

UNIT 10 MUSEUMS

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Located in the Bloomsbury area of London, the British Museum is the location of a national collection of science and art treasures. It first began in 1753 when Parliament purchased the collection of Sir Hans Sloane (the Cabinet of Curiosities) and a collection from Sir Robert Cotton along with Sir Robert Harley's Library. First opened to the public in 1759 in Montague House, it was later moved to its present location, being built in stages from 1823. The famous domed Reading Room was built in 1857 and is now part of the glassed-in Great Court.

The British Museum's mandate is "to illuminate the histories of cultures for the benefit of present and future generations". Thus, the number and subject of the exhibits and galleries is vast. Ranging from Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe to ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, and back to pre-historic times, they highlight more than just Britain. A visit to the Museum is a visit through the centuries of mankind and what he has left behind of himself.

The British collections trace the history of Britain and cover prehistoric times, Roman Britain, medieval and later Britain, and Graphic Arts. One of the highlights of the pre-historic era is the preserved body of Lindow Man, dated the mid-1st century AD. The Stone Age collections include works of art and jewellery dating from 35,000 to 10,000 years ago. Roman Britain is typified by early Christian objects and collections of Roman coins.

4th- to 20th-century European art and archaeology collections illustrate cultures of the time and include Anglo-Saxon antiquities and medieval pottery. Items from the famous Anglo-Saxon Sutton Hoo burial are of particular interest. Sutton Hoo, located in East Suffolk, contained 11 barrows and the remains of a Saxon ship complete with gold and silver treasures.

British prints, drawings, and watercolours of the 16th century to the present are amassed in a large collection and include works by Constable and Turner. There are more than 3,000,000 prints and drawings dating from the 15th century kept in storage. A large reference library is a bonus. A coin collection includes a silver penny of Offa, King of Mercia. The Museum has more than 7,000 items in its clock, watch, and scientific instrument collection.

European collections from the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Early Celtic civilisations are represented. Some of those of note are the 750-450

BC finds from the cemetery at Hallstatt, Austria and 400 BC flacons from Lorraine in France. Gold, jewels, glass, and porcelain all document the wealth of civilisations.

Greek collections begin at the Bronze Age. Included are sculptures from the mausoleum at Halikarnassos. Possibly the most well-known Greek sculptures are the Elgin collection, named after the 7th Earl of Elgin who brought them from the Parthenon in Athens. They include pediments, metopes, and friezes.

The Museum can boast the largest collection of Egyptian artefacts in the world outside of the Cairo museum. They range from the pre-dynastic period to the Christian period and include a famous collection of mummies and coffins, jewellery, weapons, furniture, and tools. The Rosetta Stone is perhaps the most famous of all the Egyptian artefacts. It is a basalt slab with identical texts in hieroglyphic, demotic, and Greek, thus unlocking the key to Egyptian hieroglyphic translation.

African collections encompass sculpture, textiles, graphic arts, and money. Near Eastern collections cover Mesopotamia, the Phoenician world, the Arabian Peninsula, and Central Asia and are some of the most inclusive collections in the world.

Aboriginal art, tools, and weapons are part of the section on Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. Perhaps the most famous object is the great statue, Hoa Hakananai'a, from Easter Island.

The Department of Oriental Antiquities houses Asian material reaching back 9000 years. Sculpture from India, Chinese porcelain, bronze, and jade, and Islamic pottery (one of the world's best collections) and tiles are just a small part of the vast number of items on display. 16th-century Vietnamese trade ceramics, salvaged from the seabed, are one of the department's recent acquisitions. Japanese swords, armour, metalwork, and art reflect their culture.

Museum opening hours: Sat-Wed 10 am-5.30 pm, Thurs-Fri 10 am-8.30 pm,
Great Court opening hours: Mon 9 am-6 pm, Tues-Wed 9 am-9 pm, Thurs-Sat 9-11 pm, Sun 9 am-9 pm.

Admission: Free. Charge for special exhibitions.

Getting there: Nearest Tube station - Tottenham Court Rd, Russell Square, Goodge Street; Bus routes - Tottenham Court Rd., northbound, and Gower Street, southbound: 10, 24, 29, 73, 134.

From: <http://www.britainexpress.com/London/british-museum.htm>

GLOSSARY

in stages = in più fasi
domed = a cupola
glassed-in = chiuso con struttura vetrata
mandate = missione
exhibit = oggetto esposto
gallery = sala
to highlight = mettere in evidenza
mankind = l'umanità
barrow = tumulo
reference library = biblioteca di consultazione

bonus = cosa gradita
flagon = caraffa, brocca
pediment = frontone
metope = metope
frieze = fregio, fascia ornamentale
to boast = vantare
basalt = basalto
slab = lastra
demotic = demotico
textiles = tessuti
seabed = fondale marino

NOTES

Antiquity is an uncountable noun which refers to ancient times: *Christian antiquity is the early period of the Christian era.*

The countable noun *antiquity* is used for things that were made in ancient times and have survived to the present day: *Collections include Anglo-Saxon antiquities.*

An *antique* is an old object such as a piece of china or furniture: *My mother has some fine antiques in her dining room.*

Ancient is an adjective to describe something that belongs to the distant past, especially before the end of the Roman Empire: *He is fascinated with life in Ancient Greece.*

Admission at a museum or other place is the amount of money that you pay to enter. Do not confuse this with *admittance*, which is the right to enter a place or institution: *She tried to gain admittance into the exclusive Art Institute in Paris, but failed.*

COMPREHENSION

Exercise 1 Find the following paraphrased sentences in the reading passage.

1. The museum is second only to the Cairo Museum for Egyptian artefacts. (par. 8)
2. Early Christian objects and Roman coins represent Roman Britain. (par. 3)
3. The Museum collection was bought by Parliament in 1753. (par. 1)
4. Collections of European art and archaeology range from the 4th century to the 20th century. (par. 4)
5. Sculptures, textiles, graphic arts and money are included in the African collections. (par. 9)

Exercise 2 Answer the following questions.

1. Has the museum always been in the same location?
2. In which part of London is the museum located?
3. Do you have to pay to visit the museum?
4. How can you reach the museum?
5. Can you visit the museum every day?

VOCABULARY

Exercise 3 Complete the sentences with the words referring to museum facilities in the box.

book	guides	admission	parking
touch section	cloakrooms	self-service	access

1. _____ is free to all visitors, though there may be a charge for temporary exhibitions.
2. Bags will have to be deposited at one of the museum's _____.
3. If you are interested in tours for groups, please _____ in advance.
4. The Sound-Guide system includes a _____ for all visitors.
5. The Gallery café is _____ and offers a range of hot and cold meals.
6. _____ for disabled users is available in the museum's forecourt.
7. _____ to the upper floors from the main entrance is by stairs or lift.
8. Over 100 volunteer _____ provide 9 different tours a day.

Exercise 4 Complete the text on exhibitions with the words in the box.

labelled	hands-on	exhibit	interactive
curator	information sheets	display cases	lighting

In the 1. _____ all the items are clearly 2. _____ and numbered, and laminated information cards are provided. Copies of 3. _____ are available from a stand near the displays. Numbered outline drawings enable each 4. _____ to be located and readily identified. The Discovery Area includes new 5. _____ displays, and for children there are 6. _____ facilities. The system of artificial 7. _____ is extremely successful and unobtrusive, thanks to the 8. _____ and his team.

Exercise 5 There are different ways to describe old and new objects. Write down five adjectives for each heading.

contemporary	ancient	outmoded	state-of-the-art
up-to-the-minute	antique	traditional	modern
current	obsolete		

PAST:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

PRESENT:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Exercise 6 Use some of the words from Exercise 5 to complete the sentences.

1. The technology for decoding different formats is fast becoming _____.
2. The _____ economic situation for museum funding is disasterous.
3. The gallery was equipped with a _____ lighting system.
4. You can find interesting china at auctions, _____ shops and flea markets.
5. He specialises in _____ Roman history.
6. I would like to study _____ art next year at University.
7. There are still some craftsmen who paint furniture in the _____ way.
8. Computers can give us _____ information on museum opening hours.

Exercise 7 Translate the following words from the passage into English.

1. oggetto esposto
2. biblioteca di consultazione
3. sala
4. tesori
5. fatto a cupola

WORD STUDY

Exercise 8 Complete the sentences with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. The exhibition _____ from ancient to modern civilisations. (*to range*)
2. The collection includes works of art _____ from 35,000 years ago. (*to date*)
3. The most well- _____ Greek sculptures are the Elgin Marbles. (*to know*)
4. There is a large _____ library for consultation. (*to refer*)
5. A visit to the museum is a visit through the centuries of _____. (*man*)

THE NEW MUSEUM

“The museum is a permanent non-profit institution, open to the public, in the service of society and its development, which does research on the material evidence of man and his environment, acquires such evidence, preserves it, communicates it and, in particular, displays it for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment.” International Council of Museums (ICOM 1974:1).

Dissatisfied with attempts to reform traditional museums, museologists in various countries have looked for possibilities to change radically the working methods, content and structure of an institution that some think outmoded. The purpose is to help museums achieve social meaning, less in the sense of recognition and increased attendance, but more in regard to the museums concrete contributions to everyday life. This new active or community museology resolutely challenges the museum as an institution, the omnipotence and omniscience of the curators, the domination of the fine arts over all other disciplines, aesthetic pleasure as the essential criterion of an object's value, the absolute precedence of objects over life and the abiding nature of the history and values of an elite that turns to its profit the resources of the planet and the creativity of its inhabitants. Of course, distinctions must