Articles

Catalogues and the Collecting and Ordering of Knowledge (II): Debates about Cataloguing Practices in the British Museum and the Forebears of the Public Record Office of Great Britain, ca. 1750–1850

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RÉSUMÉ Entre 1750 et 1850, des collections importantes de livres, d'objets et de documents sont entrés dans le patrimoine culturel des États-nations postrévolutionnaires ou réformés de l'Europe occidentale, ce qui engendra des débats sur la collection et l'organisation du savoir à un moment où des bibliothèques, des musées et des archives nouvellement nationalisés commençaient à se positionner comme institutions du savoir public. En Grande-Bretagne, les catalogues et les pratiques de catalogage du British Museum et du Public Records Office ont été façonnés par ces débats. Au British Museum, le premier catalogue général du département des livres imprimés *(Department of Printed Books)* a été façonné par les débats au sujet des mérites relatifs de la classification chronologique et de la classification alphabétique, en lien avec les buts et les obligations d'une bibliothèque publique nationale, alors que les catalogues systématiques du département de l'histoire naturelle *(Natural History Department)* ont été le résultat des débats au sujet de la classification et de la nomenclature des espèces dans les collections d'histoire naturelle. Les « catalogues » compilés par les prédécesseurs de la Public Records Office en Grande-Bretagne ont été, pour leur part, formés par les débats sur la valeur relative du *catalogage* par rapport à l'*impression* comme moyen de rendre les documents de la nation britannique disponibles au public. Une série d'enquêtes parlementaires en 1835, en 1836 et entre 1847 et 1849 ont été des forums critiques dans lesquels ces débats ont eu lieu et ils ont fourni le point focal de base du présent texte, qui se veut le deuxième article d'une étude en deux parties qui explore le rôle qu'ont joué les catalogues dans la collection et l'organisation du savoir dans les cultures émergentes des bibliothèques, des musées et des archives.

ABSTRACT Between 1750 and 1850, significant collections of books, objects, and records became part of the cultural patrimony of revolutionized or reformed nation-states in western Europe, prompting debates about the collecting and ordering of knowledge as newly nationalized libraries, museums, and archives began to position themselves as public knowledge institutions. In Britain, the catalogues and cataloguing practices of the British Museum and the Public Record Office were shaped by

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those debates. Within the British Museum, the first general catalogue of the Department of Printed Books was shaped by debates about the relative merits of classified versus alphabetical arrangement in relation to the aims and obligations of a national public library, while the systematic catalogues of its Natural History Department were born out of debates about the classification and naming of species in natural history collections. The "catalogues" compiled by the Public Record Office of Great Britain, for their part, were shaped by debates about the relative value of *cataloguing* versus *printing* as a means for making the records of the British nation available to the public. A series of parliamentary inquiries in 1835, 1836, and 1847–49 were critical fora for the airing of those debates and provide the primary focal point of the present article, the second of a two-part study exploring the role played by catalogues in the collecting and ordering of knowledge in the emergent cultures of libraries, museums, and archives.

Between 1750 and 1850, significant collections of books, objects, and records became part of the cultural patrimony of revolutionized or reformed nation-states in western Europe,[1] prompting debates about the collecting and ordering of knowledge as newly nationalized libraries, museums, and archives began to position themselves as public knowledge institutions; such debates were instrumental in shaping the modern understanding of catalogues and cataloguing practices within the institutional and professional communities of libraries, museums, and archives. In Britain, the "catalogues" produced by the British Museum and the Public Record Office that began to appear in the second half of the 19th century were shaped by debates that took place in the first half of that century. In the British Museum, the first general catalogue of the Department of Printed Books was shaped by debates about the relative merits of classified versus alphabetical arrangement in relation to the aims and obligations of a national public library, while the systematic catalogues of its Natural History Department were informed by debates about the classification and naming of species in natural history collections. The calendars and guides compiled by the Public Record Office of Great Britain, for their part, were influenced by debates about the relative value of *cataloguing* versus *printing* as a means of making the records of the British nation available to the public.

As the discussion below will show, these debates were indicative of larger societal debates taking place in Britain at the time: debates about humanistic versus Enlightenment forms of inquiry, about the competing imperatives of innovation versus tradition in disciplinary discourse, and about the relative value of direct and indirect access to historical sources. They were also part and parcel of a broader effort to reform and democratize Britain's governmental institutions and to codify their roles and responsibilities to the public, whose interests they were intended to serve.[2] A series of parliamentary inquiries in 1835, 1836, and 1847–49 became significant sites for such debates and shed a critical light on the catalogues and cataloguing practices within the British Museum and the record repositories that were the forebears of the Public Record Office between the late 18th century and the early decades of the 19th century. Those debates provide the primary focal point of the present article, which is the second of a two-part study exploring the role played by catalogues in the collecting and ordering of knowledge in the emergent cultures of libraries, museums, and archives.[3]

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[1] The transfer of collections of books and objects from ecclesiastical, aristocratic, and other semi-private collections to national libraries and museums was achieved by a variety of means, depending on the jurisdiction, and included sequestration, gift, and purchase. The centralization of public records in national archives was accomplished mainly through legislation.

The Establishment and Growth of the British Museum, 1753–1836

The British Museum was established by an act of Parliament in 1753[4] as both a national museum and a national library; it was to be maintained in perpetuity by the English government and overseen by a government-appointed board of trustees. Its founding collections included those of the naturalist and physician Sir Hans Sloane, the parliamentarian and antiquary Sir Robert Cotton, Sir Robert Harley and his son Edward (the 1st and 2nd Earl of Oxford), and the Royal Library of King George II.[5] Altogether the collections comprised "around 88,000 books and volumes of manuscripts, 24,000 coins and medals, 43,000 natural history specimens, and perhaps 5,000 antiquities and modern curiosities."[6] When the museum opened to the public at Montagu House in

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[2] Historians have described the period between the late 18th century and the first half of the 19th century in Britain as an "age of reform," during which the pressure to improve and democratize parliamentary and other governmental institutions intensified, resulting in the enactment of parliamentary and other reforms that significantly changed Britain's political and cultural landscape. Such changes included the abolition of slavery, electoral reform, the introduction of the poor law, and civil registration. See Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, eds., *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[3] The first part explored the emergence and growth of library, museum, and archival catalogues in western Europe in the early modern period, focusing on the shaping and reshaping of their ordering principles in response to broader cultural shifts in the organization of scholarly, scientific, and political knowledge during that period. See Heather MacNeil, "Catalogues and the Collecting and Ordering of Knowledge (I): ca. 1550–1750," *Archivaria* 82 (Fall 2016): 27–53.

[4] British Museum Act, 26 Geo. 2, c. 22.

[5] For a succinct history of these collections, see Michael Leapman, *The Book of the British Library* (London: British Library, 2012), esp. 29–45.

[6] Marjorie L. Caygill, "From Private Collection to Public Museum: The Sloane Collection at Chelsea and the British Museum in Montagu House," in R.G.W. Anderson, M.L. Caygill, A.G. MacGregor, and L. Syson, eds., *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century* (London: British Museum, 2003), 19.

1759, the collections were divided among three departments: manuscripts, medals, and coins; natural and artificial productions; and printed books.

The Enlightenment ideals underpinning the museum's broad collecting mission were evident in its founding legislation, which emphasized the complementarity of the forms of knowledge embedded in its varied collections. The museum was explicitly premised on the belief that "all Arts and Sciences have a Connexion with each other, and Discoveries in Natural Philosophy and other Branches of speculative Knowledge, for the Advancement and Improvement whereof the said Museum or Collection was intended, do and may in many Instances give Help and success to the most useful experiments and inventions."[7] Its establishment has been described by Robert Anderson as "a scholarly organization project," a "means by which the natural and artificial worlds could be organized, even taxonomized, by bringing them together under one roof." As such, the museum functioned as a kind of "encyclopaedia, or a dictionary based on historical principles, with sequences of rooms, their layout, and the juxtaposition of objects within them providing a means of understanding relationships within the three-dimensional world of objects and specimens."[8] Within that encyclopedic framework, the library served as a repository of knowledge in its own right and "a fundamental research tool necessary to make full use of the collections."[9]

The museum was also founded as a public institution. Section 1 of the 1753 act stipulated that its collections were to be "preserved and maintained, not only for the Inspection and Entertainment of the Learned and the Curious, but for the general Use and Benefit of the Publick," while section 20 stated that "a free Access to the said general Repository, and to the Collections therein contained, shall be given to all studious and curious persons."[10] How broadly the term "public" was to be interpreted was a subject of some debate among the trustees; eventually they agreed that the museum, "tho' chiefly designed for the use of learned and studious men, both natives and foreigners, in their researches into the several parts of knowledge, yet being a national establishment … it may be judged reasonable, that the advantages accruing from it should be rendered as general as possible."[11]

By the early 19th century, however, questions began to surface about whether and to what extent the British Museum was meeting its obligations to its various publics. "If the idea of the British Museum embodied the aspirations of the 'English Enlightenment,'" Ian Willison observes, "by the turn of the century the reality was becoming a national disgrace: perceived as part of an intellectual as well as political *ancien régime*."[12] Critics charged that an "aristocracy of talent" had been supplanted by the "aristocracy of birth" among the elected trustees,[13] and Radical Reformers in Parliament charged that the museum had become a bastion of Tory patronage. In 1835, increasing pressure from the Radical Reformers resulted in the appointment of a Select Committee of the House of Commons to inquire into the state of its collections and operations;[14] a second sitting of the committee took place in 1836.[15] Between 1847 and 1849, the affairs of the museum were once again under the scrutiny of a parliamentary inquiry, this time a royal commission.[16]

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[7] British Museum Act, 26 Geo. 2, c. 22, sec. 1.

[8] Anderson et al., *Enlightening the British*, 3.

[9] John E. Simmons, *Museums: A History* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 2016), 113.

[10] British Museum Act, 26 Geo. 2, c. 22, sec. 1 and 20.

[11] *Statutes and Rules Relating to the Inspection and Use of the British Museum, etc.* (London, 1759), 5, 6, cited in Edward Miller, *That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973), 61.

Gordon McOuat has described the establishment of the 1835/1836 Select Committee on the Condition, Management and Affairs of the British Museum as

> an important turning point in the history of public institutions in Britain. In the wake of parliamentary reform and the growing strengths of the Radicals in Parliament, public institutions came under the critical scrutiny of the reform project. What purpose would they serve? Are they to be bulwarks of the old order or vans of the new? Was the BM just another 'rotten borough', peopled with patronage appointments and run as a sop to aristocratic donors? What was the role of education, of science, of research, of 'improvement' in the British Museum? Would the people be allowed access to these public institutions?[17]

Among the matters investigated by the parliamentary inquiries of 1835/1836 and 1847–49 were catalogues and cataloguing practices in the various departments of the British Museum. From the beginning, the formation and printing of catalogues of the museum's collections had been considered important means by which those collections would be made accessible to the public. A minute issued by the trustees on 21 June 1759 read:

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[12] Ian Willison, "The Development of the British National Library to 1837 in its European Context: An Essay in Retrospect," *Library History* 12, no. 1 (1996): 42.

[13] J.G. Lockhart, ed., "Art. VI: 1. Report from the Select Committee on the Condition, ..." *Quarterly Review* 88, no. 175 (December 1850): 144.

[14] *Report from the Select Committee on the Condition, Management and Affairs of the British Museum, Together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index* (London: HMSO, 1835).

[15] *Report from the Select Committee on the Condition, Management and Affairs of the British Museum, Together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index* (London: HMSO, 1836).

[16] *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Constitution and Government of the British Museum; with Minutes of Evidence* (London: HMSO, 1850).

[17] Gordon McOuat, "Cataloguing Power: Delineating 'Competent Naturalists' and the Meaning of Species in the British Museum," *British Journal for the History of Science* 34 (March 2001): 12.

> The Committee think proper to add that the [sic] requiring the attendance of the officers during the whole six hours that the museum is kept open is not a wanton or useless piece of severity, as the two vacant hours … might very usefully be employed by them in better ranging the several collections; ... and preparing catalogues for publication, which last the Committee think so necessary a work that till it is performed the several collections can be but imperfectly useful to the Public.[18]

By the 1830s, however, progress on the compilation and publication of catalogues in many departments was patchy at best, and complaints about their incompleteness and their ineffectiveness as tools for facilitating access were growing louder, both within and without the museum. While there was general consensus among the staff, readers, and visitors that improvement was needed, the nature of such improvement was hotly debated, exposing fissures that had been growing between and among these constituencies since the early 19th century. In the Department of Printed Books, the fissures manifested themselves in debates over whether the library catalogue should be organized thematically or alphabetically;[19] in the Department of Natural History, they manifested themselves in debates about the naming and arrangement of species in the zoological collections. In the following subsections, these institutional debates will be explored with the aim of showing how they embodied and reflected broader societal discussions about the purpose of a national library and museum, and its obligations to different publics.

Debates about the Classified versus Alphabetical Catalogue in the British Museum's Department of Printed Books

Between the late 16th and late 17th centuries, catalogues of learned and other libraries were published in abundance, and the best methods for organizing the entries was a topic of considerable discussion and debate. In the early part of that period, thematic classification according to the university faculties was the preferred organizing principle for many of these catalogues because it enabled library patrons to "apprehend in the twinkling of an eye all who had written on a particular subject."[20] By the end of that period, however, as the disciplinary branches of learning became increasingly complex, thematic classification had fallen out of favour, and alphabetical ordering by author had largely displaced it as the primary organizing principle for printed library catalogues in England, if not on the continent.[21]

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[18] Quoted in Dorothy May Norris, *A History of Cataloguing and Cataloguing Methods 1100–1850: With an Introductory Survey of Ancient Times* (London: Grafton & Co., 1939), 200–201.

[19] During the parliamentary inquiries, the relative merits of alphabetical versus classified catalogues in connection to the museum's manuscript collections were also debated. Those debates fall outside the scope of the present article; however, their gist may be gleaned from the testimony of the bookseller Robert Harding Evans (arguing in favour of classed catalogues) and that of the Rev. Josiah Forshall, Keeper of the Department of Manuscripts (arguing against them) during the 1836 inquiry. See *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Q3287, Q3302–3 (testimony of Evans), and Q4378–79 (testimony of Forshall). See also n113 and n122 below.

With the large-scale transfer of books from ecclesiastical, aristocratic, and other semi-private collections to newly created national libraries between the second half of the 18th and first half of the 19th century,[22] however, discussions and debates about the relative merits of the thematic or classified catalogue versus the alphabetical author catalogue resurfaced.[23] The catalogues that accompanied these collections reflected a wide range of organizing principles and classification schemes. The foundational collections of the British Museum's Department of Printed Books were no exception. In the century or so preceding their transfer to the museum, they had been subjected to numerous reclassifications and reorganizations, and their accompanying catalogues reflected the diversity and idiosyncrasy of classificatory and organizing practices. Over the next century, as librarians worked on compiling a general catalogue of the department's massive and ever-growing book collection, the two organizing principles once again vied for supremacy.

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[20] Paul Nelles, "The Library as an Instrument of Discovery: Gabriel Naudé and the Uses of History," in *History and the Disciplines: The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Donald R. Kelley (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 47.

[21] These developments are described in MacNeil, "Catalogues and the Collecting and Ordering of Knowledge," 30–36.

[22] Ian R. Willison, "The Political and Cultural Context of Panizzi's Reform of the British Museum Department of Printed Books as a National Research Library," in *Bibliotheken im gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Wandel des 19 jahrhunderts: vom 24–26 April 1980 in d. Herzog-August-Bibliothek*, ed. Gerhard Liebers and Peter Vodosek (Hamburg, DE: Hauswedell, 1982), 62.

[23] For discussions in other juridictions during this time period see, for example, William Clark, "On the Bureaucratic Plots of the Research Library," in *Books and the Sciences in History*, ed. Marina Frasca-Spada and Nick Jardine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 196–204; Eugene R. Hanson and Jay E. Daily, "Catalogs and Cataloging: History," in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences*, 3rd ed., ed. Marcia Bates and Mary Niles Maak (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 829–38; and Ian R. Willison, "The National Library in Historical Perspective," *Libraries and Culture* 24 (Winter 1989): 75–95. For examples of catalogues and cataloguing practices in other British libraries during this period see, for example, David McKitterick, "Bibliography, Bibliophily, and the Organization of Knowledge," in *The Foundations of Scholarship: Libraries and Collecting, 1650–1750*, ed. David Vaisey and David McKitterick (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1992); and P.S. Morrish, "Library Management in the Pre-Professional Age," in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, vol. 2, ed. Giles Mandelbrote and K.A. Manley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 487–91.

In 1771, the trustees had ordered the preparation of a complete catalogue of printed books. By the time it was completed in 1787, it was found to have "many flaws," and in 1805 the trustees demanded that a new edition be prepared.[24] They initially intended the new catalogue to be a classified rather than an alphabetical one but later changed their minds and decided that an alphabetical catalogue was preferable. Work on that catalogue began in 1806 and was completed in 1819. In 1824, the trustees once again expressed a desire to have a classified catalogue, and the plan for such a catalogue was laid out by Thomas Hartwell Horne in *Outlines for a Classification of a Library.*[25] By 1834, however, little progress had been made, and the project was abandoned in favour of moving forward the compilation of a complete alphabetical catalogue.

When the first Select Committee on the Condition, Management and Affairs of the British Museum was appointed the following year, it was tasked with addressing (among other things) the question of whether classified catalogues were preferable to alphabetical ones. When the committee concluded its work in August 1835, it did not issue a report; however, "the evidence which it had taken was printed and had aroused considerable public interest,"[26] with the result that "practically every reader who had ever been inside the Museum was sending in plans for 'new and perfect catalogues.'"[27] Accordingly, a second Select Committee was set up in February 1836, and debates about the relative value of the alphabetical and classified catalogue resumed. The debates quietened down following the report of the 1836 committee, but some 12 years later, when the affairs of the British Museum came under the scrutiny of a royal commission, they were revived, although then they took second place to the question of what constituted "a full and accurate" library catalogue.

Proponents of the classified catalogue insisted that "every great public institution of printed books ought to have two catalogues, one alphabetical and the other classified."[28] As the library historian Edward Edwards explained it,

> an alphabetic catalogue can only be useful to the reader who knows the name of the author whose book he wishes to consult, and who also requires to consult *but one work* on a given subject. If he do *not* know the author's name, and attempt to find the book he is in quest of by its title, he will *commonly* have to search in three or four places; *in the Museum catalogues* he will *frequently* have to search half a dozen or

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[24] P.R. Harris, *A History of the British Museum Library, 1753–1973* (London: British Library, 1998), 15, 45.

[25] For a description of Horne's classification scheme, see Harris, *A History of the British Museum Library,* 47–48.

[26] Ibid., 103.

[27] Norris, *A History of Cataloguing*, 204–5.

[28] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Q3312.

> even a dozen places, before he can be certain whether or not the book be there.... On the other hand, to the reader who wishes to *study* a subject, a classed catalogue is vitally important; for his object is to know what has been written on that subject.[29]

Natural historians were among the strongest advocates for a classified library catalogue. When the geologist and paleontologist J. Scott Bowerbank was asked by the 1836 Select Committee how he would interpret a decision favouring the continuation of the alphabetical catalogue and the abandonment of a class catalogue, he replied, "I should say that the party who came to that conclusion was by no means aware of the wants of the natural history student, or of the general scientific reader." He contended that "a student of a certain given branch of natural history is very desirous to know what works are written upon the subject; he would gain that information immediately if there were a class catalogue; but, under the present circumstances, there are vast numbers of works in the British Museum, which would be, from the present state of the catalogue, entirely lost to him."[30]

Several witnesses who appeared before the parliamentary inquiries suggested that a classified catalogue served another critical purpose: exposing areas of strength and weakness within the British Museum's existing collection of printed books. In 1836, the bookseller Robert Harding Evans, for example, testified that "if a classified catalogue were to be published, literary and scientific men on perceiving deficiencies would suggest to the Trustees of the British Museum the acquisition of such books; whereas nobody could be expected to go through an alphabetical catalogue to suggest deficiencies."[31] Testifying before the 1847–49 inquiry, the anatomist and paleontologist Richard Owen took Evans' argument further when he declared that a good classified catalogue would promote the progress of natural history by facilitating the museum's identification and acquisition of modern works on natural history that "illustrated points not explained"; the current absence of such a catalogue, he maintained, constituted an impediment to that progress.[32]

Proponents for an alphabetical author catalogue refuted all these claims. In his testimony before the 1835 Select Committee, Sir Henry Ellis, then Principal Librarian of the British Museum, maintained that "an alphabetical catalogue is indispensable; a classed catalogue is only occasionally useful."[33]

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[29] Edward Edwards, *A Letter to Benjamin Hawes, Esq., M.P.: Being Strictures on the Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Select Committee on the British Museum; with an Appendix, Containing Heads of Inquiry Respecting the Improvement of the Museum* (London: Effingham Wilson, Royal Exchange, 1836), 28–29.

[30] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Bowerbank, Q932–33.

[31] Ibid., Evans, Q3323 and Q3324; see also the testimony of Owen, Q1552, and Bowerbank, Q929–31.

[32] *Report of the Commissioners* (1850), Q5207.

[33] *Report from the Select Committee* (1835), Ellis, Q1693.

While he thought that a classified catalogue might be desirable, Ellis did not consider justifiable the enormous expense and intellectual and manual labour associated with constructing and maintaining it. He compared a classified catalogue to a law book, which "would grow obsolete in a short space of time" and require constant reprinting "to keep it up as a record of knowledge."[34] Moreover, in Ellis's view, the purposes served by the classified catalogue could be perfectly satisfied by librarians, who were themselves "living catalogues" and "sure to be acquainted with the wealth or poverty of the library; with its strength or weaknesses in the different classes of knowledge."[35]

Antonio Panizzi, who was an assistant librarian in the Department of Printed Books at the time of the 1835/1836 inquiries, was more vehement in his rejection of classified catalogues, arguing that they were neither indispensable nor even desirable. In his testimony to the 1836 Select Committee, he stated: "I have a great objection to what are called classed catalogues. I think it is impossible to make a good one; I never heard of any. I never heard of two men agreeing on the plan of a classed catalogue."[36] He took specific aim at the assertion that a classified catalogue was essential to scientific inquiry, arguing that "for scientific purposes particularly, classed catalogues 40 or 50 years old, on a scientific plan, cannot possibly be now of use, because the changes which have taken place in mineralogy, in botany, and in all natural sciences are such that you must be reclassing every day."[37] What was needed, Panizzi argued, was not a classed catalogue but, rather, "a good index of matters to an alphabetical catalogue." Such an index would be more useful, more easily prepared, and could be carried out in conjunction with an alphabetical catalogue.[38]

Ellis and Panizzi questioned not only the ability of a classed catalogue to meet the subject needs of readers, but also the obligation of the British Museum's library to accommodate such needs. According to Ellis, the library was "mostly frequented by, and indeed mainly designed for, authors who are writing and compiling works. The greater part of these authors are acquainted with the books which have been written on their respective subjects of research; and therefore inquiries for a classed catalogue are fewer from them than on a first thought would be expected."[39] It was only "the less informed" members of the public, Ellis claimed, who were "anxious to refer to a classed catalogue."[40] Panizzi was equally dismissive of readers who were not well acquainted with the names of authors associated with particular subjects:

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[34] Ibid., Q1775.

[35] Ibid., Q1775 and Q1776. This view was disputed by other witnesses, including Bowerbank, Q925. As to Ellis's claim that librarians were perfectly capable of fulfilling the functions of a classified catalogue, Edward Edwards pointed out that, during his testimony, Ellis himself had been unable to remember the number of volumes in the library under his charge, thereby raising doubts about the credibility of that claim. See Edwards, *A Letter to Benjamin Hawes*, 27.

[36] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Panizzi, Q4853.

[37] Ibid., Q4853.

[38] Ibid., Q4858.

[39] *Report from the Select Committee* (1835), Ellis, Q2507.

> An alphabetical catalogue supposes that he who wishes to make use of it knows exactly what he wants; if he do not, he must first procure that information, and then consult the catalogue in order to find whether what he wants is in the library to which he has access. The information here alluded to may be procured from other sources, but it is not to be expected that an alphabetical catalogue will supply it. Nor is it reasonable that those who do know precisely what they want should be put to inconvenience on account of those who do not.[41]

Such comments make clear that, for Ellis and Panizzi at any rate, the intended audience of the library catalogue was the "studious and curious" rather than the "general public."

Panizzi's dismissal may be connected to a distinction he had drawn, in his testimony before the 1836 Select Committee, between public libraries whose purpose was *education* and public libraries whose purpose was *research*.[42] In his view, the purpose of a national library collection such as that of the British Museum was to facilitate the latter, not the former; its particular obligation as a "public" institution was to acquire "rare, ephemeral, voluminous and costly publications" and to make them available to persons who had no means of accessing "great private collections." As he put it, "I want a poor student to have the same means of indulging his learned curiosity, of following his rational pursuits, of consulting the same authorities, of fathoming the most intricate enquiry, as the richest man in the country, as far as books go, and I contend that the Government is bound to give him the most liberal and unlimited assistance in this respect."[43]

Panizzi's hostility toward the classed catalogue may also be an indication that the interests of the Department of Printed Books were more closely aligned with the philological and humanistic concerns of literary history[44] than with the Enlightenment ideals that informed other departments within the museum. According to Willison, Panizzi's vision of the ideal library catalogue derived from the Italian library tradition, which wore the influence of Renaissance scholarship and whose model catalogue was the alphabetical catalogue of the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome.[45] Panizzi himself hinted at such an alignment in his testimony before the 1836 Select Committee when he suggested that "whatever may interest the bibliographer and literary historian as peculiar in the volume should not be passed over in silence; these and many other things are required to constitute a good alphabetical catalogue."[46]

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[40] Ibid., Q2508.

[41] Panizzi's views are contained in a letter written to the head of the 1848–49 Royal Commission. See Sir Anthony Panizzi, "Mr. Panizzi to the Right Hon. The Earl of Ellesmere. – British Museum, January 29, 1848," in *Foundations of Cataloging: A Sourcebook*, ed. Michael Carpenter and Elaine Svenonius (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1985), 15–47.

[42] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Panizzi, Q4794.

[43] Ibid., Q4795.

[44] Henry Hallam, the 19th-century historian (and later trustee of the British Museum) defined literary history as a "history of [the] progress ... [of the] several branches of literature, using the word ... in the most general sense for the knowledge imparted through books." See Henry Hallam, "Preface," in *Introduction to the Literature of Europe: In the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth centuries*, 4 vols. (London, 1837–39), x, quoted in Willison, "The

When the second Select Committee issued its report in July 1836, it made no attempt to settle the matter of the classified versus alphabetical library catalogue, asserting merely "that it is expedient that every exertion should be made to complete within the shortest time consistent with the due execution of the Work, full and accurate Catalogues of all the Collections in the Museum."[47] Subsequent events suggest, however, that the alphabetical catalogue had, for all practical purposes, won the day. Panizzi was made Keeper of Printed Books in 1837 and, under his direction, work continued on the compilation of an alphabetical catalogue.

In his 1836 testimony, Panizzi had hinted at the requirements of a "full and accurate" alphabetical author catalogue of printed books. Those requirements were subsequently elaborated in the "91 Rules for the Compilation of the Catalogue of the Printed Books in the British Museum." The rules were prepared by Panizzi with the assistance of his staff, endorsed in 1839 by the trustees, and included in the first volume of the *Catalogue of Printed Books in the British Museum* (covering the letter A), which was published in 1841. Panizzi subsequently suspended the printing of any further volumes until the entire alphabetical catalogue was completed in manuscript form and in accordance with the 91 rules.

When the rules appeared, they sparked anger and derision among readers who criticized them for being overly detailed and yet another impediment to the publication of the general catalogue of printed books. During the 1847–49 royal commission, Thomas Carlyle testified that "elaborate catalogues are not what we require; but legible catalogues, accessible to everybody. The grand use of any catalogue is to tell you, in any intelligible way, that such and such books are in the library.... I should expect it to be a simple thing to draw up a list of the names of the books, which would be a great help to the student."[48]

Development of the British National Library," 45.

[45] Willison, "The Political and Cultural Context of Panizzi's Reform," 60–63.

[46] See *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Panizzi, Q4834.

[47] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), iv, rec. 13.

[48] *Report of the Commissioners* (1850), Q4385.

John Payne Collier characterized the 91 rules as a “vanity of bibliographic display” and accused Panizzi of being more concerned with enlarging his own reputation than advancing the interests of the public he was supposed to serve.[49] Testifying before the same inquiry, Panizzi defended the rules, insisting that “a reader may know the *work* he requires; he cannot be expected to know all the peculiarities of different *editions*; and this information he has a right to expect from the catalogues.”[50] When the royal commission issued its report in 1850, it gave its unqualified support to Panizzi’s position, and the printing of the general catalogue was set aside for the next 30 years while work continued on the compilation of the manuscript catalogue. Work on the print version of the general catalogue of printed books finally commenced in 1881 and was completed in 1900, some 21 years after Panizzi’s death.

Writing at the end of the 19th century, Richard Garnett, then Keeper of Printed Books in the British Museum, declared that the 91 rules had succeeded in laying to rest the controversy regarding the relative merits of classified versus alphabetical catalogues:

> The rules of cataloguing, framed in 1839 ... will, we believe, be now generally accepted by bibliographers as embodying the principles of sound cataloguing.... The question of the strictly classified catalogue *versus* the strictly alphabetical, may, indeed, be considered as decided. The former method may have answered in the library of Alexandria; but the multiplicity of the departments of knowledge in our own day, their intricacy and the nicety with which they blend and shade into each other, render cataloguing solely by subjects a delusion.[51]

The eventual victory of the alphabetical catalogue and endorsation of the 91 rules underpinning it established two critical principles. First, it established that “the brute size of a collection of books” determined its organizing structure and the depth of its entries.[52] For a massive and constantly growing book collection such as that of the British Museum, the objective of a library catalogue was not to enable a reader to “apprehend in the twinkling of an eye all that was known on a particular subject,” as had been the case in the 17th century, but rather to bring together like items and differentiate between similar ones. Second, it established that the requirements of a “full and accurate” catalogue would be determined by “the use to be made of it by its main, enduring readership.” As Willison observes, Carlyle’s indifference to the nuances and complexities of variant editions “simply did not correspond to the text-critical concerns fundamental to the new 'historical' scholarship which had become, and was to remain, the main constituency of the national library."[53]

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[49] Ibid., Q5103, Q5055.

[50] *Report of the Commissioners* (1850), Q9814.

[51] Richard Garnett, “Public Libraries and their Catalogues,” *Essays in Librarianship and Bibliography* (London: George Allen, 1899; London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 42–44.

[52] Willison, “The Political and Cultural Context of Panizzi’s Reform,” 63.

In the Department of Natural History, which was more closely aligned with the museum's Enlightenment ideals, the systematic catalogues of the zoological collections were the outcome, rather than the focal point, of debates about the role of classification and nomenclature in promoting scientific progress and the role of a national museum in furthering that aim.

The Role of Catalogues in Debates about the Classification and Naming of Species in the Department of Natural History (Zoological Branch)

While their specific organizing principles varied, object collections in the 16th century were governed largely by the belief that objects carried "intrinsic meanings that had been laid down during the Creation" and that arranging those objects "according to notions of meaningful proximity, juxtaposition, or alignment ... might indicate underlying symbolic resemblance."[54] Over the course of the 17th century, Sharon MacDonald observes, "new ideas about how to organize and order objects into meaningful collections began to supersede ... those that had informed earlier practices. In particular, the idea that there were multiple forms of resemblances, connected by complex and cryptic linkages, came to be replaced largely by the idea that evident physical similarities between things could themselves point directly to the natural scheme."[55] By the middle of the 18th century, the ordering and reordering of object collections in accordance with principles of systematic observation and comparison "had become established at the very heart of museums, providing them with both a visual template and a philosophical core."[56]

In the realm of natural history, this "new way of connecting things both to the eye and to discourse,"[57] as Michel Foucault puts it, emphasized affinity and differentiation, focusing on "the similarities and differences between standard specimens drawn from across the stretch of the natural world in quantities large enough to enable comparisons. Comparison as a means of creating classification had become the new explanatory paradigm."[58] The publication of Carl Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* in 1735 signalled the emergence of a classification system based on the use of natural history specimens; by the mid-18th century, his system had made deep inroads into European and British natural history circles. Linnaeus presented a taxonomy of the natural world based on its division into three broad kingdoms – animals, plants, and minerals – and a hierarchical arrangement of each kingdom into classes, orders, genera, and species. Twelve editions of *Systema Naturae* were published between 1735 and 1768, during which time Linnaeus refined and expanded his classification system and codified the use of binomial nomenclature, a standardized system for species naming in which species were given a two-word Latinized name comprising a generic and specific name. In Linnaeus's taxonomy, the meaning of an individual specimen was derived from its arrangement into series that placed it within the hierarchy of species, genus, order, and class. As Thomas Thiemeyer explains, museums of natural history consequently "established *seriality* as a principle of museum presentation and thus (re-) translated Linnaeus's basic idea into a spatial diagram (Linnaeus himself generated his taxonomies from spatial arrangements of specimens in cabinets).... These arrangements were the public face of research collections and reproduced their taxonomic logic."[59] The "scientific" or "systematic" catalogues of natural history collections that began to emerge in the latter half of the 18th century aimed to mirror that same arrangement and logic: specimens were listed under their species designation and arranged in accordance with a recognized classification system.

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[53] Ibid., 64.

[54] Sharon Macdonald, "Collecting Practices," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 84.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 235. For a more detailed summary of this evolution, see MacNeil, "Catalogues and the Collecting and Ordering of Knowledge," 36–43.

[57] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970; New York: Vintage, 1994), 131. Foucault characterizes this new way of connecting things as a shift from the "age of theatre" to the "age of the catalogue."

In the British Museum, efforts to compile catalogues of the natural history collections can be traced back to 1763, when Daniel Solander, a student of Linnaeus, was appointed to prepare a series of "systematical catalogues." Over the next 20-odd years, Solander reported at various intervals that he was making good progress on cataloguing the botanical and zoological specimens and even produced draft portions of some catalogues, but these remained incomplete at the time of his death in 1782. Throughout the 25 years that followed, no significant progress was made on either completing the existing draft catalogues or commencing work on new ones.[60] During that period,

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[58] Susan Pearce, "The Collecting Process and the Founding of Museums in the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Encouraging Collections Mobility: A Way Forward for Museums in Europe*, ed. Susanna Pettersson et al. (Helsinki: Finnish National Gallery, 2010), 22.

[59] Thomas Thiemeyer, "Work, Specimen, Witness: How Different Perspectives on Museum Objects Alter the Way They Are Perceived and the Values Attributed to Them," *Museum & Society* 13 (July 2015): 401–2.

[60] For a description of Solander's efforts, see Alwyne Wheeler, "Zoological Collections in the Early British Museum: Documentation of the Collection," *Archives of Natural History* 23 (1996): 403–5.

Jennifer Thomas observes, "the Museum [may have] aspired to produce detailed systematic catalogues, [but] its priority was to ensure that visitors and Trustees could be effectively guided around the Museum." For that reason, the compilation of catalogues took second place to the production of "more general guides or manuals of the collections, first for attendants, and later to be printed for the use of visitors."[61]

By 1807, however, the need to remedy the "defective" state of the natural history catalogues was recognized by the museum's trustees, prompting more concerted efforts to be directed toward the preparation of systematic catalogues.[62] Over the next few decades, staff in the Natural History Department devoted considerably more time and attention to cataloguing the collections. Judging from the testimony of witnesses who appeared before the 1835/36 Select Committee, however, progress continued to be slow and fitful. When J.G. Children, then Assistant Keeper of the Natural History Department, was asked by the 1835 Select Committee whether there were any catalogues of the natural history specimens, he replied, "They have been begun, but they are not finished; in fact, there is so much more to do than the hands we have can do, that it is utterly impossible to make a general correct catalogue at present."[63]

Among natural historians working within and without the British Museum, it was generally accepted that systematic catalogues constituted "the soul" and "the great perfection" of a natural history collection.[64] Before they could be "systematically" catalogued, however, specimens needed to be identified, named, and arranged. As Thomas explains, "Identifying and naming specimens was a time consuming and difficult process, particularly given the increasing volume of 'non-descripts' [i.e., specimens that had not yet been described] which were acquired by the Museum as the British Empire expanded and new species were discovered."[65] The number and variety of species that had flooded into the museum in the late 18th and early 19th centuries far outnumbered those that had been identified and named by previous generations of natural historians, including Linnaeus. By 1836, the number of zoological species, for example, exceeded Linnaeus's by a ratio of 100 to 1.[66] As the numbers multiplied, "the Linnean framework of nomenclature groaned under the load."[67]

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[61] Jennifer M. Thomas, "The Documentation of the British Museum's Natural History Collections, 1760–1836," *Archives of Natural History* 39 (2012): 122, 114. See also A.E. Gunther, "Matthew Maty MD, FRS (1718–76) and Science at the Foundation of the British Museum, 1753–80," *Bulletin of the British Museum (Natural History)*, Historical Series 15, no. 1 (1987): esp. 39–56.

[62] See Gunther, "Matthew Maty," 50.

[63] *Report from the Select Committee* (1835), Children, Q3054.

[64] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Owen, Q492; Vigors, Q1423.

[65] Thomas, "Documentation," 122. For the growth of natural history collections during this period see, for example, David Elliston Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Neil Chambers, "Joseph Banks, the British Museum and Collections in the Age of Empire," in Anderson, *Enlightening the British*, 99–112; and Paul Lawrence Farber, *Discovering Birds: The Emergence of Ornithology as a Scientific Discipline, 1760–1850* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

Once specimens had been named, they then had to be arranged in display cases according to their place within a given classification system. In the 18th century, Solander had introduced the Linnean classification system at the British Museum; Linnaeus's system was an *artificial* one, meaning that it was "a means of organizing and retrieving information ... [that] makes no claims about the intrinsic or actual relations among groups that the system defines and orders."[68] Linnaeus acknowledged that his classification of animals, plants, and minerals in *Systema Naturae* did not reflect any "real" order in nature; nevertheless, he believed "that naturalists ... should use his 'artificial' system until he developed one that actually conveyed God's plan in nature."[69] Though he devoted the rest of his life to constructing such a "natural" system, "[he] was, in the end, unable to formulate one satisfactorily."[70]

For Linnaeus, the goal of natural history was simply "to construct the catalog of life."[71] His contemporary Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, who was the keeper of the Jardin du roi, the French royal botanical and zoological garden,[72] held a different view. As Paul Farber explains, Buffon believed that the goal of natural history was "to uncover the broad outlines of the order in nature. That order constituted more than just a list of individual kinds. It portrayed a grand tableau on which natural relationships, driving forces, geographical distribution, and historical change could be recognized."[73] By the early 19th century, while Linnean classification and nomenclature remained a dominant force in European and British natural history circles, a number of French natural historians, following in the footsteps of Buffon, had introduced various "natural" systems of classification that aimed to reveal the underlying order of nature. They included Georges Cuvier, Étienne Geoffrey

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[66] Gordon McOuat, "Species, Rules and Meaning: The Politics of Language and the Ends of Definitions in 19th Century Natural History," *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 27 (1996): 481.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Paul Lawrence Farber, *Finding Order in Nature: The Naturalist Tradition from Linnaeus to E.O. Wilson* (Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 2000), 10.

[69] Ibid., 9.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 21.

[72] In 1793, during the time of the French revolution, the Jardin du roi was reorganized into a museum of natural history, the Muséum d'histoire naturelle.

[73] Farber, *Finding Order*, 21. Buffon laid out his vision of nature in his 36-volume encyclopedia, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière, avec la description du Cabinet du Roi*. The differing perspectives of Linnaeus and Buffon are examined in Phillip R. Sloan, "The Buffon-Linnaeus Controversy," *Isis* 67 (September 1976): 356–75.

Sainte-Hilaire, and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck.[74] In 1819, a British entomologist, William MacLeay, introduced "quinarianism," yet another version of the natural system, and one that also entailed "a programme of massive taxonomic reconstruction."[75] As McOuat observes, all of these natural historians and their adherents, some of whom worked in the museum, "believed in a 'totalising' natural history in which, eventually, the whole of nature's creations could be brought within one complete 'natural system.'"[76] And though they disagreed, sometimes violently, on which of the many competing, and sometimes contradictory, classification systems best represented the natural system, they were all united in their opposition to Linneaus's artificial system and its associated nomenclature. By the 1830s, the British community of natural historians in general, and zoologists in particular, were deeply divided between two groups: scientific "reformers," those who aligned themselves with one or more of the new natural classification systems and who advocated (in varying degrees) nomenclatural reform on the grounds that new systems required new names; and conservative Linneans, those who were not persuaded that the newer classification systems were necessarily better than the ones they sought to displace and who insisted on the need to preserve Linnean nomenclature in the interest of stabilizing species-naming.[77]

This division within the natural history community was very much in evidence during the 1835/36 Select Committee hearings. In his testimony before the 1835 committee, Charles König, who was then in charge of the zoological branch of the Natural History Department, acknowledged that

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[74] For a concise overview of the natural classification systems introduced by Cuvier and Geoffrey Sainte-Hilaire, see Farber, *Finding Order*, 37–45; see also Toby A. Appel, *The Cuvier-Geoffrey Debate: French Biology in the Decades before Darwin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). For Lamarck's system, see Pietro Corsi, *The Age of Lamarck: Evolutionary Theories in France, 1790–1830* (Berkeley, CA, and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988). For more general studies of the evolution of French natural history during this time period see, for example, Robert Fox and George Weisz, eds., *The Organization of Science and Technology in France, 1808–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord, and E.C. Spary, eds., *The Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); E.C. Spary, *Utopia's Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[75] Adrian Desmond, "The Making of Institutional Zoology in London 1822–1836: Part 1," *History of Science* 23 (1985): 161. On quinarianism see, for example, Mary P. Winsor, *Starfish, Jellyfish, and the Order of Life: Issues in Nineteenth-Century Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 82–86; and Mario A. Di Gregorio, "In Search of the Natural System: Problems of Zoological Classification in Victorian Britain," *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 4 (1982): 232–36.

[76] McOuat, "Species, Rules, and Meaning," 482.

[77] For a more detailed examination of these debates see, for example, McOuat, "Species, Rules, and Meaning," and Adrian Desmond, "The Making of Institutional Zoology in London 1822–1836 [2 parts]," *History of Science* 23 (1985): 153–185; 223–250.

"there have been complaints made respecting the nomenclature, respecting the new names introduced, and respecting the mode of classing the different objects; but that is matter of opinion, there are as many in favour of it as against it."[78] Later in his testimony (addressing a question about deviations in the arrangement and naming of the museum's shell collection), he added:

> Undoubtedly there is a sort of anarchy among naturalists, who are ambitious to affix their own names, and to make almost every species into a new genus. That circumstance leads to great inconvenience; but on the other hand it may be said that since the natural history of the animals inhabiting the shells has become so much better known, it is quite impossible to retain the old system."[79]

When asked by the committee whether "this anarchical spirit [had] invaded the peaceful regions of the British Museum," König's reply was ambiguous: "I think something might be done to put it on a different footing."[80]

For scientific reformers such as Nicholas Vigors (an adherent of MacLeay's quinarianism) and Robert Grant (a committed Lamarckian), the "grand object" of a zoological collection such as that of the British Museum was "to show the great harmony in the system of nature." As Vigors explained in his testimony before the 1836 Select Committee,

> the object in former days was chiefly to investigate the properties of, and to assign names to, individual species. The present improved state of science leads us to consider these species as united by their affinities and analogies into one grand system; to view them not merely as a collection of detached individuals, but as a series of individuals forming one grand harmonious plan.[81]

Grant elaborated on this point, declaring that in order to reveal the one grand system it was necessary to pay "the most strict attention to zoological or systematic classification in the arrangement of the specimens." Such systematic classification would not only render the collection attractive to the public, but it would also "interest and instruct the student of zoology, by pointing out to him in the most agreeable and satisfactory manner the natural affinities of the immense series of objects belonging to the animal kingdom, by presenting to their contemplation the whole continuous chain of beings, from the lowest corals up to the highest animal forms that exist." He warned the Select Committee that

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[78] *Report from the Select Committee* (1835), König, Q2632.

[79] Ibid., Q2712.

[80] Ibid., Q2713.

[81] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Vigors, Q1296.

> without that strict systematic classification of the objects in so vast a domain of nature as zoology embraces, the mind passes vacantly from one interesting object to another perhaps totally dissimilar, and there can thus result no interesting or useful reflection to the student or the uninstructed visitor, nothing indeed but a tiresome confusion of thought, from the contemplation of objects so numerous and diversified grouped together without any perceptible bond of connexion.[82]

In Grant's view, the British Museum's zoological collection exemplified the consequences of failing to adhere to a strict systematic classification. No consistent method of classification was followed in the arrangement of its various parts,[83] and while some of the classification systems followed were more "natural" than others, they too were deficient and had not kept pace with the progress of science; in some cases, museum officers had taken it upon themselves to introduce new genera and species into existing classification systems without proper authority; in other cases, no classification system was even discernible, and species belonging to different orders were jumbled together throughout the display cases and exhibition rooms. Huge numbers of the specimens in the display cases remained unnamed, and when there were names attached to them, the names were inconsistent, obsolete, or simply incorrect. Even when more "progressive" systems of arrangement were followed, such as the arrangement of shells according to Lamarck's genera, the nomenclature adopted was "altogether antiquated and quite behind the present state of the science of conchology, in so far as the old abolished Linnaean names are applied there."[84] According to Grant, species names needed to be modernized to reflect the progress that had been made in the development of more natural classification systems; shackling these newer systems to an obsolete system of nomenclature impeded that progress. In his evidence before the Select Committee, Vigors echoed Grant's condemnation of the museum's adherence to Linnean names, maintaining that while the Linnean nomenclature may have been "valuable in its own time," it was "ill-adapted to the present state of science."[85] Vigors' own preference was for a home-grown British system of nomenclature, one that would include "all the best parts of the foreign systems ... [but] modified according to our own particular views."[86]

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[82] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Grant, Q255.

[83] For example, Cuvier's system was followed for the classification of the museum's collection of mammals, fish, and reptiles; Lamarck's system for its collection of shells; Coenraad Temminck's system for its collection of birds; and so forth.

[84] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Grant, Q1501.

[85] Ibid., (1836), Vigors, Q1419.

[86] Ibid., Q1418.

Conservative Linneans both within and without the British Museum were not convinced that the "latest" systems of arrangement and nomenclature were necessarily the best ones;[87] nor were they as optimistic as the reformers in their "expectations of the natural system ever being perfectly worked out."[88] In his testimony before the 1836 committee, Richard Owen contended that its realization would have to wait until "a superior mind shall have surveyed the whole known system of animated beings, and shall have proposed such a harmonious disposition of the old and new subjects of classification as shall receive the sanction of the majority of men of science and be approved as ... the truest expression of the state of zoological knowledge at the time being."[89] In the meantime, he suggested that

> the system of arrangement should correspond with the *Systema Naturae* or classification of the animal kingdom most generally adopted by zoologists [e.g., Cuvier's *Le règne animal*]; … it should accord with the principles laid down in the work that has received the sanction of the majority of naturalists throughout Europe, and which is most generally recommended to the students of the science as their best and safest guide.[90]

Of course, given the continual discovery of new species and genera, it was impossible to adhere completely to any one published system, and so deviations were inevitable. In response to a question from the 1835 committee about such deviations in the mammalian collection, Children insisted that so long as museum officers "put [the specimen] in such as place as it is supposed Cuvier himself would have put it in, endeavouring to keep his system in view altogether as the guide,"[91] the collection remained useful and intelligible both to the public and the scientific community.

While each zoological collection within the museum was arranged according to "the best and most generally received published system of the objects of that [collection]," and the species arranged in the genera of those systems, the name given to species followed the principle of "priority of first dubbing," meaning the name given them by "the oldest author who has described them."[92] The museum's practice of giving priority to the name by which a species was first scientifically described explained the continuing dominance of Linnaeus in questions of nomenclature, if not arrangement, and it had drawn heavy fire from the scientific reformers. John Edward Gray, an assistant working in the zoological branch at the time, explained the rationale for the practice to the 1836 committee:

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[87] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836); see, for example, the testimomy of Richardson, Q2267; Gray, Q3072; and Greenough, Q3949.

[88] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Children, Q2856.

[89] Ibid., Owen, Q534.

[90] Ibid.; see also the testimony of Richardson, Q2191.

[91] *Report from the Select Committee* (1835), Children, Q3125.

[92] *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Gray, Q2466.

> By using these, the oldest names, the students of all the different systems of zoology (both Linnean and the more modern ones), are enabled to ascertain what animal is intended; as every subsequent author refers, as a synonym or otherwise, to the name given to the animal by its original describer. This system also possesses the advantage of indicating the length of time that the animal has been scientifically known.[93]

Taken together, Gray argued, the conventions followed by the museum in arranging and naming its collections ensured both "the best arrangement and the most generally received nomenclature."[94]

Truth to tell, Gray's own sympathies were more closely aligned with the views of the scientific reformers than those of the conservative Linneans.[95] In his testimony before the 1835 committee, he asserted that the aim of the museum, so far as its natural history collections were concerned, was two-fold:

> To encourage a taste for science among the people generally, and to advance it among those who are more specially to be regarded as men of science and students ... [and] to supply a collection of standard authority as complete as possible, which may serve as a model and a guide for all the other similar institutions of the country. For this purpose it ought to be kept, in point of arrangement and nomenclature, level with the constantly progressive state of science.[96]

He also understood, however, that for natural history to progress, naturalists had to be able to communicate with one another; in order to communicate with one another, they needed to speak a common language. Prioritizing the earliest rather than the latest name given to a species provided the key to that common language, enabling species to act as fixed reference points in naturalist discourse regardless of their placement within any given natural system. Gray translated that insight, i.e., the need to balance the competing imperatives of scientific progress and nomenclatural stability, into a pragmatic new method for compiling systematic catalogues, which he presented to the 1836 Select Committee.[97] Rather than construct catalogues in accordance with a particular classification system (as had been the practice of some previous museum officers), Gray proposed that each species be recorded on a separate leaf "so that at any future time the leaves may be separated and bound in any other form."[98] As McOuat explains:

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[93] Ibid., Q2470.

[94] Ibid., Q2474.

[95] For Gray's disputes with the Linneans, see McOuat, "Cataloguing Power," 10–11 and passim.

[96] *Report from the Select Committee* (1835), Gray, Q3322.

[97] Gray had started working on these catalogues a few years earlier, and he provided the committee with a sample page as part of his testimony. See *Report from the Select Committee* (1836), Gray, Q2496.

> The new cataloguing system was as simple as it was ingenious. It was immune to much of the criticism of the ultra-reformers. They worried about "progress" and the "true" natural system. In Gray's scheme, the names and places of the species did not hold the Museum to any one classification. That much was left to those using the catalogue. If [an alternative] system was to prove right ... the catalogue could be unbound and rearranged according to the new system. With this rearrangement, the names and the original species they nominally indicate, would be retained and divorced from the classification system itself. Diverse zoologists, botanists, and supporters of different "natural systems," would still refer to the same names, and consequently the same things. In a sense, the catalogue uncoupled system from kind.[99]

By presenting this new method of cataloguing as a means of resolving the impasse between the reforming and conservative factions within the natural history community, Gray not only moved forward the compilation of systematic catalogues, but he also ensured their publication, which was essential if they were to serve the purpose of standardizing and stabilizing species nomenclature. In that respect, McOuat argues, Gray's catalogues may be seen as part of his broader agenda to position the museum as "the gravitational point" for species and their names: "As the new *Systema Naturae*, or something approaching it was developed, the catalogues would set the stage."[100]

Subsequent events suggest that Gray was at least partly successful in fulfilling that agenda. In 1840, he became the keeper of the (now autonomous) Zoological Branch of the Natural History Department, and over the next few decades, the catalogues published either by him or under his direction became "celebrated as the main, in some cases the only, complete account of classes within the natural world."[101] During the 1847–49 royal commission investigating the affairs of the museum, Gray reported on the steady progress that had been made in the compilation and publication of catalogues, including in that report extracts from favourable reviews of the catalogues to demonstrate the high estimation in which they were held by the international community of natural historians.[102]

The debates about the relative merits of the alphabetical versus classified catalogue of printed books and the naming and classification of zoological specimens revolved around the obligations of a national repository to its various publics. In the following section, the debates about the relative value of printing versus cataloguing public records revolve, instead, around the obligations of a government to make its records accessible to the public in the absence of a national repository.

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[98] Ibid., Q2500.

[99] McOuat, "Cataloguing Power," 24.

[100] Ibid., 28.

[101] Ibid., 26.

[102] *Report of the Commissioners* (1850), Q8595.

Access to the Public Records Prior to the Record Commissions of 1800–1836

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the public records of England fell into two broad groups: documents "concerned with 'matters of estate and the crown only'" and "legal and financial records which concerned both the interests of the Crown and the rights, tenures, and titles of the subject."[103] According to the historian R.B. Wernham, "Only the more formal legal and financial documents in the second group were public records in the sense that the public had reasonably ready and regular access to them upon payment of fees."[104] Access to the public records during the 16th century was sought primarily by the king's subjects, whose interest in the public records was chiefly as litigants, landowners, and taxpayers, and by the king's officials, whose interest was tied to the regular conduct of administration, diplomacy, and justice.[105] This narrowly defined public and official interest, Wernham suggests, allowed for "an increasing dispersal of the archives among many repositories and many custodians."[106] As the bureaucracy of the courts grew and solidified, its officials "came to look upon their offices almost as their freeholds and to regard their archives, if not exactly as private property, at least as strictly office muniments."[107] At the same time, so long as the public were concerned with the records chiefly as litigants, "they preferred to have the archives of each court kept in the custody of that court, where they – or more often their attorneys – could find their way around most easily."[108]

During the 17th century, however, public and official interest in ensuring that the public records were properly preserved, well ordered, and reasonably accessible was beginning to grow. Wernham cites, as contributing factors, "the constitutional conflicts of the early Stuart period and the growth of antiquarian studies, [which] were ... beginning to create a wider interest in the public records, an historical interest that could hardly be satisfied with conditions of access and means of reference designed primarily to meet the narrower and more specialized needs of legal and official searchers."[109] Following the 1688 revolution, that interest intensified; so too did the dissatisfaction with the system, and by the early 18th century the state of the public records had become a focus of parliamentary concern.

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[103] R.B. Wernham, "The Public Records in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *English Historical Scholarship in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. Levi Fox (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 11.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., 12.

[106] Ibid., 12.

[107] Ibid., 14.

[108] Ibid., 14–15.

Between 1703 and 1732, numerous committees of the House of Lords and the House of Commons were appointed to investigate the state of the public records.[110] They found that the records were widely dispersed and housed in a multitude of official and unofficial repositories; that the records held in many of these repositories were in a serious state of disrepair and decay; that many classes of records lacked any discernible order; and that the dearth of calendars and indexes impeded access to and use of the records. Although some of the recommendations that came out of these inquiries were adopted, many were ignored, and the overall improvement to the state of the public records was modest. No further parliamentary inquiries were undertaken, and the public records continued to languish in the relative obscurity of the record repositories.[111] In 1744, the historian Thomas Carte declared, "No country in *Europe* affords such a quantity and variety of materials for its History, as *England* does; and yet none is so destitute of a good one; a defect easy to be perceived and much to be lamented."[112]

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[109] Ibid., 26.

[110] For a more detailed discussion of these inquiries, see Elizabeth Hallam, "Problems with Record Keeping in Early Eighteenth Century London: Some Pictorial Representations of the State Paper Office, 1705–1706," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 6 (2009): 219–26. See also Charles F. Mullett, "The 'Better Reception, Preservation, and More Convenient Use' of Public Records in Eighteenth-Century England," *American Archivist* 27, no. 2 (April 1964): 195–217.

[111] Although no further parliamentary inquiries into the public records were undertaken, a select royal commission was appointed in 1764 to "methodize," "regulate," and "digest" the papers and records in the State Paper Office; the commissioners' warrant was subsequently extended to the records of the Court of Augmentation and several offices of the Exchequer. Despite its lengthy duration (1764–1800), the commission produced very little in the way of results. For assessments of its work by subsequent inquiries see, for example, *First Report from the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the State of the Public Records of the Kingdom, &c., Reported by Charles Abbott, Esq. on 4 July 1800* (London: HMSO, 1800), 143–45; and Record Commission, *State Papers: Published under the Authority of His Majesty's Commission ... King Henry the Eighth*, vol. 1 (London: J. Murray, 1830), xx.

[112] Thomas Carte, "Proposal for Removing the Impediments of Writing an History of England," in *A Collection of the Several Papers Published by Mr. Thomas Carte, in Relation to His History of England* (London: Printed for M. Cooper at the Globe in Pater-Noster-Row, [1744]), 1.

The beginning of the 19th century saw the resumption of efforts to improve the condition and accessibility of the public records. In 1800, a Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed "to inquire into the State of the Public Records of this kingdom … and to report to the House the Nature and Condition thereof; together with what they shall judge fit to be done for the better Arrangement, Preservation and more convenient Use of the same."[113] The Select Committee on the Public Records acknowledged a centuries-long history of efforts, under the authority of the Crown and Parliament, to institute provisions directed toward the goal of properly preserving and making accessible the public records, noting that "in some of the very first Petitions upon the Rolls of Parliament, the Public Records are considered to be the People's Evidences, and it is ordained that they shall be accessible to all the King's subjects."[114] The committee also drew attention to the failure of previous parliamentary inquiries to achieve that goal.

At the time of the 1800 Select Committee's appointment, the public records were housed "in no fewer than sixty [separately administered] official repositories" scattered throughout London.[115] The Select Committee found that the records held in many of these repositories, some dating back to the 11th century, were poorly housed and in a lamentable state of decay and disarray. It also discovered that the finding aids created by the keepers of records in these repositories varied considerably in terms of their accuracy and completeness, as did the fees charged by the keepers for their use. The committee made several recommendations aimed at improving this state of affairs. For the "better arrangement" and "more convenient use" of the records specifically, it recommended that private calendars and indexes of records (i.e., those considered the private property of the individual keepers of records) be purchased for public use and that work be undertaken to remedy the deficiencies of the public calendars and indexes; such work was to be carried out either by the recordkeepers themselves or, if necessary, "by extra Assistance, provided at the Public Expense."[116] For the purpose of "laying open to the Public a full Knowledge of the Contents of these various and extensive Repositories," the committee also recommended, as a "most essential" measure, the printing of some of the principal calendars and indexes and "such of the Original Records hitherto unpublished, as are the most important in their Nature and the most perfect of their kind."[117] The 1800 Select Committee did not recommend any measures directed toward concentrating the public records in fewer repositories and rejected proposals made by some recordkeepers to transfer entire series of particular types of records into one repository on the grounds that it would result in "confounding the known References in printed Books, and destroying ... the Use of the present Catalogues."[118] Between 1800 and 1837, six consecutive record commissions – known collectively as the Record Commission – attempted to implement the recommendations of the 1800 Select Committee.[119]

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[113] *First Report from the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the State of the Public Records,* 3. The returns from all the repositories holding public records that were surveyed by the Select Committee are contained in Appendix I of the first report. Among the public records surveyed were those held by the British Museum's Department of Manuscripts and dispersed throughout the Royal, Cottonian, Harleian, and Sloanian libraries and other manuscript collections. The state of those records and their associated catalogues were reported on by Joseph Planta, the museum's Principal Librarian. See *First Report from the Select Committee*, 389–91.

[114] Ibid., 3.

[115] Hubert Hall, *Studies in English Official Historical Documents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 23.

[116] *First Report from the Select Committee on the Public Records*, 11.

Debates about Printing versus Cataloguing the Public Records, 1800–1836

The record commissions of 1800–1836 all shared three common objectives: first, "to provide for the better arrangement and preservation of the Records of the Kingdom," by "methodizing," "regulating," and "digesting" (i.e., sorting, arranging, and listing) the records, and attending to their repair where necessary; second, to provide for the records' "more convenient use" by compiling calendars and indexes to them; and, third, to oversee the printing of calendars, indexes, and such original records as constituted "the more ancient and valuable" items.[120] The commission of 1831 was given the additional task of investigating the rules and regulations under which the various record repositories operated as well as the salaries, fees, and perquisites received by the recordkeeping staff.[121] Although the Record Commission made some progress in achieving these objectives, the commissioners were severely criticized for poor management, extravagant spending, and for placing a disproportionate emphasis on publication.[122] In 1836, in response to those criticisms, the House of Commons appointed the Select Committee on Record Commission to investigate the operations of the Record Commission and the current state of the public records.

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[117] Ibid., 13.

[118] Ibid., 13.

[119] The Record Commission was first constituted in 1800; it was subsequently renewed in 1806, 1817, 1821, 1825, and 1831.

[120] *Report from the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Management and Affairs of the Record Commission, and the Present State of the Records of the United Kingdom* (London: HMSO, 1836), v.

[121] Ibid.

[122] The antiquary Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas was one of the fiercest critics of the work of the Record Commission; in 1830, he published his critique in a pamphlet entitled *Observations on the State of Historical Literature* (London: William Pickering, 1830). He repeated and expanded on his critique in his testimony before the 1836 Select Committee on Record Commission. See *Report from the Select Committee on Record Commission*, Q3871–989, Q4165–244, Q4585. Among the publications he singled out for attack were the catalogues of the Harleian, Landsdowne, and Cottonian manuscripts held by the British Museum, which

It should be pointed out that in the parliamentary inquiries that took place between the mid-18th and mid-19th centuries, the terms "catalogue," "calendar," and "index" were not given fixed definitions and often were used interchangeably to refer to the finding aids compiled by the custodians of the public record repositories. Such finding aids tended to consist of "rough-and-ready abstracts of series of documents ... sufficient to allow these custodians (who normally carried out the searches themselves) to identify relevant entries."[123] Typically, they would contain "lists of names or places mentioned in them, arranged in alphabetical or chronological order, or sometimes a list of subjects mentioned."[124] As J.B. Post observes, "They were archivists' working notes rather than anything more polished or comprehensive."[125] The debates about "catalogues" that preoccupied the Select Committee on Record Commission, therefore, did not revolve around their specific characteristics or organizing principles but, rather, around the relative value of "printing" versus "cataloguing" the public records as a means of making them accessible to the public.

In pursuing record publication as their first priority, the various record commissions had been following a tradition that extended back to the early stages of modern historical scholarship in the 17th century. As Post explains, "There arose – not only in England but elsewhere in Europe as well – the idea of publishing careful and critical editions of historical documents, comparable to the long-established editorial traditions for chroniclers and other ancient authors, in order to serve a school of history which understood the more nearly objective value of contemporary administrative documentation."[126] Tom Verschaffel has likened this assembling of "all relevant and important source material concerning the national past" to "the idea and the (albeit partial) creation of a 'virtual' national archive," one that preceded the creation of "real" national archives.[127] In England, the first large-scale publication of

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had been compiled or revised under the direction of the Record Commission. According to Nicolas, "That these Catalogues are often erroneous and generally unsatisfactory is well known to all who have consulted them." See Nicolas, *Some Observations*, 75–81.

[123] J.B. Post, "Public Records Office Publication: Past Performance and Future Prospects," in *The Records of a Nation* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1990), 92.

[124] *First Report of the Royal Commission on Public Records and Local Records of a Public Nature of England and Wales*, vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1912), 26n*.

[125] Post, "Public Records Office Publication," 92.

[126] Ibid., 89–90.

[127] Tom Verschaffel, "'Something More than a Storage Warehouse': The Creation of National Archives," in *Setting the Standards: Institutions, Networks and Communities of National Historiography*, ed. Ilaria Porciani and Jo Tollebeek (Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 29.

records funded by the government had been undertaken by Historiographer Royal Thomas Rymer. Published between 1704 and 1735, *Foedera* (Latin for "Treaties") contained treaties and other diplomatic agreements, as well as royal and other correspondence and papers relating to international affairs, which Rymer had assembled from a wide range of record offices and archives. It also included "the texts of large numbers of documents whose bearing upon the conduct of diplomatic business was slight but whose value for the political and administrative history of England was substantial."[128] Though its contribution to historical study was indisputable, *Foedera* had the unfortunate effect of encouraging emulation of the practice of "selecting" documents, i.e., "printing texts of whole treaties, but also picking and choosing entries from rolls and registers and archives on the basis of the editor's perception of their value to the project in hand."[129] Such selection, Post suggests, might have been a perfectly reasonable practice for a historiographer royal, but it also encouraged "the development of assumptions that the archivist could and should be the arbiter of all texts and entries that were worth publishing."[130] It also encouraged the belief that making records accessible to the public meant opening up the contents of the records themselves rather than opening up the contents of record repositories.[131]

Such belief was clearly in evidence in the testimony given by a number of witnesses who appeared before the Select Committee on Record Commission, many of whom considered the printing of the public records a public duty and one that could only be carried out by the government. When asked his opinion of the utility of record publications, Sir Frances Palgrave, who had edited several volumes of medieval texts for the Record Commission, told the committee:

> Altogether, they disclose a mass of information, which, with all its faults, is perfectly unrivalled in literature as a collection of documents, as illustrating the particular

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[128] Post, "Public Records Office Publication," 90.

[129] Ibid., 90.

[130] Ibid., 91.

[131] That Rymer's *Foedera* continued to be held in high regard in the early 19th century is evident in one of the recommendations of the 1800 Select Committee. Noting that the state papers published in *Foedera* did not extend beyond the reign of Charles II, the committee recommended that it be "completed by a supplementary Selection of such other important Papers as were omitted by the original Compilers, and also to have it continued to the Revolution, or even to the Accession of the House of Hanover." See *First Report from the Select Committee on the Public Records*, 17. The subsequent efforts of the Record Commission to implement this recommendation were subjected to considerable criticism during the 1836 Select Committee on Record Commission inquiry. See *Report from the Select Committee on Record Commission*, xxxi. The serious errors and substantial costs associated with the updating and revision of *Foedera* were also highlighted by Nicholas Harris Nicolas. See Nicolas, *Some Observations*, 89–95.

> history of a country.... I am pretty well acquainted with all the historical and palaeographical works of other nations, and I am not aware that any of them has produced a set of works, of the same nature and character, that can be at all compared to them."[132]

The Reverend Joseph Hunter, an antiquary who had also been involved in the work of the Record Commission, professed that he could "hardly conceive" of limiting record publication "inasmuch as I look upon these records as I look upon any historical fragment; and I think it is just of as much importance to publish any inedited letter of a king, or anything in which the State is concerned, as it is to publish a newly discovered coin or medal."[133] When asked by the Select Committee if he had considered the expense such unlimited publication would entail, Hunter asserted, "I should not be disposed to begrudge even a very considerable expenditure, because I feel that no history can be sound without this information, and that such information can hardly be bought too dearly; it comes under the category of the value of knowledge, and I think that to diffuse sound information among the people is one of the highest offices of a wise and enlightened government."[134]

Similar views were expressed by other witnesses. The antiquary Sir Thomas Phillips, for example, suggested that an annual expenditure of £1 million for the publication of original records "would not be too much until all were printed."[135] Phillips considered printing the records to be a greater priority than calendaring them because the records were more important than any calendar: "In fact, it is my opinion that calendars are not necessary for the public, if the records themselves are to be printed, with indexes of persons and places. The calendars are most useful and indeed necessary, to the [record] offices, but to the public only in the case of unprinted records."[136]

Among the advocates for record publication were a number of legal searchers whose support likely was fuelled by their frustration at the punitive fees recordkeepers charged inquirers for searching and transcribing records held in their repositories and for viewing calendars and indexes, many of which the recordkeepers regarded as their private property. Numerous witnesses cited instances when they were unable to produce needed records in a legal suit because the parties they were representing could not afford the high cost of fees associated with identifying and locating those records. In his testimony, the lawyer and antiquary Stacy Grimaldi asserted that the recordkeepers' conduct "amount[ed] to a denial of justice" for litigants.[137] Even when calendars were made available to searchers (with or without a fee), they were often of limited use because "the calendars were usually worded in an equivocal and misleading way, expressly to whet the searcher's appetite. Fresh searches brought new fees."[138] For some legal searchers, then, the availability of printed records obviated the need for them to pay the heavy fees associated with accessing the records themselves.

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[132] *Report from the Select Committee on Record Commission* (1836), Palgrave, Q5265.

[133] *Report from the Select Committee on Record Commission* (1836), Hunter, Q6305.

[134] Ibid., Q6306.

[135] Ibid., Phillips, Q7523.

[136] Ibid., Q7577.

[137] Ibid., Grimaldi, Q6529. In its report, the committee noted the significant number of complaints levelled by witnesses about excessive fees and sharply criticized that particu-

If the proponents of giving priority to the printing of the public records were fierce in defending their view, their opponents were equally fierce in condemning it. The Scottish historian Patrick Tytler, for example, asserted that the commissioners' "*first* efforts ought for some time, to have been devoted *exclusively* to the formation of catalogues of the historical materials existing in England." The choice between printing the public records and cataloguing them, Tytler declared, amounted to

> a choice or balance between having a correct knowledge of the contents of all the records and letters illustrating English history, and having a small corner of our history, ... illustrated by the records themselves. No historian familiar with the use of original materials would hesitate I think to choose the catalogues. By them he would be enabled to collect all the scattered lights which might illustrate the general history of England from a large mass of original documents. In the other way he would acquire a minute knowledge of a very curtailed portion.... Besides this, it is evident that were the whole or even the greater portion of the records to be printed, it would only be the substitution of an unfathomable sea of *print* for an unfathomable sea of *manuscript*.[139]

For its proponents, cataloguing the public records had at least three specific advantages over printing them: first, it made a greater volume of records known to the public; second, it made it possible to establish the completeness of the existing records and to identify any gaps in them; and third, it provided a more systematic and defensible foundation on which to identify those public records whose national significance warranted their publication.

When the Select Committee on Record Commission issued its report, it came down firmly on the side of the proponents of cataloguing. The committee found that, in terms of the preservation and accessibility of the public

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lar barrier to access: "No language that Your Committee could employ could too strongly condemn the monstrous injustice and impolicy of imposing these additional burthens on those who have the misfortune of having legal rights unjustly withheld or menaced; and who are already, from accident or the defects of our law, exposed to the unavoidable expenses and anxieties of litigation." *Report from the Select Committee on Record Commission,* xxiv.

[138] Edward Edwards, *Libraries and Founders of Libraries* (London: Trübner and Co., 1864; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 299.

[139] *Report from the Select Committee on Record Commission* (1836), Tytler, Q8185. Support for cataloguing rather than printing the public records was also voiced by several legal inquirers; see, for example, Grimaldi, Q6544, and Parkes, Q4383–85.

records, little had changed since 1800: the records continued to be housed in unsafe buildings and were at constant risk of fire and destruction from damp, dirt, and vermin; most of them remained "unarranged and "unascertained"; those records that were arranged lacked adequate calendars and indexes; and public access to the records for legal and historical inquiries was frequently impeded "by the exaction of heavy fees and the imposition of needless and vexatious regulations." In light of these findings, the Select Committee on Record Commission could only conclude that "the great mass of the Records, including many of the highest importance, may therefore be said to be unavailable for any public purpose."[140]

The Select Committee made it clear that the exorbitant sums of money that had been expended on the printing of original records would have been better spent on preserving, arranging, and cataloguing the records so as to make them accessible.[141] While printing the more "ancient and valuable" records was "advisable, and should proceed," the committee observed, "the object of paramount importance and earliest attention should be the rendering whatever of the contents of the Record Offices are to be preserved, thoroughly known and perfectly accessible to the Public."[142] The dereliction of duty implicit in the commission's reversal of the order of its priorities was exacerbated by the poor quality of the publications produced through its efforts. Apart from a few notable exceptions, the selections of printed records were riddled with "great errors and defects": incomplete, inaccurate, haphazard in their coverage, and full of gaps and redundancies.[143] In his testimony before the Select Committee, Tytler implied that the commissioners had committed "a common error of antiquaries, the substitution of antiquity for value,"[144] in their selection of records to be printed. In the eyes of the Select Committee, all these errors and defects were directly attributable to the commission's failure to attend to the records' preservation, arrangement, and cataloguing as essential prerequisites to printing selections from them: "Not knowing accurately what treasures existed in the public Repositories," the committee asserted, "they [the commissioners] necessarily printed in the dark as to the relative value of what they published and what they left unpublished, and as to the completeness of some of the most important works which they gave to the world."[145] The public interest in making "the great mass of our records" available to anyone who wished to consult them, ultimately, was best served not by printing the records but "by making the contents of our Record Offices generally known, by means of full and complete calendars and catalogues."[146]

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[140] *Report from the Select Committee on Record Commission* (1836), xxvii–xxviii.

[141] Ibid., xxxii–xxxiv.

[142] Ibid., v.

[143] Ibid., xxix–xxxi.

[144] Ibid., Tytler, Q4256.

[145] Ibid., xxviii.

The Select Committee's finding that "the first and most obvious defect in the present system is that records are deposited in different and widely scattered buildings, and entrusted to a multitude of imperfectly responsible keepers,"[147] and its recommendation that the public records be centralized in a single repository resulted in the 1838 *Act to Keep Safely the Public Records*, which authorized the creation of a Public Record Office under the supervision of the Master of the Rolls.[148] With the establishment of the Public Records Office, more concerted attention was finally paid to "the ordinary and unostentatious business"[149] of sorting, listing, and cataloguing, resulting, over the next few decades, in the compilation and publication of hundreds of finding aids and the stabilization of a new generation of archival finding aid genres.[150]

Conclusion

This article has explored the different ways in which catalogues were implicated in debates about the collecting and ordering of knowledge in the national library, museum, and archives of Britain between the mid-18th and mid-19th centuries. Its aim has been to provide a glimpse into some of the sociocultural forces that have helped to shape our modern understanding of catalogues and cataloguing practices. Viewed from that perspective, the institutional debates about classified versus alphabetical arrangement of books, the naming and arranging of zoological specimens, and printing versus cataloguing records are indicative of larger societal debates that were taking place in Britain at the time: debates about humanistic versus Enlightenment forms of inquiry, about the competing imperatives of innovation versus tradition in disciplinary discourse, and about the relative value of direct and indirect access to historical sources.

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[146] Ibid., vii.

[147] Ibid., xxxix. The Select Committee compared the "defective" state of the public records in England to the "pleasing" state of the public records in Scotland, which had been centralized in one repository (the Register House) since 1789. They described the latter in glowing terms: "Collected together in one central, ample, commodious and safe building in Edinburgh, placed under the custody of responsible and most competent keepers, they appear to be kept in a state of perfect arrangement, and ample information as to their contents supplied by full Calendars and Indexes." See *Report from the Select Committee on Record Commission* (1836), xxxvi.

[148] Stat. 1&2 Vict. (1838), c. 94.

[149] *Report from the Select Committee on Record Commission* (1836), xxxvii.

[150] For these developments, see Heather MacNeil and Jennifer Douglas, "The Generic Evolution of Calendars and Guides at the Public Records Office of Great Britain, ca. 1838–1968," *Information and Culture: A Journal of History* 49 (August 2014): 294–326; and Heather MacNeil, "The Role of Calendars in Constructing a Community of Historical Workers in the Public Records Office of Great Britain ca. 1850–1950," in *Genre Theory in Information Studies*, ed. Jack Andersen (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2015), 93–115.

The institutional debates are also emblematic of broader efforts that were directed toward reforming and democratizing Britain's governmental institutions and codifying their roles and responsibilities to the public, whose interests they were intended to serve. In a publicly funded institution such as the British Museum, how is the balance to be struck between serving the interests of "the learned and studious" and those of the general public? In the absence of a centralized national archives, is it possible for the government to fulfill its obligation to make the public records of the nation available to the public in a way that will serve the interests of both justice and historical inquiry?

A more general aim of this two-part article has been to contribute a historical perspective to contemporary discussions about collaboration and convergence between and among libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs) in general and in specific relation to their descriptive practices. The urgent need for LAMs to work collaboratively toward creating online catalogues that will provide the public at large with cross-domain access to the holdings of cultural heritage information institutions, and to build participatory models aimed at repositioning those catalogues as tools for promoting social inclusion, are recurring themes in recent reports published by the Council of Canadian Academies, the Royal Society of Canada, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.[151]

Successful collaboration among LAMs in this area depends on recognizing and respecting differences as well as commonalities. The museum scholar Helena Robinson argues that the collective categorization of LAMs as "knowledge" institutions obscures the significantly different ways in which these institutions engage with questions of history, context, and meaning.[152] For example, the structures of meaning-making that, traditionally, have framed how each type of institution makes its holdings accessible to the public are inextricably linked to specific disciplinary and professional ways of knowing.

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[151] Council of Canadian Academies, *Leading in the Digital World: Opportunities for Canada's Memory Institutions* (Ottawa: Expert Panel on Memory Institutions and the Digital Revolution, Council of Canadian Academies, 2015); Patricia Demers et al., *The Future Now: Canada's Libraries, Archives, and Public Memory* (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 2014); Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2015).

[152] Helena Robinson, "Knowledge Utopias: An Epistemological Perspective on the Convergence of Museums, Libraries and Archives," *Museum & Society* 12 (2014): 210–24; see also Helena Robinson, "Remembering Things Differently: Museums, Libraries and Archives as Memory Institutions and the Implications for Convergence," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27 (2012): 413–29.

In libraries, these ways of knowing are embedded in standardized bibliographic and subject classification systems; in museums, they are tied to exhibition and display practices; and in archives, they revolve around the principle of provenance. A historical study of the distinct traditions and perspectives that have shaped catalogues and cataloguing practices within and across the emergent disciplinary and professional cultures of LAMs can provide a foundation on which we might cultivate a deeper and more critical understanding of some of the epistemological differences – past and present – between and among these institutions. Achieving that understanding is an essential first step in identifying ways in which libraries, archives, and museums can begin to build bridges in one particular area of common concern, i.e., how to share information about holdings in ways that accommodate rather than level the differences between them and that are attuned to the needs of participatory culture in general and social inclusion agendas in particular.

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