**Celebrating the 250th anniversary of the public opening of the   
British Museum**

On 15 January 1759, the British Museum opened its doors for the first time to the public. Set up by Parliament six years earlier it was the first national museum in the world. 250 years later it is still one of the enduring achievements of the European Enlightenment and its collection has played a major part in shaping our understanding of human history.

From the beginning the Museum was unusual in attempting to gather the whole world into one building, a universality of ambition that embraced not just its collection but also its intended public. The objects were to be available free of charge to all 'studious and curious persons' and were stated explicitly to be for foreigners as well as natives.

The Museum has remained open to the public for 250 years, moving from an attendance of 5,000 per year at the beginning to six million last year. It is now accessible not only to visitors to Bloomsbury but to millions worldwide online and through travelling exhibitions. Extending and deepening that access is the great challenge for the future.

To mark this significant date in the history of the Museum its Director, Neil MacGregor, gives a special free public lecture examining the Museum’s enduring commitment to making its collection available worldwide.

https://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\_on/events\_calendar/recorded\_events/250\_lecture.aspx