



The British
Museum

Review 2021/22

Introductions

Chair's foreword

The British Museum moves forward with confidence and ambition. We are now embarking on a huge redevelopment of the Museum so that we can present our unique collection in new spaces, using contemporary technology and in a way that tells the whole story of our common humanity.

At the same time we are working with museums across the UK, and communities around the world, so that ever more people have the opportunity to visit in person, and online, all we have to offer.

None of this would be possible without our dedicated staff or the millions of visitors who show us such support. Thank you.

Rt Hon George Osborne CH
Chair, British Museum

Director's preface

It has been another astounding year for the Museum. Once again, we rose to the unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19. Our success in reaching out in difficult times has demonstrated that we've never been more necessary or relevant. The strength of the collection coupled with our ground-breaking exhibitions has enabled millions of visitors – onsite and online – to navigate the connected story of the people and cultures which have shaped the modern world from deep history to the present.

I'm incredibly proud that our work touches so many communities. Over the last year, we welcomed 390,000 young people to the Museum, providing an enriching and, at times, life-changing experience. Our Portable Antiquities Scheme celebrated its one millionth find. Our loans programme saw thousands of objects visit hundreds of venues at home and overseas.

Our heritage expertise enables us to build enduring partnerships through our international work in places like West Africa, Iraq, India and South America, playing a crucial role in supporting those nations in archaeological discovery, exchanging skills and knowledge, sharing the collection, building capacity and training the next generation of talent to preserve and share cultural heritage.

There's more to come in the year ahead as we map out an exciting new future for the Museum and our audiences – and create innovative new ways to connect them to the past and the future.

Hartwig Fischer
Director, British Museum

What a year

*The world of Stonehenge in
The Sainsbury Exhibitions
Gallery (Room 30).*

The Museum in numbers

2m

visitors

1m

finds recorded by the public through
the Portable Antiquities Scheme

600

volunteers recruited as part of the
Portable Antiquities Scheme

17m

visits to the Museum website

390,000

number of people under 16 who
have visited the Museum

97%

of visitors recommend the Museum



Transforming the Museum for the future

Our vision is to build on the Museum's unique global position, to connect people and cultures through a collection that encapsulates the world's complexity through its diversity, beauty and significance.

Our priorities are to deliver the best possible visitor experience, increase access to the collection and renovate our historic buildings and estate.

While COVID-19 had a devastating effect around the world, we hope to move forward with the lessons we've learned and the responses we implemented.

Response 1 We adapted

Response 2 We embraced digital

Response 3 We enhanced access to the collections

Response 4 We created new innovative exhibitions for our audiences



Exhibitions

Loved by millions around the world, our exhibitions allow visitors to engage emotionally and intellectually with objects and works of art – and feel more connected to the people who made and used them. They enable visitors to experience a huge breadth of history around the world.

Peru: a journey in time was a remarkable exploration of the thousands of years that humans have lived in the stunning landscapes of the Andes mountains and beyond.

Nero: the man behind the myth allowed us to reveal a society that was prosperous and dynamic, yet full of inner tensions, which erupted in a violent civil war after Nero's death.

Last but not least, *The world of Stonehenge* unveiled secrets from the period – enabling visitors to engage emotionally, bringing hundreds of inspiring objects together to tell a real and understandable story.



Ceramic relief plaque of a mounted Parthian archer, Syria, 1st–3rd century. From the 2021 exhibition *Nero: the man behind the myth*.

Nebra Sky Disc, Germany, about 1600 BC. From the 2022 exhibition *The world of Stonehenge*.

Copper and shell funerary mask, Peru, Moche, AD 100–800. Museo de Arte de Lima, Peru. Donated by James Reid. From the 2021/2022 exhibition *Peru: a journey in time*.



Exhibitions

Stonehenge

The world of Stonehenge, supported by bp, opened on 17 February 2022 to widespread critical acclaim. Prior to the public opening, the exhibition was blessed by the Archdruid of Stonehenge and Britain.

Following the story of Britain and Europe from 4000 to 1000 BC, in this exhibition we learned about the restless and highly connected age of Stonehenge – a period of immense transformation and radical ideas that changed society forever.

Informed by ground-breaking recent archaeological and scientific discoveries, this landmark exhibition offered new insight on one of the world's great wonders, bringing the story of Stonehenge into sharper focus than ever before.

The world of Stonehenge in The Sainsbury Exhibitions Gallery (Room 30).



Part of a gorget (military throat armour) or box lid, gold, Ireland, about 1150–750 BC. From the 2022 exhibition *The world of Stonehenge*.



Exhibitions

Peru: a journey in time in The Joseph Hotung Great Court Gallery (Room 35).

Peru: a journey in time

Peru: a journey in time opened on 11 November 2021. Supported by PROMPERÚ, the exhibition featured stunning objects from the ancient Andes from the Museum's own collection alongside key loans from the Museo de Arte de Lima and other museums in Peru.

From Peru's early indigenous peoples to the ill-fated Inca, this exhibition explored how past cultures were shaped by the diverse landscapes of the central Andes.

Visitors discovered how people thrived in one of the most challenging and geographically diverse regions in the world, adapting to landscapes ranging from arid deserts along the Pacific coast, high mountains across the Andes and tropical forests in the Amazon in the east.



Painted pottery vessel in the form of a warrior holding a club and a shield, Peru, Moche, AD 100–600. From the 2021/2022 exhibition *Peru: a journey in time*.

Exhibitions

Nero: the man behind the myth

Exploring the true story of Rome's fifth emperor, *Nero: the man behind the myth*, supported by bp, was informed by new research and archaeological evidence from the time, challenging the biased historical accounts written after Nero's death that have shaped his legacy.

The exhibition, which opened on 27 May 2021, showed how recent discoveries relating to Nero's 14-year rule reveal a more accurate picture. Treasures hidden during the destruction of Colchester in AD 60–61 during Boudica's Iceni rebellion, burned artefacts from the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64, and evidence from the destruction of Pompeii uncover a new understanding of Nero's turbulent reign.

Marble bust of Nero. Italy, about AD 55. Photo by Francesco Piras. With permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Cagliari. From the 2021 exhibition *Nero: the man behind the myth* in The Sainsbury Exhibitions Gallery (Room 30).

'This was the first major exhibition in the UK to look beyond the commonly held view of Nero as the Emperor who fiddled while Rome burned. The exhibition's representation of Nero is one that resonates with our times, in a world with deepening social and economic challenges, contested facts and the polarisation of opinion.'

Hartwig Fischer. Director, British Museum





Nero: the man behind the myth
in The Sainsbury Exhibitions
Gallery (Room 30).

Exhibitions

Thomas Becket: murder and the making of a saint

Opening to the public on 20 May 2021, this special exhibition marked the 850th anniversary of Thomas Becket's brutal murder. It presented his tumultuous journey from merchant's son to archbishop, and from a revered saint in death to a 'traitor' in the eyes of King Henry VIII more than 350 years later.

Visitors got up close to the man, the murder and the legend through an extraordinary array of objects associated with Becket – from illuminated manuscripts, some of which included eyewitness accounts of the murder, to jewellery and sacred reliquaries.

This exhibition was supported by The Hintze Family Charitable Foundation, The Ruddock Foundation for the Arts, and Zemen Paulos and Jack Ryan.



Left: Reliquary casket, Norway, about 1220–50. By kind permission of Hedalen Stave Church. From the 2021 exhibition *Thomas Becket: murder and the making of a saint* in The Joseph Hotung Great Court Gallery (Room 35).

Right: Alabaster sculpture showing the murder of Thomas Becket, England, about 1450. This sculpture was made for an altarpiece in a church. It would probably have formed part of a sequence of sculptures showing scenes from Becket's life and death. From the 2021 exhibition *Thomas Becket: murder and the making of a saint*.



Exhibitions

Miracle Window, Canterbury Cathedral, early 1200s. © The Chapter, Canterbury Cathedral. From the 2021 exhibition *Thomas Becket: murder and the making of a saint* in The Joseph Hotung Great Court Gallery (Room 35).



Exhibitions

Hokusai: The Great Picture Book of Everything

This exhibition, sponsored by The Asahi Shimbun, opened to the public on 30 September 2021, with an inauguration ceremony in the gallery, attended by the Japanese Ambassador, Hajime Hayashi.

It featured a collection of 103 drawings acquired by the Museum in 2020 with Art Fund support, as well as two prints of *The Great Wave* from the Museum collection.

These small, exquisite drawings were not previously known to the public. Last publicly recorded at a Parisian auction in 1948, they are said to have been in a private collection in France before resurfacing in 2019.



Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (*The Great Wave*). From the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*. Colour woodblock print, Japan 1831. Purchase funded by the Brooke Sewell Bequest with support from Art Fund.

Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), *Daoist master Zhou Sheng ascends a cloud-ladder to the moon*, from illustrations for *The Great Picture Book of Everything*. Block-ready drawing, ink on paper, Japan, 1820s–40s. Purchase funded by the Theresia Gerda Buch Bequest, in memory of her parents Rudolph and Julie Buch, with support from Art Fund. From the 2021/2022 exhibition *Hokusai: The Great Picture Book of Everything*.

Free exhibitions and displays

Greek Revival: simplicity and splendour

The influence of ancient classical architecture was the focus of this Asahi Shimbun Display on Robert Smirke (1730–1867) who designed the main British Museum building in 1821.

The display explored the rise of Greek Revival architecture through contemporary watercolours and contextual images. It was an opportunity to learn more about Smirke and view his original drawing of the Parthenon within the walls of the building he planned.

Smirke was just one of many contemporary architects inspired by the simple splendour of ancient Greek buildings in Italy, Greece and Turkey.



Drawing attention: emerging British artists

Featuring highlights from the Museum's collection of prints and drawings dating back to the early 1500s, alongside work from new artists, this display provided a fascinating context for artwork from some of the most exciting up-and-coming names in contemporary drawing.

Over 20 new acquisitions featured for the first time alongside some of the most celebrated works by the likes of Andy Warhol, Käthe Kollwitz, Odilon Redon, Mary Delany and Michelangelo, demonstrating the many connections with the collection and their relationships to historical traditions of drawing.

This exhibition spanned a wide range of techniques and practices, including drawings using make-up on face wipes by Sin Wai Kin (formerly known as Victoria Sin), and a drawing made with chalk collected from the White Cliffs of Dover by Josephine Baker.

Sir Robert Smirke (1780–1867), drawing showing the west side of the Parthenon surrounded by later buildings. Graphite with watercolour on paper, 1803. From The Asahi Shimbun Display *Greek Revival: simplicity and splendour* in 2022.

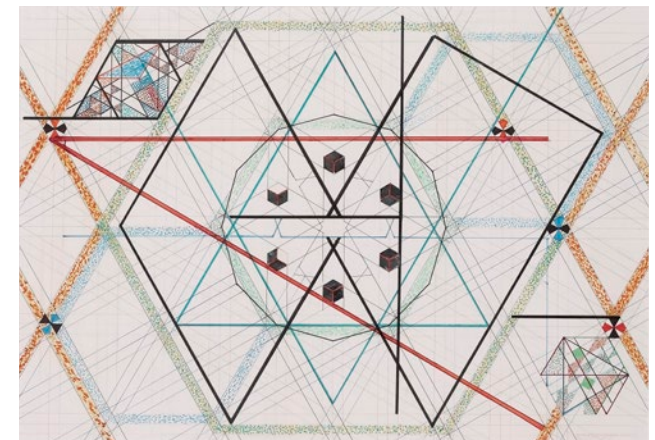
Reflections: contemporary art of the Middle East and North Africa

This exhibition explored a rich tapestry of artistic expression from artists born in, or connected to, countries from Iran to Morocco.

Featuring around 100 works on paper – from etchings to photographs and artists' books – the majority of works in the exhibition were collected in the past decade.

With drawings by artists trained everywhere from Paris to Jerusalem, and subject matters ranging from the Syrian uprisings to the burning of the National Library of Baghdad, it offered new views of societies whose challenges are well-known in the press but are little known through the prism of contemporary art. The exhibition was supported by the Contemporary and Modern Middle Eastern Art (CaMMEA) acquisition group.

Top right: Charmaine Watkiss (b. 1964), *Double Consciousness: Be Aware of One's Intentions*. Graphite, pencil, watercolour and ink, 2021. Acquired with Art Fund and Rootstein Hopkins Foundation support. Reproduced by permission of the artist. From the 2022 exhibition *Drawing attention: emerging British artists*.



Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (known as Monir) (1922–2019), *Untitled*. Coloured markers and mirror on paper, 2005. Funded by CaMMEA. From the 2021 exhibition *Reflections: contemporary art of the Middle East and North Africa*.

Expanding access

We're committed to sharing the British Museum collection with as many people as possible, which is why we work with partner museums, galleries and communities throughout the UK and around the world. Highlights include:

Ming Dynasty porcelain bowl ('the Lennard Cup'), China (1522–66) with silver-gilt mount and cover, England (1560–70). From the 2021/2022 exhibition *West Encounters East: A Cultural Conversation between Chinese and European Ceramics* (also known as *The Firmament of Porcelain*) at Shanghai Museum, China.



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Nebra Sky Disc, Germany, about 1600 BC. From the 2022 exhibition *The world of Stonehenge*.

China

West Encounters East: A Cultural Conversation between Chinese and European Ceramics (also known as *The Firmament of Porcelain*)

These loans, comprising 12 pieces of porcelain from the British Museum collection and two from the Sir Percival David collection, including the Lennard Cup, were made despite the challenges posed by rapidly changing international travel restrictions.

Shanghai Museum, China
17 September 2021 – 16 January 2022

Japan

Salon Culture and the Pictorial Arts of Kyoto and Osaka

Meticulously curated, this exhibition examined the work of the highly individualistic painters of the Edo period such as Maruyama Okyo. The British Museum received this request in March 2021 at a period of considerable uncertainty, but we proceeded with the planned loan of 20 Japanese paintings and handscrolls.

The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan
23 March – 8 May 2022



Germany

The World of the Nebra Sky Disc – New Horizons

The British Museum made a major loan of 46 objects including the Mold gold cape and the Ringlemere gold cup to a major partner in Germany. This partnership made possible the loan of the Nebra Sky Disc from Halle for *The world of Stonehenge*.

The Nebra Sky Disc is one of the most remarkable surviving objects from Bronze Age Europe. It has only recently been unearthed, after remaining hidden in the ground for over three millennia.

Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte, Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany,
4 June 2021 – 9 January 2022.

Inside the 2022 exhibition *Salon Culture and the Pictorial Arts of Kyoto and Osaka* at The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan.

Communities

The Lampedusa cross, made by Francesco Tuccio in 2015. From the 2021 display *Crossings: community and refuge* at Coventry Cathedral, as part of the City of Culture project.

From our Bloomsbury home in London to hundreds of communities around the UK, our work facilitates greater understanding of the collection. It helps people to make connections and gain a deeper understanding of different cultures and societies.

This is what makes the Museum so valuable – as we saw through the Coventry City of Culture programming in 2021.

We contributed a special display of the Lampedusa cross, which is made from remnants of a refugee boat wrecked near the Italian island of the same name. As Coventry is a sanctuary city, displaying the cross, in the cathedral rebuilt after its destruction in the Second World War, held particular poignance and power.

Events such as these enable us to reach out to communities and show how important art is in telling stories.

The programme also demonstrates how investment in culture helps to stimulate economic growth, create jobs in the community and attract inward investment, leading to a lasting legacy of social, cultural and economic change.



National Programmes

Our National Programmes promote learning and participation, encourage discussion, increase confidence and contribute to wellbeing through inspiring and creative engagement with culture and heritage.

Events related to the *Thomas Becket* show were a huge success, attracting a new, diverse and inclusive audience of more than 33,000 attendees.

Highlights included a recording of Archbishop Rowan Williams in conversation with Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin and a collaboration with a music group based at Kings College London.

One standout exhibition – *The Show Windows: Reflections* – saw reproductions of artworks from famous artists with a connection to Coventry, including Geoffrey Clarke RA, Dame Elisabeth Frink RA, Käthe Kollwitz and Coventry-born George Shaw, on display in the City Arcade windows.

Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945),
Self Portrait. Lithograph, 1924.
From the 2022 *The Show Windows: Reflections* on display in the City Arcade windows, Coventry.

National Programmes in numbers

1,594

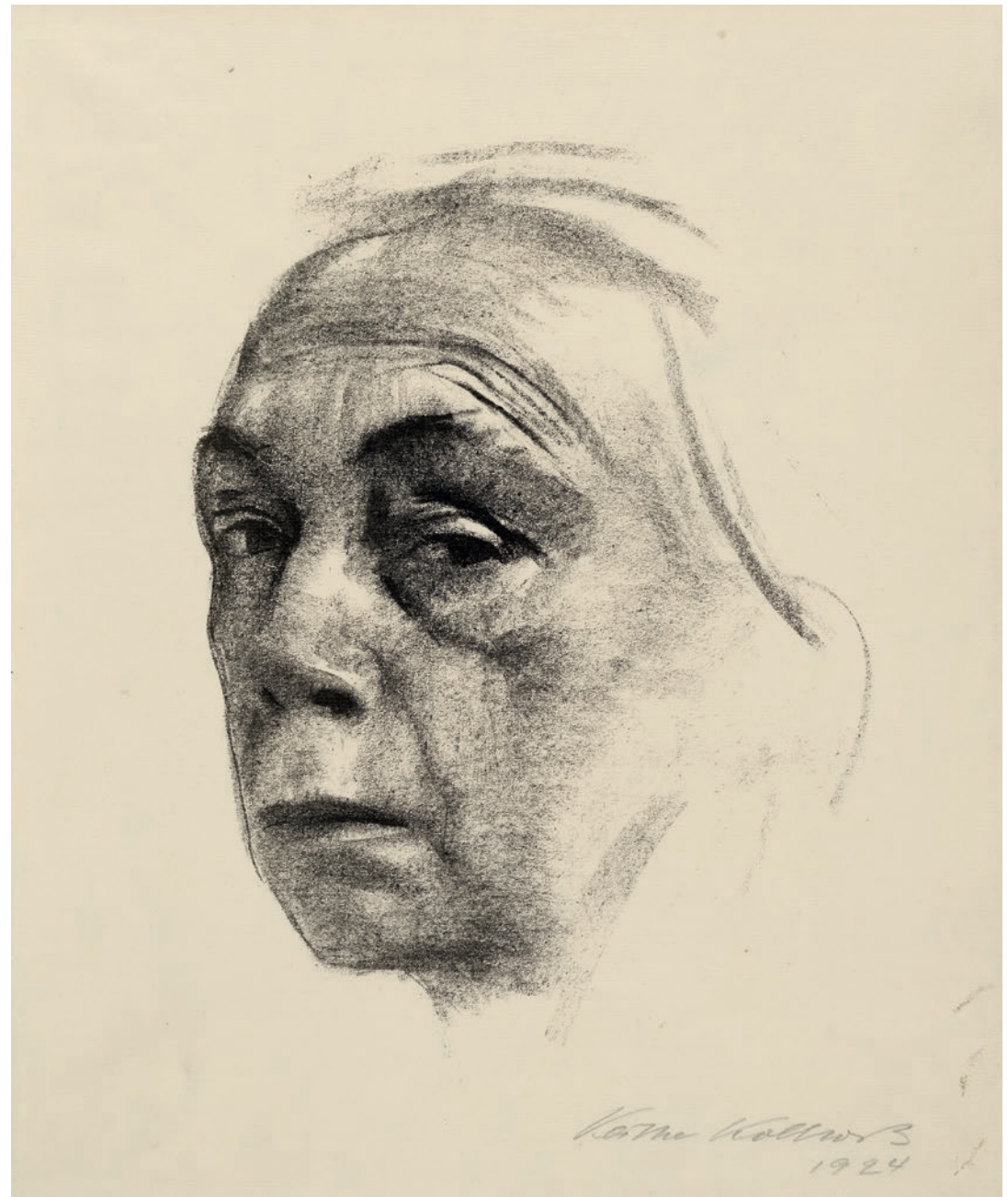
objects loaned

95

venues hosted loans

3m

visitors reached outside of London



Around the world

Drone view of the Sacred Precinct of Girsu showing the excavation area of the 4,000-year-old Temple of the White Thunderbird.

The Museum is recognised all over the world for its international work, from loans and touring exhibitions to archaeological projects and capacity-building programmes. The latest tour, *Ancient Greece: athletes, warriors and heroes*, was on show in Australia and New Zealand in 2022.

Our excavation and training work at the ancient Sumerian site of Girsu – supported by the J. Paul Getty Trust – is the second phase of a long-term partnership with the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage. This will lead to the revising of the history of Sumer by archaeologists, the sharing of learning and skills, crucial capacity building and community engagement through the unique collaboration between our Iraqi partners and the British Museum team.

Following a year of disruption, changing schedules and re-openings, the Museum's popular programme of international touring exhibitions continued in Australia, Belgium, China, Japan and Spain.

An exhibition on ancient Rome drew more than 41,000 visitors to the Gallo-Roman Museum in Tongeren, Belgium, and it continued its tour at the Suzhou Museum in China. It attracted almost half a million visitors in its first six months.



Research

Behind each object there's a story about how it's looked after and the contemporary care it is given. The research we do at the Museum is at the heart of this.

The British Museum remains a world-leader in the field of academic and scientific research. The team's work ranges from dedicated research projects to the application of science to unravel the mysteries of objects within the collection. Here are just some of the highlights of research projects currently being undertaken as part of the Museum's work.

Hans Sloane Collection

The Museum is taking part in a £3 million project led by University College London, as part of a major Arts and Humanities Research Council programme called *Towards a National Collection*. This project will build the digital tools needed to bring together the surviving objects from Hans Sloane's collection in the British Library, Natural History Museum and the British Museum, with the surviving original catalogues of Sloane's collection.

China's hidden century 1796–1912

The British Museum and London University have partnered to create a major UK Research and Innovation / Arts and Humanities Research Council project (2020–24) with an international team exploring cultural creativity and resilience in the twilight of the Qing empire.

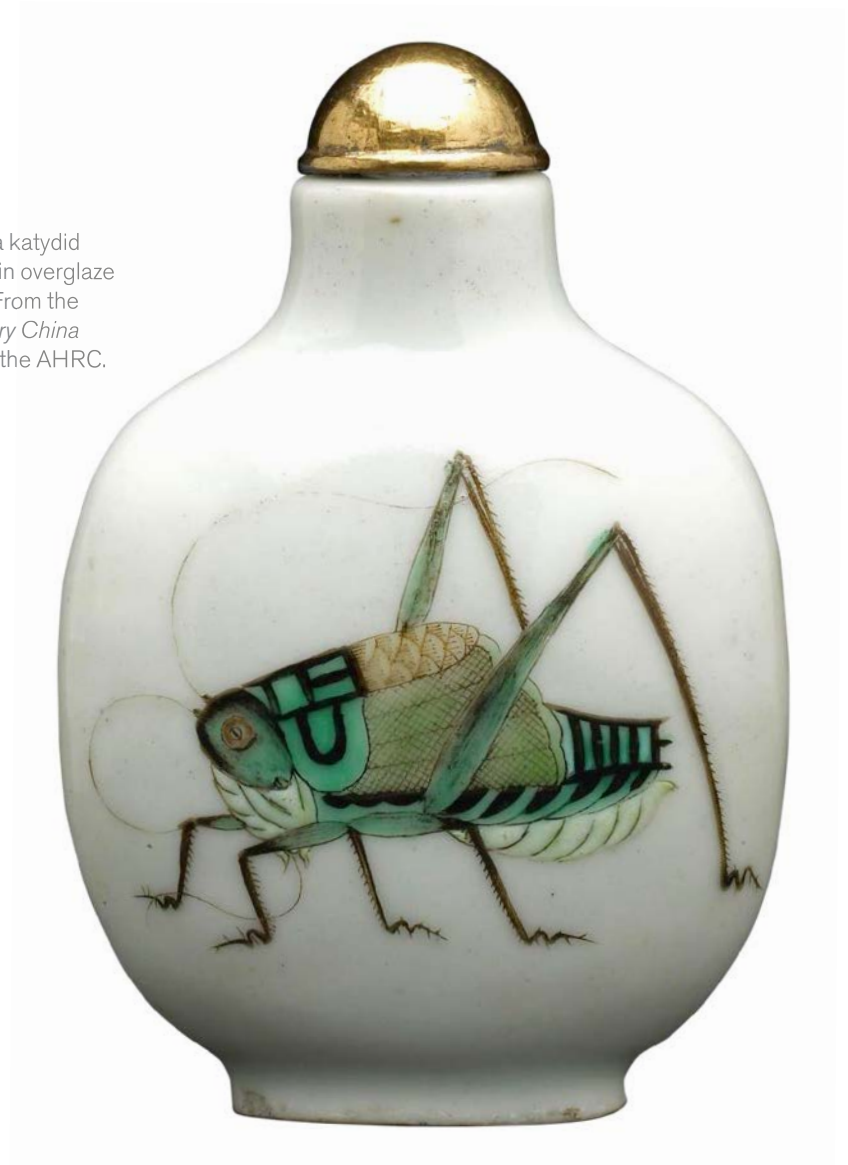
Research into texts and objects have revealed the personalities behind the turbulent history of 19th-century China. This research will lead to an exhibition and three publications.

West African Bronzes

Following on from a study on the collecting history of West Africa Bronzes at the British Museum, our Scientific Research department appointed distinguished Nigerian scientist Dr Tunde Babalola, on a two-year research fellowship.

This was funded by the Mellon Foundation in order to explore the history of the technology used to produce these important and under-researched objects.

Porcelain snuff-bottle with a katydid (long-horned grasshopper) in overglaze enamels, China, 1821–50. From the *Object history of 19th century China* research project, funded by the AHRC.



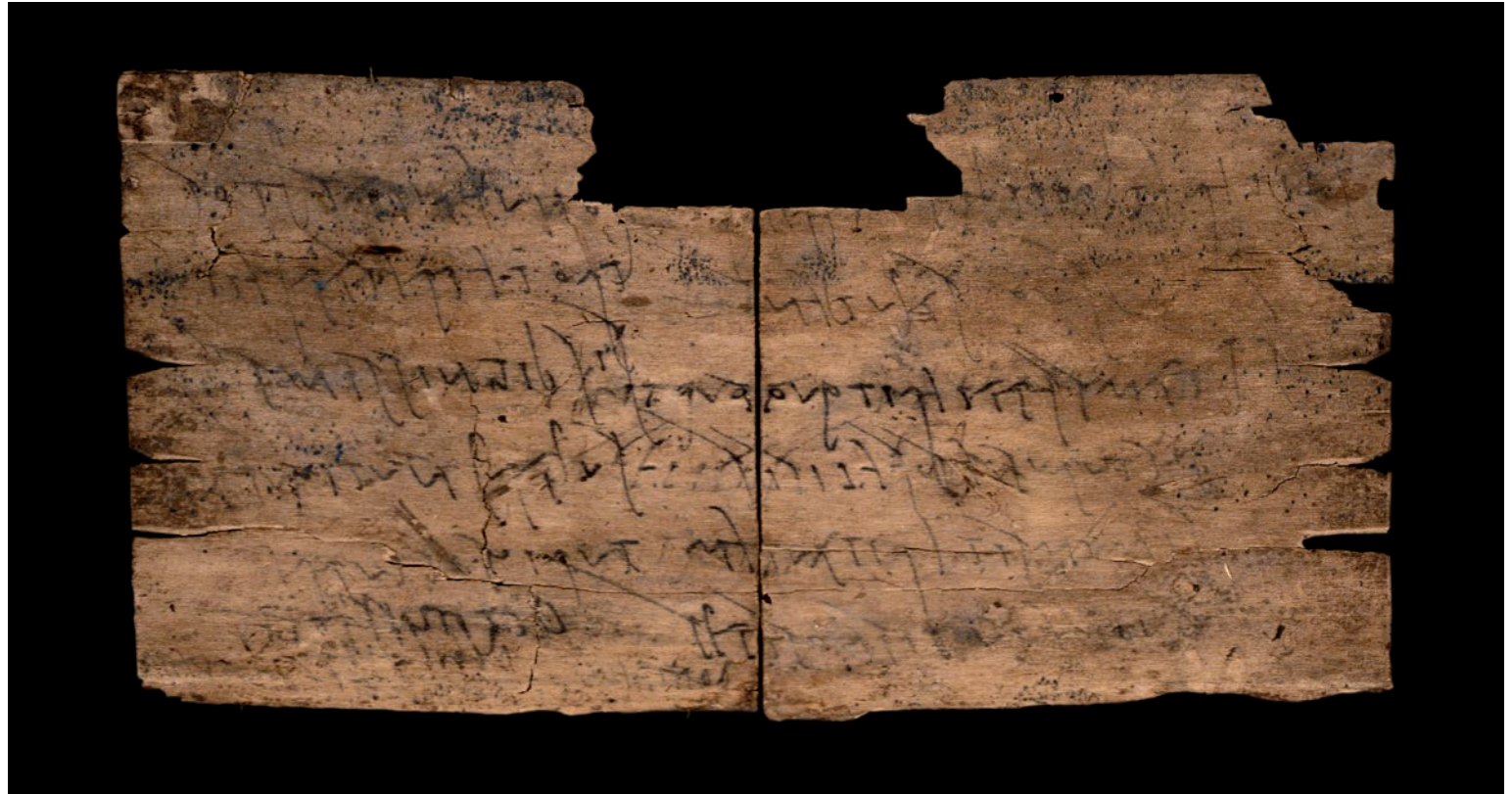
Rediscovering the collection

Enabling greater access for academics, researchers and the public alike is a significant priority for the Museum. The new British Museum Archaeological Research Collection (BM_ARC), which is nearing the end of construction, is a huge milestone in achieving this.

We've partnered with the University of Reading to develop a new state-of-the-art facility to house some of the most fascinating parts of the collection.

The BM_ARC means the collection will be even more accessible for research and loans across the country and around the world. This partnership, the first of its kind between a national museum and UK university, will deliver considerable benefits to the public and to research efforts.

As part of our research work, other objects including some of the oldest-surviving handwritten documents in Britain including the Roman Vindolanda tablets, were safely rehoused at Bloomsbury. The tablets are among the most fragile objects being moved as part of the project. This has enabled us to rediscover some of the collection using advances in research techniques on key objects, some of which featured in *The world of Stonehenge* exhibition.



The Museum is grateful for the generosity of private donors supporting BM_ARC including the Headley Trust, the BAND Trust, Graham and Joanna Barker and others who wish to remain anonymous, as well as for the public funding received from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Wood writing tablet, part of the Vindolanda tablets, with letter to Flavius Cerialis, written in ink, in two hands. Romano-British, England, late 1st – early 2nd century. From the BM_ARC.

Portable Antiquities Scheme

The flagship Portable Antiquities Scheme is designed with communities at its heart. Members of the public who unearth rare artefacts are able to record their finds and contribute to the rewriting of the UK's archaeological history

In 2021 we hit an incredible milestone – the one millionth find, a medieval pendant, was recorded in rural Lincolnshire.

Together we support 119 national partners, including local councils and museums, delivering the scheme through our committed and talented Finds Liaison Officers and National Finds Advisors.

Portable Antiquities Scheme in numbers

1m

finds recorded

600

volunteers recruited

4

internships

104,000

finds recorded in 2021/2022

The one millionth PAS find was this medieval harness pendant, England, about 1350–1400, found in Binbook, Lincolnshire, in 2021.



Other PAS finds include (left) this copper-alloy bust of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, probably a sceptre head, and (above) a horse and rider figurine, England, 2nd century. Part of The Ryedale Hoard, they were found near Ampleforth in Ryedale, North Yorkshire in 2020.

Reaching audiences

Families enjoying free digital activities in the Great Court, part of the Samsung Digital Discovery Centre programme, October 2021.



Museums can sometimes be seen as static and at the British Museum we work hard to show we're a place of dynamism and progress as well as history.

Audiences seek stories and are curious, for glimpses behind the scenes, for the chance to see conservators at work, to engage with objects and to learn about our active research – and they enjoy all of this at the British Museum.

Whether in Bloomsbury, seeing UK and international touring exhibitions and loans, or on our digital channels, the British Museum's global audiences can satisfy their curiosity about its global collection wherever they are.

Social media continues to enable us to reach audiences directly, and we are engaging with nearly six million followers online through exciting content produced by our in-house team. Our audiences react overwhelmingly positively, and in July 2021 we reached a new record with 68.4k likes on Instagram. In total we shared 1.3k posts across our channels and had 5.1m likes, 64.5k comments and 57.3k mentions and direct messages over the course of the year.

In 2021/22, we had the greatest number of visitors to the website since 2014/15, which shows the long-term impact of the launch of the new website in 2019.

A modern Museum

A must-see in London

‘The exhibits bring you back in time and they are so well done... This is our second time here and it never disappoints... there is something for everyone here!’

Museum visitor, via Tripadvisor



A volunteer tour taking place
in Sutton Hoo and Europe (Room 41),
The Sir Paul and Lady Ruddock Gallery.

Thank you

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patrons, members, visitors and
staff for your unwavering support.**

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