ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #645
The Story of The British Museum
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Transcript....3
Key vocabulary....21
Language spotlight....29
Quiz....31
- Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions....31
- True or False....32
- Fill in the Blanks....33
- Vocabulary Practice....33

Answers....35

Transcript

[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about the British Museum.

[00:00:28] It's a story about a doctor with a collecting problem, the British Empire, some stones the Greeks want back, and the unanswered question of who the past actually belongs to.

[00:00:41] OK then, let's not waste a minute and get right into it.

[00:00:48] If you have been to London, there is a good chance you have visited the British Museum.

[00:00:56] In total, its collection numbers around eight million objects. They aren't all on display; on any given day, you can see perhaps 80,000 of them, a **mere**[1] 1 per cent of the total.

[00:01:11] That is still a lot. To give you an idea of quite how much, if you wanted to see each object on display, and you spent only one minute with each one, it would take

[1] only; just

you almost two months. That is, if you didn't stop to sleep, or eat, and the museum allowed you to stay throughout the night.

[00:01:32] If you did the same for the entire collection, the full eight million, you would finish your visit a little over fifteen years from now.

[00:01:43] There is a vast amount of stuff: sculptures from Athens, **mummies**[2] from Egypt, **bronzes**[3] from Nigeria, chess pieces from a Scottish beach, and of course a stone from the banks of the Nile that unlocked the secrets of ancient Egypt.

[00:02:01] So the obvious question is: how did all of this end up in one building in London?

[00:02:09] The answer begins with a man named Hans Sloane.

[00:02:14] Sloane was born in Ireland in 1660, and after training as a **physician**[4], he became one of the most fashionable doctors in London. He treated three **monarchs**[5], became president of the Royal Society, and even has a square in Chelsea named after him: Sloane Square.

[00:02:38] As a young man, he spent over a year in Jamaica as a doctor to the island's governor, and he came home with around 800 plant **specimens**[6].

[2] dead bodies that were preserved and wrapped in cloth
[3] sculptures made of a hard, reddish-brown metal
[4] a medical doctor
[5] kings and queens
[6] examples of plants collected for scientific study

[00:02:50] See, Sloane's passion was collecting. He collected plants, animals, coins, medals, books, **manuscripts**[7], shoes, drawings, and what he called "**curiosities**[8]" from all over the world.

[00:03:05] Today, he might be called a "hoarder", someone who keeps everything and throws nothing away.

[00:03:13] By the time he died in 1753, aged 92, his collection had **swollen**[9] to more than 71,000 objects.

[00:03:25] In his will, he offered his entire collection to the nation, on the condition that Parliament pay his daughters £20,000, which is almost £4 million in today's money.

[00:03:39] A lot of money, of course, but it was a **fraction**[10] of what the collection was worth.

[00:03:46] He also asked that the collection be kept together, and shown to anyone who was curious, **free of charge**[11].

[00:03:55] Parliament agreed, and launched a national lottery to pay for it.

[00:04:00] Once the funds were raised, the collection passed into the hands of the state, and a building was bought to **house**[12] it all.

[7] old documents or books written by hand
[8] strange or unusual objects that people find interesting
[9] grown much larger
[10] a small part
[11] without having to pay
[12] provide space to keep

[00:04:09] And so in 1759, in a mansion called Montagu House in Bloomsbury, the British Museum opened its doors. It was the first national museum in the world that belonged to neither a king nor a church, open to what its founding rules called "all **studious**[13] and curious persons".

[00:04:33] Curious minds, one might even say.

[00:04:36] In the early years, visiting was not particularly easy. You had to apply in writing for a ticket, wait weeks, and then **be marched through**[14] the rooms in a small group by an official. But from the start, the collection belonged to the public, and that was a bold new idea.

[00:04:59] And the collection kept growing.

[00:05:02] Now that Britain had a national museum, there was somewhere for things to go.

[00:05:09] Wealthy collectors followed Sloane's example and left their collections to it. Parliament bought others, including hundreds of ancient Greek vases collected by the British **ambassador**[15] in Naples.

[13] keen on studying and learning
[14] be led quickly through, in a strict and organised way
[15] the official representative of one country in another country

[00:05:24] As the empire expanded, and British ships sailed further and further from home, their **crews**[16] brought back objects from all corners of the globe, and many of them ended up in the museum.

[00:05:37] And by law, the museum received a copy of every book published in Britain.

[00:05:43] Within a few decades, Montagu House was **bursting at the seams**[17]. It was completely full.

[00:05:51] In the 19th century, it was knocked down and replaced by the great columned building you might have visited yourself.

[00:05:59] Soon enough, this building also started to fill up, but instead of knocking it down and building a bigger one, the solution was to move parts of the collection to other museums in London.

[00:06:13] Sloane's dried plants, **stuffed**[18] animals and **pickled**[19] creatures were moved out to South Kensington, where in 1881 they became the Natural History Museum.

[00:06:25] The books and **manuscripts**, as we will see, would leave later.

[00:06:29] What stayed in Bloomsbury were the things made by people, things from often distant civilisations.

[16] the people who worked on the ships
[17] completely full, with no more space
[18] dead and filled with material so that they looked alive
[19] kept in a liquid such as alcohol to stop them decaying

[00:06:37] And many of these arrived in London thanks to British military and political power abroad.

[00:06:44] One such example is the museum's single most famous object: the Rosetta Stone.

[00:06:52] Now, we've made a full episode on the Rosetta Stone. It's episode number 141, so if you'd like the full story, you can listen to it there.

[00:07:02] But as a brief summary, or as a reminder, in 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt.

[00:07:11] The following year, French soldiers rebuilding a fort near the town of Rosetta dug up a broken **slab**[20] of dark stone, covered in three bands of writing: ancient Greek, everyday Egyptian script, and **hieroglyphics**[21].

[00:07:30] The **scholars**[22] Napoleon had brought with him understood immediately what this could mean. Nobody on Earth had been able to read **hieroglyphics** for well over a thousand years. If all three texts said the same thing, the Greek could be used as a key, a dictionary to translate this ancient Egyptian script.

[00:07:56] But the French, **alas**[23], never got to keep their prize.

[00:08:00] In 1801, the British defeated Napoleon's forces in Egypt, and under the terms of the French **surrender**[24], the stone was handed over.

[00:08:11] It has been in the British Museum since 1802, and it remains the single most visited object in the building.

[00:08:20] And it's closely followed by the Parthenon Marbles.

[00:08:25] At the start of the 19th century, Greece was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, and the British **ambassador** to the Ottomans was a Scottish **aristocrat**[25] called Lord Elgin.

[20] a large, flat, thick piece
[21] the ancient Egyptian system of writing that used pictures and symbols
[22] people who study a subject in great detail
[23] unfortunately
[24] official agreement to stop fighting because they had lost
[25] a person from the highest social class

[00:08:38] Between 1801 and 1812, Elgin's agents removed about half of the surviving sculptures from the Parthenon, the ancient temple in Athens, and shipped them to Britain.

[00:08:54] Elgin claimed he had permission from the Ottoman authorities, although the original document giving him permission has never been found. The Greeks were never consulted, and if they had been, it seems extremely unlikely they would have agreed.

[00:09:11] Now, not to suggest that Elgin is deserving of a huge amount of sympathy, but the **logistics**[26] of removing the marbles proved far more complicated and expensive than the ambassador had **bargained for**[27].

[00:09:27] By the time the marbles reached Britain, Elgin had spent more than £70,000 on the operation, which is the equivalent of around £6 million in today's money. He had borrowed much of it, at high interest rates.

[00:09:45] Financially, he was **ruined**[28], and he was forced to sell the sculptures to the British government, which paid him around half of what he claimed to have spent. In turn, the government gave them to the museum.

[00:10:01] And then there are the Benin Bronzes.

[26] the practical organisation needed to do something complicated
[27] expected
[28] left with no money

[00:10:04] In 1897, a British force invaded the Kingdom of Benin, in what is now Nigeria, as revenge for the killing of a British **delegation**[29].

[00:10:16] They burned Benin City to the ground, sent the king into **exile**[30], and carried away thousands of extraordinary **brass**[31] **plaques**[32] and sculptures from the royal palace.

[00:10:29] The British government then sold much of this artwork to cover the costs of the military **expedition**[33]. Several hundred pieces went to the British Museum, which today holds more than 900 objects from Benin.

[00:10:45] Here, nobody even claimed to have permission. The **bronzes** were simply taken. Stolen, you might say.

[00:10:54] Plenty of the collection, however, arrived in other, friendlier, ways. Some of it was dug up with the agreement of the authorities of the time.

[00:11:05] In the 1840s, for example, a young adventurer named Austen Henry Layard dug into the **mounds**[34] of northern Iraq. There, he uncovered the palaces of ancient Assyria, a civilisation then known mainly from the Bible.

[29] a group of people sent to represent their country
[30] a situation in which someone is forced to live outside their own country
[31] made of a shiny yellow metal
[32] flat pieces of metal decorated with pictures
[33] an organised journey made for a particular purpose
[34] small, rounded hills

[00:11:23] His finds included huge winged bulls of stone. They were floated down the River Tigris on **rafts**[35] made of **inflated**[36] animal skins, and they **caused a sensation**[37] in London.

[00:11:36] Ordinary Victorians queued to see a world nearly three thousand years old.

[00:11:43] And some of the most important finds were simply given, donated, to the museum.

[00:11:50] In 1938, a **widow**[38] named Edith Pretty invited an **archaeologist**[39] to dig up some mysterious **mounds** of earth on her land at Sutton Hoo, in Suffolk, in the east of England.

[00:12:05] The following year, under the largest one, he found the outline of an entire ship, whose wood had long since **rotted away**[40]. Inside it was the treasure of an Anglo-Saxon king: a warrior's helmet, gold **buckles**[41], and silver bowls from Byzantium.

[00:12:25] It was one of the greatest **archaeological**[42] discoveries ever made in Britain, an **invaluable**[43] collection, and it was **ruled**[44] that all of it belonged to Mrs Pretty.

[35] flat boats made of pieces tied together
[36] filled with air
[37] created great excitement and interest
[38] a woman whose husband had died
[39] a person who studies the past by digging up old objects and buildings
[40] slowly decayed until almost nothing was left
[41] metal pieces used to fasten belts
[42] relating to the study of the past by digging up old objects
[43] extremely valuable; worth more than can be measured
[44] officially decided

[00:12:39] Mrs Pretty gave it to the museum, every piece. She asked for nothing in return.

[00:12:47] At the time, it was the most valuable gift the museum had ever received from a living person.

[00:12:54] Now, we will come back to some of the arguments over whether the museum should actually be the **custodian**[45] of this vast collection, or at least parts of it.

[00:13:03] But first, there is another part of the museum's story: its library.

[00:13:09] In 1857, a magnificent circular reading room opened in the museum's central courtyard.

[00:13:17] It had a blue and gold **dome**[46], wider than that of St Paul's Cathedral.

[00:13:23] Beneath it sat hundreds of leather-topped desks, arranged in rows like the **spokes**[47] of a wheel. And around it, on 40 kilometres of shelves, was one of the great libraries of the world.

[00:13:39] It was free to use, and you did not need to be rich or famous, just to have a letter of recommendation and a reason for study.

[45] a person or organisation that looks after and protects something
[46] a round roof shaped like half a ball
[47] the thin bars that connect the centre of a wheel to its edge

[00:13:49] Readers over the years included some of the greatest writers, thinkers, and politicians in modern history: Charles Dickens, Bram Stoker, Virginia Woolf, Mahatma Gandhi, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

[00:14:04] Even Karl Marx sat under that **dome**, day after day, for decades, researching and writing the book that became Das Kapital.

[00:14:14] And a few decades later, a Russian revolutionary applied for a reader's ticket under the false name of Jacob Richter; his real name was Vladimir Lenin.

[00:14:26] So, Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin might not be the first people who **come to mind**[48] as **beneficiaries**[49] of the British state, but they owed some small **debt of gratitude**[50] to the British Museum.

[00:14:40] Now, if you're wondering where all these books are now, the library moved out in 1997, to the new British Library building a little bit up the road. The space around the reading room was transformed into the glass-roofed Great Court that visitors walk through today.

[00:14:59] So, back to the objects, and to the arguments over them.

[00:15:05] As you may know, today, many of the countries they came from want them back.

[48] be thought of
[49] people who received help or advantages
[50] a reason to be thankful

[00:15:11] Greece has formally demanded the return of the Parthenon Marbles since the 1980s, when the actress-turned-culture-minister Melina Mercouri made them a national cause.

[00:15:24] In 2009, Greece opened a **gleaming**[51] museum at the foot of the Acropolis, with a top floor built to the exact dimensions of the Parthenon. The pieces that are in London are shown there as plain white **plaster**[52] copies, so visitors can see exactly what is missing.

[00:15:46] Greece is far from alone. Nigeria wants the Benin Bronzes. Egyptian **archaeologists**[53] have campaigned for the Rosetta Stone. And on Easter Island, or Rapa Nui, to give it its Polynesian name, the islanders want back a giant stone figure taken by a British warship in 1868 and presented to Queen Victoria.

[00:16:11] The islanders' name for it is usually translated as "the lost friend" or "the stolen friend".

[00:16:19] The museum's traditional defence **rests on**[54] three arguments.

[51] shiny, bright and new-looking
[52] a white material that becomes hard when it dries, used for making copies
[53] people who study the past by digging up old objects and buildings
[54] is based on

[00:16:24] First, a legal one: an Act of Parliament from 1963 actually forbids the museum from giving away almost anything in its collection, so the **trustees**[55] say **their hands are tied**[56]. Legally, they aren't allowed to give anything back.

[00:16:43] Second, a philosophical one: that there is real value in a universal museum, a single place where a visitor can walk from Egypt to Greece to Benin in an afternoon and see human civilisation as one connected story. And, after all, the museum is still free to all. **Granted**[57], you need to get there, to get to London, but when you do, the collection is there for you.

[00:17:15] And third, a defence of security. Some of these ancient treasures, its defenders say, simply wouldn't be **adequately**[58] protected if they were returned to areas of conflict. Just take a look at what ISIS did to sites of cultural value in Syria and Iraq. In 2015, it destroyed much of Nimrud, the very place where Layard had dug up his winged bulls.

[00:17:43] The museum has **held to**[59] this defence for decades, but in recent years, things seem to be shifting.

[55] the people in charge of running the museum and its property
[56] they are not free to act as they would like
[57] it is true that
[58] well enough
[59] continued to keep to

[00:17:52] Other countries have started to give things back. Germany has **signed over**[60] ownership of more than a thousand Benin Bronzes to Nigeria, and the Netherlands has sent back more than a hundred.

[00:18:06] And the British Museum and Greece have spent several years talking about an arrangement in which sculptures could return to Athens as part of a long-term exchange. More than once, reports in the press have suggested a deal was close.

[00:18:24] But the talks keep **running into**[61] the same problem, which is the question of who owns the sculptures. The museum says it can only lend them. Greece says it cannot borrow something that it believes already belongs to it.

[00:18:42] And then there is the question of how well the museum looks after what it holds, and here the defence of "we're keeping things safe" starts to look a little **shaky**[62].

[00:18:55] In 1845, a drunken visitor picked up a **lump**[63] of stone and **hurled**[64] it at the Portland Vase, a piece of Roman glass nearly 2,000 years old and possibly the most famous vase in the world. It **shattered**[65] into more than 180 fragments.

[60] officially given, by signing a legal document
[61] coming up against
[62] weak and not very convincing
[63] a solid piece without a regular shape
[64] threw with great force
[65] broke suddenly into many small pieces

[00:19:16] The museum glued it back together. And has since taken it apart and restored it again, twice, as restoration techniques improved. Today, you can hardly see the **joins**[66], but still, it was damaged **under the British Museum's watch**[67].

[00:19:33] But in 2023, the museum faced a much bigger **scandal**[68].

[00:19:40] It **emerged**[69] that around 2,000 objects had gone missing or been damaged over a period of several years. Most were small gems, jewellery and fragments from the storerooms. The museum **alleges**[70] that they had been secretly removed by one of its own senior **curators**[71], with some pieces offered for sale for a **fraction** of their value.

[00:20:06] One Roman object, **reportedly**[72] worth as much as £50,000, was offered for sale for just £40. Some had been bought by collectors who had no idea what they were holding.

[00:20:20] And the museum had been warned. An **antiques**[73] dealer in Denmark had noticed suspicious pieces appearing on eBay and had emailed the museum about it in 2021, two years before the scandal **broke**[74].

[66] the places where the pieces were stuck together
[67] while the British Museum was responsible for it
[68] an event that shocked people because it involved wrong or dishonest behaviour
[69] became known
[70] says something is true without having proved it
[71] people in charge of the objects in a museum
[72] according to what has been reported
[73] old and valuable objects
[74] became public

[00:20:36] He was told, **in effect**[75], that he was wrong, and that there was nothing to worry about.

[00:20:42] When the scale of the losses finally became clear in the summer of 2023, the story went around the world. The director resigned. The **curator**[76] was **dismissed**[77], and later ordered by a court to hand over his eBay records and to return what he still held.

[00:21:03] Museum staff began the long work of hunting their own collection across the internet. Hundreds of pieces have since been recovered, but many more are still missing.

[00:21:15] Part of the problem, it turned out, was that the museum did not fully know what it owned.

[00:21:21] Millions of objects had never been photographed or properly **catalogued**[78], so when small things **vanished**[79] from a storeroom, their disappearance could go unnoticed. The museum has since promised to photograph and **catalogue**[80] the entire collection, but this is a huge project that is expected to take years.

[00:21:44] So, where does that leave the British Museum?

[75] in reality; basically
[76] the person in charge of objects in a museum
[77] officially removed from his job
[78] listed and described in an organised record
[79] disappeared suddenly
[80] make an organised list and description of

[00:21:49] It is one of the most argued-about museums in the world, and still one of the most visited, with around six million people walking through its gates every year.

[00:22:00] It is, to some people, a crime scene, a warehouse full of stolen goods waiting to be returned to their **rightful**[81] owners. To others, it is a marvellous collection of human **ingenuity**[82], creativity, and progress through time.

[00:22:18] Whatever you may think of it, there is one thing that has not changed in the almost 300 years of its existence. It is free. Anyone, old or young, rich or poor, can walk in and see some of the most remarkable things the world has ever produced.

[00:22:38] And I, **for one**[83], think that is something pretty special.

[00:22:44] OK, then, that is it for today's episode on the British Museum.

[00:22:48] I hope it's been an interesting one and that you've learnt something new.

[00:22:52] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:22:57] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

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[81] true and legal
[82] cleverness and skill at inventing things
[83] personally (used when giving your own opinion)

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Mere	only; just
Mummies	dead bodies that were preserved and wrapped in cloth
Bronzes	sculptures made of a hard, reddish-brown metal
Physician	a medical doctor
Monarchs	kings and queens
Specimens	examples of plants collected for scientific study
Manuscripts	old documents or books written by hand
Curiosities	strange or unusual objects that people find interesting
Swollen	grown much larger
Fraction	a small part

Free of charge	without having to pay
House	provide space to keep
Studious	keen on studying and learning
Be marched through	be led quickly through, in a strict and organised way
Ambassador	the official representative of one country in another country
Crews	the people who worked on the ships
Bursting at the seams	completely full, with no more space
Stuffed	dead and filled with material so that they looked alive
Pickled	kept in a liquid such as alcohol to stop them decaying
Slab	a large, flat, thick piece
Hieroglyphics	the ancient Egyptian system of writing that used pictures and symbols
Scholars	people who study a subject in great detail

Alas	unfortunately
Surrender	official agreement to stop fighting because they had lost
Aristocrat	a person from the highest social class
Logistics	the practical organisation needed to do something complicated
Bargained for	expected
Ruined	left with no money
Delegation	a group of people sent to represent their country
Exile	a situation in which someone is forced to live outside their own country
Brass	made of a shiny yellow metal
Plaques	flat pieces of metal decorated with pictures
Expedition	an organised journey made for a particular purpose

Mounds	small, rounded hills
Rafts	flat boats made of pieces tied together
Inflated	filled with air
Caused a sensation	created great excitement and interest
Widow	a woman whose husband had died
Archaeologist	a person who studies the past by digging up old objects and buildings
Rotted away	slowly decayed until almost nothing was left
Buckles	metal pieces used to fasten belts
Archaeological	relating to the study of the past by digging up old objects
Invaluable	extremely valuable; worth more than can be measured
Ruled	officially decided
Custodian	a person or organisation that looks after and protects something

Dome	a round roof shaped like half a ball
Spokes	the thin bars that connect the centre of a wheel to its edge
Come to mind	be thought of
Beneficiaries	people who received help or advantages
Debt of gratitude	a reason to be thankful
Gleaming	shiny, bright and new-looking
Plaster	a white material that becomes hard when it dries, used for making copies
Archaeologists	people who study the past by digging up old objects and buildings
Rests on	is based on
Trustees	the people in charge of running the museum and its property
Their hands are tied	they are not free to act as they would like
Granted	it is true that

Adequately	well enough
Held to	continued to keep to
Signed over	officially given, by signing a legal document
Running into	coming up against
Shaky	weak and not very convincing
Lump	a solid piece without a regular shape
Hurled	threw with great force
Shattered	broke suddenly into many small pieces
Joins	the places where the pieces were stuck together
Under the british museum's watch	while the British Museum was responsible for it
Scandal	an event that shocked people because it involved wrong or dishonest

	behaviour
Emerged	became known
Alleges	says something is true without having proved it
Curators	people in charge of the objects in a museum
Reportedly	according to what has been reported
Antiques	old and valuable objects
Broke	became public
In effect	in reality; basically
Curator	the person in charge of objects in a museum
Dismissed	officially removed from his job
Catalogued	listed and described in an organised record
Vanished	disappeared suddenly

Catalogue	make an organised list and description of
Rightful	true and legal
Ingenuity	cleverness and skill at inventing things
For one	personally (used when giving your own opinion)

Language spotlight

1. Be bursting at the seams

- **Meaning**: Be completely full, with no space left for anything or anyone else.
- **Synonyms**: be packed, be full to capacity, be overflowing
- **Antonyms**: be empty, be half-empty, have plenty of room
- **Examples**:
    - By nine o'clock the little café was **bursting at the seams**.
    - Our flat is **bursting at the seams** now that my parents are staying with us.

2. Bargain for

- **Meaning**: Expect or be prepared for something, usually used when something turns out worse or harder than you expected.
- **Synonyms**: expect, be prepared for, anticipate
- **Antonyms**: be taken by surprise, be caught off guard, not see something coming
- **Examples**:
    - Renovating the kitchen took far longer than we had **bargained for**.
    - She got more of an argument than she **bargained for** when she criticised his cooking.

3. Cause a sensation

- **Meaning**: Create a great deal of excitement, interest or surprise among a lot of people.
- **Synonyms**: create a stir, make a splash, make headlines
- **Antonyms**: go unnoticed, fall flat, attract no attention
- **Examples**:

- Her first novel **caused a sensation** when it was published.
- The new electric car **caused a sensation** at the motor show.

4. Someone's hands are tied

- **Meaning**: Someone is not free to act as they would like, usually because of rules or circumstances.
- **Synonyms**: be powerless, have no choice, be restricted
- **Antonyms**: be free to act, have a free hand, have the power to decide
- **Examples**:
  - I'd love to give you a refund, but **my hands are tied** by company policy.
  - The teachers wanted to help, but **their hands were tied** until the head teacher agreed.

5. Under someone's watch

- **Meaning**: While someone is responsible for or in charge of something.
- **Synonyms**: on someone's watch, during someone's time in charge, while someone is responsible
- **Antonyms**: out of someone's control, beyond someone's responsibility, outside someone's care
- **Examples**:
  - The minister promised that nothing like this would happen again **under his watch**.
  - Several valuable paintings disappeared **under the previous director's watch**.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. How did Hans Sloane's collection become the property of the nation?

a) Parliament took it after he died owing money

b) He offered it in his will, if Parliament paid his daughters £20,000

c) He sold it to the king, who gave it to the public

d) He gave it to the Royal Society while he was still alive

2. How did the Rosetta Stone end up in the British Museum?

a) A British collector bought it from Egyptian farmers

b) Napoleon gave it to Britain as a gift of friendship

c) British soldiers found it while rebuilding a fort

d) The French handed it over after being defeated by the British in Egypt

3. What happened to Lord Elgin as a result of removing the Parthenon Marbles?

a) He lost so much money that he had to sell the sculptures to the government

b) He became one of the richest men in Britain

c) He was arrested by the Ottoman authorities

d) He gave the sculptures back to Greece

4. Why did the Sutton Hoo treasure end up in the British Museum?

a) The museum bought it from Edith Pretty for a large sum

b) A court ordered Edith Pretty to hand it over

c) Edith Pretty gave all of it to the museum and asked for nothing in return

d) The archaeologist who found it sold it to the museum

5. According to the episode, why could objects disappear from the museum without anyone noticing?

a) The storerooms were open to any visitor

b) Millions of objects had never been photographed or properly catalogued

c) The missing objects had been replaced with copies

d) The museum checked its collection only once every ten years

True or False

6. When the British Museum first opened, visitors could walk in without a ticket. (True/False)

7. Sloane's dried plants and stuffed animals were moved to South Kensington, where they became the Natural History Museum. (True/False)

8. The document from the Ottoman authorities giving Elgin permission is on display in the British Museum. (True/False)

9. Karl Marx researched the book that became Das Kapital in the museum's reading room. (True/False)

10. Germany has signed over ownership of more than a thousand Benin Bronzes to Nigeria. (True/False)

Fill in the Blanks

11. Within a few decades, Montagu House was bursting at the _____.

12. The logistics of removing the marbles proved far more complicated and expensive than the ambassador had bargained ___.

13. They owed some small debt of _____ to the British Museum.

14. An Act of Parliament from 1963 actually forbids the museum from giving away almost anything in its collection, so the trustees say their hands are ____.

15. And I, for ___, think that is something pretty special.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does "**mere**" mean when the podcast says you can see a mere 1 per cent of the collection?

a) Exactly

b) At least

c) Only

d) Almost

17. What does "**alas**" mean when the podcast says the French never got to keep the Rosetta Stone?

a) Unfortunately

b) Luckily

c) Finally

d) Surprisingly

18. What does “**invaluable**” mean in the description of the Sutton Hoo treasure?

a) Worth very little

b) Impossible to sell

c) Not yet given a price

d) Extremely valuable

19. What does “**shaky**” mean when the podcast discusses the museum's claim that it keeps objects safe?

a) Strong and convincing

b) Weak and not very convincing

c) New and untested

d) Loud and angry

20. In the podcast, what does “**broke**” mean in "two years before the scandal broke"?

a) Became public

b) Was damaged

c) Ended suddenly

d) Cost a lot of money

Answers

1. b) He offered it in his will, if Parliament paid his daughters £20,000
2. d) The French handed it over after being defeated by the British in Egypt
3. a) He lost so much money that he had to sell the sculptures to the government
4. c) Edith Pretty gave all of it to the museum and asked for nothing in return
5. b) Millions of objects had never been photographed or properly catalogued
6. False
7. True
8. False
9. True
10. True
11. seams
12. for
13. gratitude
14. tied
15. one
16. c) Only
17. a) Unfortunately
18. d) Extremely valuable

19. b) Weak and not very convincing

20. a) Became public