009, BM objects have been seen in cities across the world*