



Neil MacGregor, the new Director of the British Museum, has enjoyed getting to know this unique institution and sees the Friends as part of the Museum's bedrock as it approaches its 250th anniversary

A message from the Director

It is a particular pleasure to introduce this edition of *the British Museum Magazine*, the first since I became Director of the Museum in August. The strong support the British Museum Friends provide to this Museum, and the range of activities you undertake are known well beyond its walls. Like many of you, I am not an ethnographer, archaeologist nor an ancient art historian, but, like all of you, I have a deep interest in human culture, art and society, past and present. In the few weeks I have now been at the Museum, I have particularly enjoyed attending my first Evening Opening, where I, like you, have been able to look closely at the objects, and enjoy the fruits of the research that is at the heart of the British Museum.

This museum is unique amongst the great museums. No other institution is able to tell the stories of peoples and cultures from all over the world in the way the British Museum can. With the continuing return of the ethnographic collections from Burlington Gardens in the next few years, the Museum will once again truly encapsulate the experience of all humanity in a single building. As I walk around the Museum I am continually struck by the connections and exchanges between different cultures and parts of the world. I have been getting to know

peoples, societies and religions I had hardly heard of before August, and discovering new insights into those that I thought I knew.

Next year we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Museum, when Parliament had the foresight to establish this unique institution that has become ‘a world in a box’. At the heart of these celebrations will be the restoration of the King’s Library and with it new displays that convey the intellectual vision that created the British Museum in 1753. I am convinced that there is today an even greater need for a museum with a global vision to present the world to the world; for a museum which actively researches, cares for and presents its collection to as many people as possible in the UK and throughout the world. This is at the heart of what we will be celebrating next year through such high profile projects as the new Wellcome Gallery on Well Being, and exhibitions such as ‘Art and Memory’ or ‘Treasure: Finding Our Past’. But we shall also celebrate the wide range of day-to-day activities that are the bedrock of this institution.

The Friends are part of this bedrock, and I know you will continue to be a central part of the Museum. I would like to thank you for the support you provide. You not only play a crucial role in helping us to acquire important

objects for the collection, but through the Townley Group you enable some of the most exciting research and conservation projects to take place; it is these that drive the Museum intellectually. The handling tables in galleries across the Museum staffed by volunteers from the Friends is an exciting development that I am sure other Museums will wish to emulate. Thanks to you, the public can literally get its hands on the collections. For all of this, many thanks. I look forward to meeting more of you at future Friends’ events.

Neil MacGregor
Director of the British Museum