

Museum and careers

■ A tour at... the British Museum

reading&speaking

- 1 Read the text and try to guess the meaning of the words in bold from their context.

The British Museum was founded in 1753 **to promote** universal understanding through the arts, natural history and science in a public museum. Since its foundation, the British Museum has been guided by three important principles: that the collections **are held** in perpetuity in their entirety; that they are widely **available** to all who **seek** to enjoy and learn from them and that they are curated by **full-time** specialists.

From its beginnings the British Museum was a new type of institution. Governed by a body of **Trustees** responsible to Parliament, its collections belonged to the nation, and **admission** was free and open to all.

The first antiquities **of note**, Sir William Hamilton's collection of Greek vases and other classical objects, **were purchased** in 1772. These were followed by such notable acquisitions as the Rosetta Stone and other antiquities from Egypt (1802), the Townley collection of classical sculpture (1805), the sculptures of the Parthenon, known as the Elgin Marbles (1816).

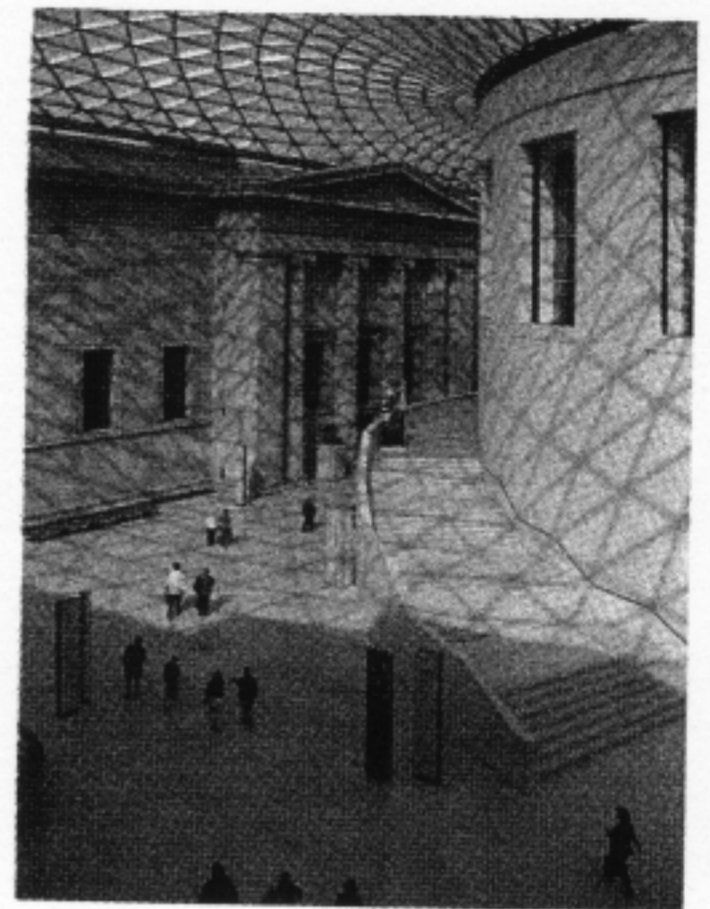
The **appointment** in 1851 of Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks (1826-97) **led to** a vast expansion into such fields as British and European prehistory, ethnography, oriental art and archaeology.

Nowadays the Museum is divided into three main floors: upper, main and lower floor.

The British Museum's African, Asian, European and Ancient world collections, **spanning** over 2 million years, include real-life legends like the Rosetta Stone and Easter Island statue, **masterpieces** like the Lewis Chessmen and Michelangelo cartoons, and **iconic** objects, from the oldest man-made **tools** on earth to the first known image of Christ – and all before you get to the mummies.

The British Museum is free to all visitors, though a **charge** may be made for special exhibitions.

Tours vary each day. Tours in several foreign languages, as well as audio tours, are also available.



glossary

are held: siano mantenute

seek: cercano

full-time: a tempo pieno

admission: ingresso

of note: degne di nota

were purchased: furono acquistate

appointment: nomina

iconic: iconici

speaking

- 2 You are back from a visit to the British Museum. A friend of yours is asking you about the museum and its collections. He wants to know:

- what kind of collections are housed in the museum;
- on how many floors the collections are dislocated;
- if the Parthenon marbles are currently open to visitors;
- if there is an admission fee;
- if there are guided tours in Italian.



MUSEUM highlights

■ Colossal bust of Ramesses II, the Younger Memnon

From the Ramesseum, 19th dynasty, ca 1250 BC, Thebes, Egypt.

One of the largest pieces of Egyptian sculpture in the British Museum.

Ramesses II succeeded his father Sethos I in around 1279 BC and ruled for 67 years. Weighing 7.25 tons, this fragment of his statue was cut from a single block of two-coloured granite. He is shown wearing the *nemes*, **head-dress** surmounted by a cobra diadem. The sculptor has used a slight variation of normal conventions to relate his work to the viewer, **angling** the eyes down slightly, so that the statue relates more to those looking at it.



■ Horsemen from the west frieze of the Parthenon

Greek, ca 438-32 BC.

This block was placed near the corner of the west **frieze** of the Parthenon, where it turned onto the north. The horsemen have been moving at some speed, but are now **reining back** so as not to appear to ride **off the edge** of the frieze. The horseman in front **twists around** to look back at his companion, and raises a hand (now missing) to his head. This gesture, repeated elsewhere in the frieze, is perhaps a signal. Although mounted riders can be seen here, much of the west frieze features horsemen getting ready for the cavalcade proper, shown on the long north and south sides of the temple.



■ The Rosetta Stone

From Fort St Julien, el-Rashid (Rosetta), Ptolemaic Period, 196 BC, Egypt.

The inscription on the Rosetta Stone is a **decree** passed by a council of priests, one of a series that affirm the royal cult of the 13-year-old Ptolemy V on the first anniversary of his coronation.

The decree is inscribed on the stone three times, in hieroglyphic (**suitable for** a priestly decree), demotic (the native script used for daily purposes), and Greek (the language of the administration). The importance of this to Egyptology is immense. Soon after the end of the fourth century AD, when hieroglyphs had **gone out of use**, the knowledge of how to read and write them disappeared. In the early years of the nineteenth century, some 1400 years later, scholars were able to use the Greek inscription on this stone as the key to decipher them. The French scholar Jean-François Champollion realized that hieroglyphs recorded the sound of the Egyptian language and **laid the foundations** of our knowledge of ancient Egyptian language and culture.



glossary

speaking

3 Answer the following questions.

- 1 What kind of stone was the colossal bust of Ramesses II cut into?
- 2 Has its author contravened normal conventions in any way?
- 3 Do the horsemen in the Parthenon frieze convey any idea of movement?
- 4 What was the inscription on the Rosetta Stone?
- 5 Why did they inscribe it in three languages?

head-dress: copricapo

to angle: sistemare

frieze: fregio

to rein back: trattenerne le redini

off the edge: oltre il limite

to twist around: voltarsi

decree: decreto

suitable for: come si addice a

to go out of use: cadere in disuso

to lay the foundations: gettare le basi