

Hannah Hemmerly

Site Visit, 1/10/18

The British Museum: "The world's first institution of its kind..."

I. Museum's Emergency

A. Sir Hans Sloane: wealthy doctor (1660-1753)

1. Upon death leaves person art collection to King George II
  - a) Specific instructions for it to be left from preservation and public use

B. Original Status

1. Act of Parliament, 1753
2. Opens to public Jan 5, 1759
  - a) 1758, public lottery to acquire funds
  - b) Originally visitors had to be accompanied by museum officers upon entering the rooms
    - (1) Had been a debate over whether or not all social statuses should be allowed into the museum
  - c) Free entry
3. Housed in Montagu House
  - a) Original collections (three)
    - (1) Sir Hans Sloane, Robert Harley (1st earl of Oxford), Sir Robert Cotton
    - (2) Primarily books, manuscripts, and some antiquities
  - b) Beginning visitation #s = 12000/yr

II. 19th Century

A. Famous attributes during this time

1. Rosetta Stone (1802)
2. Townley Collection of Classical Sculpture (1805)
3. Parthenon Sculptures--Elgin Marbles (1816)
4. Kings Library (1823)
5. Quadrilateral Building & Reading Room (1857)

B. Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, appointed to museum 1851

1. Responsible for much of the medieval, prehistoric, ethnographic, oriental, and archeological elements acquired during this era

C. Current British Museum building constructed in same location (1823-52)

1. Bloomsbury district in borough of Camden
2. Architect: Sir Robert Smirke
3. Greek Revival
4. Experiences many additions

- a) Ex: Reading Room which has been visited by historical figures like K. Marx, V. Wolf, P. Kropotkin, T. Carlyle
  - D. Natural History Museums established 1881, South Kensington
    - 1. Collections from British Museum moved there for its formation
  - E. Excavation Abroad
    - 1. Ex: Assyria (cuneiform)
- III. 20th Century
  - A. Attention towards expanding its public presence
    - 1. Guides and lecturer added to staff
    - 2. 1970s
      - a) Education and publication sectors added to museum
        - (1) Duveen Gallery (1939/62)
      - b) Queen Elizabeth II Great Court
        - (1) New galleries and education center
  - B. British Library established 1973
    - 1. Formed as an act of parliament to combine the British Museums library with others
- IV. 21st Century
  - A. The Great Court and refurbished Reading Room open to public (2000)
  - B. 2003, 250th Anniversary of British Museum
    - 1. Kings Library restored, which now houses the permanent collection: The Age of Enlightenment
  - C. Public facilities keep growing
    - 1. Galleries
      - a) Chinese ceramics, clocks & watches, Europe AD 1050-1540, Tomb-Chapel Nebamun -- Ancient Egypt
  - D. World Conservation Exhibition Center

### Bibliography

The British Museum. "History of the British Museum." *British Museum - General History*, Trustees of the British Museum, [www.britishmuseum.org/about\\_us/the\\_museums\\_story/general\\_history.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/the_museums_story/general_history.aspx).

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