

# British Museum announces completion of Independent Review

**For immediate release**

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- Recommendations of the Independent Review published, and unanimously accepted by the Board of Trustees
- Interim Director Sir Mark Jones commits to begin work on delivering the recommendations immediately

**LONDON, 12 December:** Following the discovery of thefts from the collection, the Board of Trustees instigated an Independent Review to learn lessons and ensure something of this kind never happens again. The Review was led by Sir Nigel Boardman, Chief Constable Lucy D’Orsi, and Deputy High Court Judge Ian Karet. The Review is now complete, and the recommendations have been published. The Board of Trustees has unanimously accepted them – and the Museum has committed to begin work on delivery immediately.

The review recommends first and foremost that the British Museum completes the documentation of its collection and closes any gaps in the registration of objects. This has already begun. It also includes a set of recommendations on audit and risk, governance, and security. While the security measures have been redacted, the rest have been published on the Museum’s website as part of a wider commitment to openness and transparency.

Over a third of the published recommendations are already underway or completed under the new leadership of Sir Mark Jones, including a plan to complete the documentation and digitisation of the entire collection within the next five years. This will eliminate any pockets of unregistered objects and ensure that the British Museum’s collection is the most viewed, studied and used in the world.

**George Osborne**, Chair of Trustees, said: “This Review shows the British Museum is putting our own house in order, indeed we commissioned it because we were determined to learn the lessons of what went wrong.

“The British Museum was the victim of thefts over a long period, and we apologise again that this was allowed to happen. The ongoing police investigation means the full report cannot be published today, but we have accepted the recommendations in full, and have started to recover hundreds of the stolen items.

“Above all, we’re determined to emerge from this period a stronger, more open, and more confident Museum that is fit for the future. Thanks to the hard work of the Review team we’re now equipped to do just that.”

**Sir Mark Jones**, Interim Director, said: “This is a helpful set of recommendations, many of which we are already delivering on. No-one can pretend this has been an easy period for the Museum, but I have the utmost admiration for the commitment of the staff to building a stronger future for the Museum we all care so deeply about.”

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## **Timeline:**

The Museum is limited in what it can say about the thefts themselves at this stage due to the ongoing police investigation, and the Museum is grateful to have a close and cooperative relationship with the Metropolitan Police Service.

However, we can say that we believe the thefts took place over a considerable period of time – and that the total number of items damaged or missing is estimated to be around 2000. A key target appears to have been unregistered items – mainly gems and jewellery – in the Department of Greece and Rome. As such, one of the most important responses to the thefts is the commitment to complete the documentation and digitisation of the collection within the next 5 years.

The Museum was alerted to suspicions of thefts in 2021 by Dr Ittai Gradel. The Museum's investigation incorrectly concluded that there was no basis to the claims.

Later that year, a spot check by internal audit revealed an item not in its proper location within the Greece and Rome strongroom. This led to a wider audit of the strongroom as well as the Greece and Rome Jewellery and Gem collection. This started in April 2022 and the audit subsequently revealed further evidence of missing objects.

In December, concerns arising from the audit were raised with senior management and the Chair of the British Museum. The Chair called in the police immediately, and they began an investigation. At their request nothing was said publicly at that point.

In August 2023, with the consent of the Metropolitan Police Service, the British Museum announced the discovery of thefts. At the same time, the Museum announced that a member of staff had been dismissed and a review launched in order to look into the matter and provide recommendations regarding future security arrangements at the Museum.

Since then the Museum has started to recover some of the missing items. A full summary of the numbers is below.

- We estimate that there are approximately 2000 damaged or missing items
- Within that the number that are missing or stolen is around 1500
- Then there are around 350 items that have had portions removed e.g. gold mounts for gems
- And around 140 that have been damaged by tool marks
- The 140 by definition cannot be retrieved because we already have them, and we believe the majority of the portions removed from the 350 are likely to be unrecoverable because they have probably been sold for scrap
- Of the 1500 missing or stolen items, 351 items have already been returned into our possession, and more than 300 further items have been identified



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### **Further information:**

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# British Museum Independent Collection Security Review

Sir Nigel Boardman, Lucy D'Orsi, Ian Karet

30 November 2023

## Recommendations

### A. The Collection

1. The Museum should have a policy which defines what comprises its Collection.
2. The Museum should identify the unregistered or inadequately registered objects within the Collection and register them fully.
3. The Museum should introduce a policy regulating how registration should be undertaken – what information and in what detail artefacts should be registered (including, for example when bulk registration is acceptable). It should consider requiring mandatory entry fields to ensure its cataloguing quality. This policy should require newly acquired objects to be registered promptly.
4. The Museum should improve its policy for reporting unlocated objects to cover the entire Collection, to allocate responsibilities for investigating unlocated objects and to accelerate escalation of the problem.
5. The Museum should improve the protection of valuable objects not forming part of the Collection (e.g. works of reference) and create a record of its valuable non-Collection possessions.
6. The Museum should introduce a requirement for MI+ to be updated promptly when items in the Collection are moved.
7. The Museum should review its Collection Care strategy to ensure it allocates responsibility for the security of the Collection; removes potential areas of friction between curatorial staff and the Collections Care team; and provides adequate training to Collections Care staff to handle those parts of the Collection within their specific responsibility.

### B. Risk

8. The Museum's current risk register should be replaced with one that draws on best practice in peer institutions.<sup>1</sup>
9. The Museum should develop a risk tolerance statement.
10. Compliance with the Public Records Act, with Data protection and Freedom of Information should all appear on the Museum's risk register.
11. Meetings discussing risk should be attended by the manager directly responsible for the items under discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. the Treasury Orange Book requirements.

12. The major risks, and their direction of travel and mitigations, should be discussed at the Board as well as in Committee.
13. The Audit Committee (renamed as Audit, Risk and Compliance) should undertake 'deep dives' on specific areas of risk.

### **C. Internal Audit and Policies**

14. Internal audit reports should comment on management awareness of any problem and the level of management co-operation.
15. Where there is a follow up audit to an unsatisfactory first audit, if matters have not been remedied then, in line with best practice, a more severe rating should be imposed.
16. Internal audit budgets should be agreed with the Chair of the Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee. The internal auditor must be sufficiently senior within the organisation to be able to perform the role and have an adequate budget.
17. Internal audit should increase to include more frequent and more extensive inventory checks of the Collection, including of the unregistered collection. The internal auditor should verify the progress towards full registration of the Collection.
18. The Museum requires a Document Management Policy. At our request the Museum has commenced an internal audit of its compliance with the Public Records Act. Its results should be reported to the Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee in due course.
19. The Document Management Policy should address document retention and deletion and the scope and frequency of back up records including cloud-based services.
20. Each policy of the Museum should have a designated 'owner' with responsibility for keeping it up to date. Each policy should also have other interested parties who must sign off on changes to the policy. Each policy should over a cycle be approved by Trustees.

### **D. Trustees and the Board**

21. Trustees should be proactive in setting their agenda and requiring the necessary information to be able to take decisions and to receive proper assurance about management of the Museum under the Museum's Governance Principles and Procedures. They should ensure that management focus on the Museum's short, medium and long-term objectives as set by the Trustees with appropriate Key Performance and Key Risk Indicators to measure success.
22. The Board should regularly review the list of matters reserved to Trustees to ensure it is in line with best practice.
23. Trustees should introduce a 'buddy' system with Trustees being paired to parts of the Museum to encourage a two-way flow of information.
24. The Board should actively consider the Museum's culture and staff engagement. The Board should appoint a Trustee member of the Nominations and Remuneration Committee to

represent the employee view on the Board,<sup>2</sup> and the Committee's terms of reference should reflect responsibility for those matters.

25. Minutes of Trustee meetings (and of the Trustee and management committees) should be expanded to ensure that it is possible to understand the rationale for decisions made at meetings. Minutes should be circulated promptly following each meeting and all Trustees should receive minutes of all Trustee committees.
26. Between Trustee meetings the Chair and the Director should update Trustees on developments within the Museum by email or video conference.
27. The Trustees should review the trustee induction pack and compare it with that used in peer organisations.

#### **E. Trustee Committees**

28. The Board should create a Curatorial Committee in which Trustees and curatorial staff contribute to areas of importance such as the future exhibitions programme, the allocation of staff between departments, conservation programmes and progress on registration and digitisation of the Collection.
29. The Nominations and Remuneration Committee should have expanded terms of reference to take on oversight of staff matters, with access to exit interview notes, a staff engagement survey and the anonymous line for reporting concerns. The Committee should have oversight of allegations of misconduct and harassment (in all forms). They should also introduce and oversee a transparent and fair process for appointments and promotions and should be consulted on any material redundancy or restructuring proposal. The committee should be re-named to cover its enlarged remit.
30. The Investment Committee should have expanded terms of reference to include oversight of the finances of the Museum and should change its name to the Finance and Investment Committee.
31. The Audit Committee should become the Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee and have expanded terms of reference to have greater oversight of risk and compliance. These increased responsibilities will likely more frequent and/or longer meetings.
32. Existing Sub-Committees of the Standing Committee should become Sub-Committees of the Board and report directly to the Board of trustees.

#### **F. Management**

33. Trustees and the Director should consider the size and composition of the Directorate with a view to establishing a group in line with best practice and peer institutions to ensure capacity, sufficient challenge and diversity of thought.
34. The Directorate should adopt a modern and inclusive approach to management.

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<sup>2</sup> See Government Green Paper on corporate governance (November 2016) at 2.34.

35. The Museum should strengthen the HR department and consider seeking external advice (including legal) where the Museum does not have the relevant expertise available. The Museum should improve the handling of complaints.
36. Management should review their approach to suspension of employees to give due weight to the protection of the collection, the integrity of its records and the wellbeing of staff.