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Cleaning and Controversy: The Parthenon Sculptures 1811–1939

Ian Jenkins

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Production Editor

Josephine Turquet

Design

Esterson Lackersteen

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The Parthenon Sculptures 1811–1939*

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Front cover: South frieze X. Cavalcade.
Left, the weathered coating present before cleaning;
right, the coatings removed.

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Foreword

With thanks to the Ars Longa Stichting

The 1930s cleaning of the Parthenon Sculptures is one of the most controversial episodes in the 250 year-long history of The British Museum. Over a period of some 15 months, an unauthorised cleaning of the sculptures was carried out in preparation for their installation in a new gallery given by Lord Duveen. Eventually, the matter was brought to the attention of the Director, Sir John Forsdyke (1883–1979). An internal enquiry was held and disciplinary action taken against Museum officials who were deemed culpable. The Press of the day was much interested in what was perceived to be a scandalous affair, but the Museum was officially reticent.

In 1996 I decided to provide full access to the Museum’s own papers relating to these events. Publication of the papers by an independent scholar in 1998 precipitated a storm of newspaper interest in a scandal that was in fact 60 years old. There were renewed charges of secrecy and of cover-up, and there was great confusion as to what actually had happened to the sculptures in 1937–8.

The Museum was determined to demonstrate its commitment to openness and decided to hold a public conference on 30 November and 1 December 1999. Some 300 delegates attended, including many representatives of the media. Every aspect of the cleaning affair was scrutinised, and lengthy discussions were led by an international panel of distinguished experts. The Museum’s treatment of its sculptures was put into the context of other case studies. Among these, it was of especial interest to learn that less than ten years after the Museum’s controversial

cleaning of its Parthenon Sculptures, a frieze of the Hephaesteum in Athens – a sister temple of the Parthenon – was stripped of its historic surface by Greek workmen using methods subsequently judged to be far more severe than those employed in The British Museum.

Some of those who spoke at the conference have already published their papers, while others have them in press, or have been invited to put them on to a British Museum website (www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/parthenon). Meanwhile, the present volume by Ian Jenkins makes available in printed form transcripts of all the Museum’s relevant documents, some of which were only discovered during research for the conference. These documentary appendices are accompanied by a long essay which presents the cleaning affair in narrative form. Events are interpreted and set into the context of the history of the cleaning of the Parthenon Sculptures since 1811. Previous published discussions of the 1930s cleaning are reviewed and, finally, the surface of the sculptures themselves is assessed to determine how they were affected.

I welcome this volume as the Museum’s first official publication of events which took place 60 years ago. It is my personal wish that commentators upon these events and, in particular, those who make future reference to the scandal that once surrounded them, will first read and refer to this frank account of the facts.

Robert Anderson
Director, The British Museum



Sir John Forsdyke (1883–1979) caricatured by Piet de Jong.
Courtesy of the Knossos Trust.

Cleaning and Controversy

1 Introduction

In the late 1930s the art dealer Lord Duveen offered the Trustees of The British Museum a purpose-built gallery to house the ‘Elgin Marbles’.¹ In 1937–8, while the sculptures of the Parthenon were being prepared for installation in this new gallery, a controversial cleaning of some of the sculptures took place. A major press scandal ensued, and at its height there appeared a newspaper cartoon (**Plate 1**) with the caption: ‘Elgin Marbles being spoilt by Cleaning – Epstein’, and underneath, ‘Lor, Em, That Mister Epstein is right. They must’a cleaned this bloke wif a pick.’²

The 1930s newspaper cartoon is funny because it is deliberately misleading. Nevertheless, it represents a typical reaction to the 1930s cleaning. Fascinated by the scandal of it, people have tended to make up their own version of its consequences.³ There is, and always has been, much loose talk of ‘patina’. Adjectives to describe it like ‘warm’, ‘rich’ and ‘glowing’ reflect notions of how the sculptures should be, rather than how they are or were. The cleaning, we are told, has removed their glow. Contrast this opinion with that of a journalist writing in *The Daily Graphic* when the sculptures went back on show in 1949. He saw them ‘glow with a Mediterranean warmth’.⁴ This, it should be noted, was post-cleaning, when others had argued that the sculptures had lost their ‘glow’.

Everyone has their own idea of how they think the Marbles should look. Writing in 1857, Michael Faraday thought them far from glowing and lamented their discolouration from brown stains and black soot, whereas – or so he believed – sculptures in Greece and Italy, unaffected by Museum pollution, were white.⁵ What I take Faraday to mean by ‘brown stains’ are the orange-brown coatings that can still be seen in places on the surface of the sculptures today. In 1988 I published a paper with my colleague Andrew Middleton entitled ‘Paint on the Parthenon Sculptures’.⁶ We argued that these coatings were ancient and artificial, and likely to be the result of paint treatments applied to the stone in antiquity and afterwards partially weathered off. They appear where the ancient finish is intact and, where the surface is weathered, they are missing. There is a dispute as to the origin of these coatings. The least that may be said is that whether artificial or natural these coatings are historic. They happened at specific moments in time and were then affected by weather or damage. They did not re-form in the areas that were affected by this wear.

A critical question has to do with the extent to which these coatings survived up until the 1930s. From an examination of the marble surface itself it is possible to see that they had already largely disappeared even before Elgin’s men set eyes on the sculpture. I estimate that when the sculptures entered the Museum less than 20% of their



Plate 1 One British newspaper’s view of the 1930s cleaning of the Parthenon Sculptures. (Unsourced cutting in The British Museum, Greek and Roman Department scrapbook.)

overall surface retained its coating, of which in the 1930s about half was removed. The surface of the sculptures today is, without question, largely the product of weathering before they entered the Museum.

Weathered and some unweathered surfaces underwent further change as a result of the cleaning of the 1930s and, indeed, earlier. But natural weathering is by far the single most important factor determining the surface and colour of the sculptures as we see them today. It is important to state this at the outset, so as to get the 1930s cleaning into perspective. In 1998 it was very surprising to read William St Clair’s assertion to the contrary, namely that ‘when the Elgin Marbles were transferred to the British Museum in 1816, their ancient patina was still largely intact’.⁷ Up to the 1930s the sculptures were, he says, a ‘warm brown’.⁸ Earlier in his account we read that ‘in Elgin’s day [they] were covered with a patina, in some places smooth, in others scaly, in a rich mixture of white, brown, orange and occasional black, the result of long exposure to the open air’.⁹ This premise is the very foundation of his argument and yet no scientific evidence is given to demonstrate it. Watercolour drawings and oil paintings are offered instead as literal representations of how the sculptures once were. We read that in Archibald Archer’s oil painting of the *Elgin Room* the sculptures are ‘honey-coloured’.¹⁰ In fact, under fuliginous layers of old varnish, they are a pale cream, which is probably the colour Archer thought they should be, rather than what they were (**Plate 2**). St Clair argues that the sculptures were that colour actually. If so, his case for their having been covered in the brown coating is already destroyed. Lord Leighton’s self-portrait now in the Uffizi is cited as evidence for the original colour of the Parthenon Frieze.¹¹ But when this picture was painted in 1880, it is much more likely that Lord Leighton had in mind the casts installed in the walls of his own studio.¹²

Why, we must ask ourselves, has it been so difficult, both in the 1930s, and since, for people to give an accurate report of the cleaning? It is not as if the sculptures have been hidden from view. It has been claimed that as the Duveen Gallery was being built, the Marbles were mostly not on public view.¹³ Photographs of the day and the Keeper’s reports to the Trustees show that, once they had been cleaned on a piecemeal basis, the sculptures were returned to the public gallery. There we see the cleaned ones looking white against the uncleaned sculptures and the darkened casts (Plate 3). Nor, with the exception of their removal for safety during and after the Second World War, have the sculptures been hidden from view since their cleaning. They have been on show since 1949 and, if the damage were obvious, why is it so little remarked upon? Many published references have been made to the 1930s cleaning,¹⁴ but the most recent interest has often been in scandal and, latterly, the campaign for the return of the sculptures of the Parthenon to Greece. Scandal-mongering and politics have not provided a healthy climate in which to foster a truthful assessment of what actually was done to the sculptures.

It is ironic that already in 1939, the last word in the pre-War press coverage tried to move the discussion forward. On 9 June an anonymous correspondent to *The Manchester Guardian* wrote:

The ultimate question at the bottom of the Elgin Marbles controversy is what is meant by the magic word ‘patina’. No one denies that some of the marbles have been pretty drastically cleaned, in some cases by methods of which no expert could possibly approve.... Folk who like to think they have scented out a first-rate scandal have not been slow to move and a good deal has been said about it, including the suggestion that the Marbles have been ‘ruined’... But what, in fact, has happened?¹⁵

Sixty years on, that question has yet to be answered. St Clair claims ‘all the metopes, 80 or 90 per cent of the frieze, and about half the pedimental sculptures of the Parthenon were damaged by over cleaning at some time before the halt was called.’¹⁶ ‘The most vivid evidence’, he says, ‘for the extent of the damage is in the three pieces which were still being cleaned when Sir John Forsdyke discovered what was going

on in September 1938, the Helios, the head of Selene’s horse and the Iris.’¹⁷ These are the ones mentioned in the Board of Enquiry’s Report. This internal affair was concocted by Sir John Forsdyke, the Museum’s Director, to create scapegoats for what was ultimately his responsibility. It is unwise to depend upon it as a source for what actually was done. The Board’s phrase: ‘the damage is obvious and cannot be exaggerated’, is often quoted, but it seems anything but obvious and has been much exaggerated.

We read that most of the smaller sculptures of the west pediment were ‘stripped’. Of the Iris St Clair writes: ‘The white left leg, where a patch of residual patina had not yet been removed when the halt was called, looks as if it had been smeared in dog dirt.’¹⁸ The hyperbole is embarrassing enough, but it is even more so, when we learn that he is describing entirely the wrong statue. He should have been looking, as was pointed out to him in 1998, not at this figure from the west pediment but another piece from the east pediment. Only east pediment pieces were rubbed and these were the Helios, the back of his two horses’ heads, the drapery of Iris and the back of the head of the horse of Selene.

So what in fact did happen to these and other sculptures? A detailed analysis of their surface condition is given below. In order fully to assess this surface, however, something must be said of previous interventions that have made it what it has become. I shall here restrict my history of the cleaning of the sculptures to the period before 1939. Subsequent cleanings have been described by Andrew Oddy, Keeper of Conservation at The British Museum (Oddy, forthcoming).

2 Cleaning the sculptures 1811–1936

Already two and a quarter millennia old when they arrived in the Museum, the sculptures of the Parthenon have had a Museum life of nearly another 200 years. In the course of that life, not only have their surroundings changed, but the sculptures themselves have changed. Like the objects in any old house they have been moved and rearranged. The

sculptures have had their fractures filled with cement, and had these fillings taken away again. They have been drilled and cut to attach joining fragments and casts. They were sandbagged in the First World War, and in the Second they were removed to the underground tunnels of the Aldwych Tube Station. They have been allowed to get dirty and they have been over-cleaned.¹⁹

The notorious cleaning of the sculptures of the Parthenon in 1937–8 can only be understood in the context of what went before. By 1937 the sculptures had already been displayed in England for a century and more, first in Lord Elgin’s two makeshift ‘museums’²⁰ and after February 1817 in The British Museum. Here, the sculptures went first into a temporary building designed by Robert Smirke and erected in the grounds of old Montagu House. In 1832 they were removed to the gallery that formed a part of the new Greek Revival building designed by Robert Smirke.²¹ Already within one generation, therefore, the sculptures had undergone no less than four separate changes of location. Even then their arrangement did not stand still.

The remainder of the 19th and the early part of the 20th century saw many attempts at reconciling the conflicting status of the sculptures as, on the one hand, the finest ancient artworks known to man, and, on the other, component parts of an original architectural complex.²² Treated as star pieces of ancient art, the pediment sculpture and the metopes fitted into the frame of the neoclassical museum gallery with relative ease. The great length of the frieze, however, together with the fact that it was designed originally for four sides of the exterior of a building, made it less adaptable to the circumstances of museum display. There was to be almost constant experiment in the arrangement and rearrangement of the frieze, not least to accommodate the many additions of newly discovered fragments. Sometimes these were in the actual marble, but usually the addition was made in the form of a plaster cast of the original. Rearrangement was also occasioned by advances in the knowledge of the proper sequence of the frieze blocks as fixed on the Parthenon itself. The Elgin

Room of The British Museum became the great laboratory of experiment in the search for an ever better understanding of the sculptures and for better ways of displaying them.

It was not only the frieze that received plaster additions. Attachments were also made to the metopes by drilling holes into the broken areas. As for the pediment sculptures, by the 1920s not only were casts added to them but also, under Arthur Hamilton Smith, an explicit indication was given of the triangular frame of the architecture that once surrounded them.²³ Perhaps more than any Museum curator before him, Smith was committed to the principal that the sculptures could only be made intelligible if explicit reference were made to their original architectural context, and if deficiencies in the sculptures themselves were made up by the use of plaster casts. He raised his voice in opposition, therefore, to a report submitted to the Royal Commission on Museums and Art Galleries of 1928 that proposed to sweep all this away.²⁴ In the radical new spirit of post Great War Britain, the Elgin Room seemed to some critics cluttered and in need of purging. Donald Robertson, John Beazley and Bernard Ashmole reported as follows:

The Parthenon Marbles, being the greatest body of original Greek sculpture in existence, and unique monuments of its first maturity, are primarily works of art. Their former decorative function as architectural ornaments, and their present educational use as illustrations of mythical and historical events in ancient Greece, are by comparison accidental and trivial interests, which can indeed be better served by casts.²⁵

This bold manifesto left the reader in no doubt as to where its authors stood in the division of opinion between those who saw the sculptures as art and those who regarded them as archaeology. It had immediate effect in attracting a pledge of funds from Sir Joseph Duveen for a new gallery to house the sculptures. It was in the course of preparing them for exhibition in this new gallery that the infamous cleaning occurred. There had, however, been other controversial cleanings before this one.

Many of the arguments that are heard today for or against the conservation of ancient artworks were rehearsed

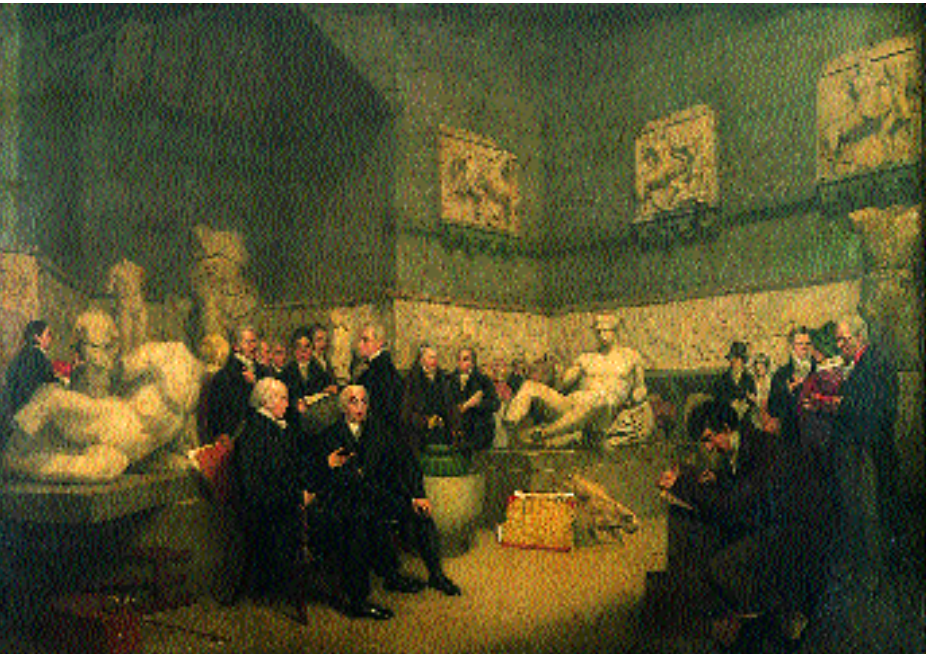


Plate 2 *The Temporary Elgin Room.* Oil on canvas, signed Archibald Archer, 1819. The British Museum.

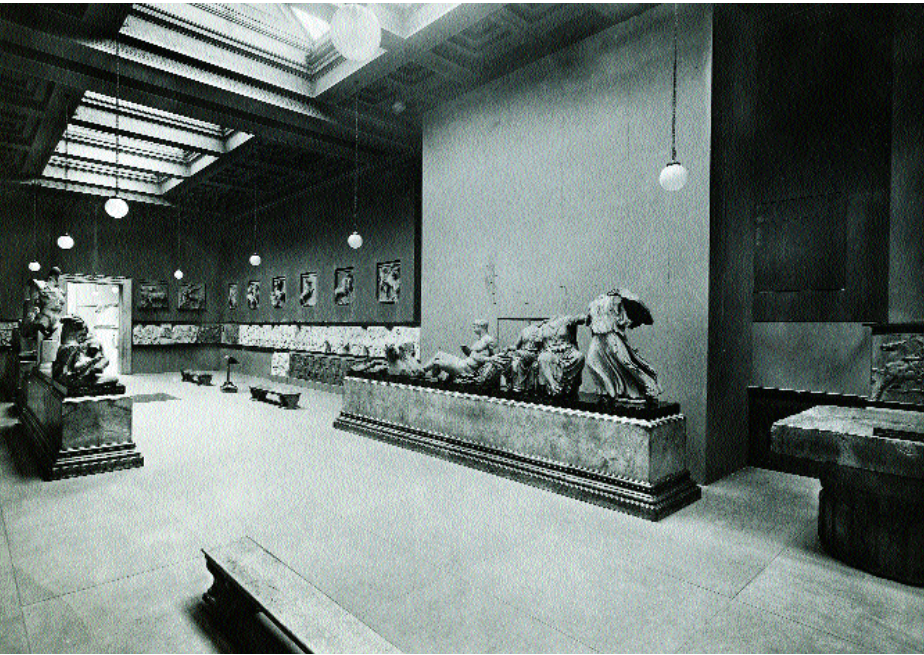


Plate 3 The 'Elgin Room' of The British Museum at the time of the cleaning showing the hoarding around the newly made entrance into Duveen's gallery. The recently cleaned north frieze cavalcade, to the left of the temporary doorway, shows white against the as yet uncleaned frieze, metopes and casts.

in the 19th century around the case of the ‘Elgin Marbles’.²⁶ Even before they came to the Museum, Lord Elgin aroused dissent with his proposals for having his Marbles restored in the Italian manner.²⁷ He did not in the end execute them, but in 1811 John Henning, the sculptor, intervened when Joseph Nollekens’ men were about to start scouring the sculptures with dilute sulphuric acid and water.²⁸ The practice had been advised by Nollekens himself, who had learned his trade from Bartolomeo Cavaceppi and other restorers of ancient sculpture in Rome, where preserving original surfaces mattered less than achieving a complete object for the Grand Tour market.²⁹ Henning had been prompted to recall the incident when, in 1845, he had seen the Lycian sculptures, then newly arrived in The British Museum, being washed with acid and water, and had tactfully expressed his disapproval.³⁰

The sculptures were presumably washed by some means in Elgin’s possession. They must have been washed again in 1816, when casts were made of them by the sculptor Richard Westmacott,³¹ and washed again around 1836–7, when they were moulded for the second and last time.³² Already in 1830 Michael Faraday and Richard Westmacott had been consulted about the application of a wash to prevent ‘decomposition’ of the surface of some sculptures that were perceived to be suffering from ‘exposure to the air’.³³ However, it was in 1845 that the Museum seems to have become especially sensitive to the surface condition of its sculptures. The Trustees’ attention was drawn to the fact that the manner of heating the galleries by coal-fired stoves was responsible for a great quantity of dust.³⁴ There was, besides, another cause, and perhaps a far greater menace, namely the deterioration of the London air by the increase of smoke emissions from coal-fires serving the city’s ever-growing population. The antiquities, it was observed, including the Elgin Marbles

are daily becoming more deteriorated by exposure to the London atmosphere, its smoke and dirt and the alterations of heated and damp air. A single inspection of them and comparison of the present state with that in which they were brought to England, or that of late importations from Athens are quite sufficient to confirm the danger: and from the frequent ablutions which are necessary to clear them of the dirt, but which materially affect the surface of the marble, it is to be appreciated that at the end of a century or less they may be irreparably injured.³⁵

These warnings were given by W R Hamilton, Lord Elgin’s former agent and afterwards an influential Trustee of the Museum. They formed part of an ongoing discussion about whether the Museum collections as then constituted were rationally composed and whether they should be separated out. One possibility was for detaching the sculptures of the Parthenon and sending them out of London into the clean air of the country. Such was the concern over the threat to London’s artworks that the Site Commission for the National Gallery’s new building requested permission for Michael Faraday to examine the surface of sculptures in The British Museum to ascertain the effects of smoke and dust. The intention was to determine where, or where not, to found the new repository of the nation’s collection of pictures.³⁶ The Museum was also much interested in Faraday’s responses and its Trustees discussed the text of a letter

addressed by him to the Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral. It was considered important enough to be printed up as a Memorandum.³⁷

Faraday examined especially the Erechtheum column and Caryatid and some metopes, but his comments seem to have general application.

The marbles generally were very dirty; some of them appearing as if dirty from a deposit of dust and soot formed upon them, and some of them, as if stained, dingy, and brown. The surface of the marbles is in general rough, as if corroded; only a very few specimens present the polish of finished marble: many have a dead surface; many are honeycombed, in a fine degree, more or less; or have shivered broken surfaces, calculated to hold dirt mechanically.

I found the body of the marble beneath the surface white. I found very few places where the discolouration seemed to be produced by a stain penetrating the real body of the unchanged or unbroken marble. Almost everywhere it appeared to be due to dirt (arising from dust, smoke, soot, etc.) held, mechanically, by the rough and fissured surface of the stone.

The application of water, applied by a sponge or soft cloth, removed the coarsest dirt, but did not much enlighten the general dark tint. The addition of rubbing, either by the finger, or a cork, or soft brushes, improved the colour, but still left it far below that of the fresh fracture. The use of a fine gritty powder, with the water and rubbing, though it more quickly removed the upper dirt, left much imbedded in the cellular surface of the marble.

I then applied alkalies, both carbonated and caustic; these quickened the loosening of the surface dirt, and changed the tint of the brown stains a little; but they fell far short of restoring the marble surface to its proper hue and state of cleanliness. I finally used dilute nitric acid, and even this failed; for, though I could have gone on until I had dissolved away the upper marble, and left a pure surface, even these successive applications, made, of course, with care, but each time producing a sensible and even abundant effervescence, and each time dissolving enough marble to neutralise the applied acid, were not sufficient to reach the bottom of the cells and fissures in which dirt had been deposited, so as to dislodge the whole of that dirt from its place.

The examination has made me despair of the possibility of presenting the marbles in the British Museum in that state of whiteness which they originally possessed, or in which, as I am informed, like marbles can be seen in Greece and Italy at the present day. The multitude of people who frequent the galleries, the dust which they raise, the necessary presence of stoves, or other means of warming, which by producing currents in the air, carry the dust and dirt in it to places of rest, namely, the surfaces of the marbles; and the London atmosphere in which dust, smoke, fumes, are always present, and often water in such proportions as to deposit a dew upon the cold marble, or in the dirt upon the marble, are never ceasing sources of injury to the state and appearance of these beautiful remains. Still, I think that much improvement would result from a more frequent and very careful washing; and I think that the application of a little carbonated alkali (as soda) with the water, would be better than soap, inasmuch as the last portions of it are more easily removed. It requires much care in washing to secure this result; but whether soap or soda be employed, none should be allowed to remain behind.

Dry brushing or wiping is probably employed in some cases; if so, it should be applied with care, and never whilst the objects are damp, or from the conditions of the weather likely to be so. In several cases there is the appearance as if such a process had resulted in causing the adhesion of a darker coat of dirt than would have been produced without it; for convex, front, underlying portions of a figure are in a darker state than back parts of the same figure, though the latter are more favourably disposed for the reception of falling dirt.

Richard Westmacott Jnr had taken over from his more famous father and namesake (d.1856) as principal restorer of the Museum’s sculpture. He was invited to attend the

meeting at which Faraday’s letter was read and concluded that cleaning the sculpture was a necessary operation as long as it was done ‘under the superintendence of a competent and responsible person in accordance with the condition of the sculptures and the quality of the marble.’

To the next meeting of Trustees, Edward Hawkins, Keeper of the Antiquities since 1826 and now nearly 80 years old, presented his views on how the sculptures should be cleaned and how the work was to be supervised.³⁸ The Committee approved Hawkins’ use of ‘clay water’ for washing marble statues about to be photographed, but recommended that Westmacott be consulted once more. (There was rivalry between Hawkins and Westmacott.) The Keeper of Antiquities had long battled to develop a more independent role for himself and his Department. The Trustees tended to regard the Keepers as servants and to disregard opinion from these, their direct employees, preferring that of outside consultants such as the architects Robert Smirke and his brother Sydney and the sculptors Richard Westmacott, elder and younger.³⁹

Westmacott and Hawkins agreed that the sculptures needed cleaning, but did not agree over the method. Westmacott favoured Fuller’s earth and was given permission to go ahead by the Trustees.⁴⁰ The decision did not meet with everybody’s approval. On 18 June 1858 there appeared a letter in *The Times* newspaper, signed anonymously by one ‘Marmor’. It is the first of three such letters that remarkably foreshadow the acrimonious exchange surrounding the 1930s cleaning of the Marbles.

Sir – I have seen with amazement and indignation the Colosseum – that mighty record of imperial Rome’s magnificence – ‘restored’ in part by the descendants of Goths in Italy, its crevices plastered up and the rich, varied, golden hue, the result of nearly 2,000 Italian summers, obliterated by a monotonous coating of filthy colour. I have seen with like feelings some of our masterpieces in the National Gallery destroyed in order to give a wretched ‘restorer’ a job, and on walking through the Elgin room at the British Museum to-day I witnessed proceedings which in absurdity and atrocity may vie with both those I have named.

Sir, they are scrubbing the Elgin Marbles! Will their next act be to fill up their abrasions and have them neatly mended?

Now, Sir, I am no worshipper of dirt, but I do say that the tone given by time to antique sculpture ... is absolutely essential to the harmony of its effect.

The writer characteristically offers no view of what this ‘tone’ might be, other than the patina of age, but, as Faraday’s memorandum shows, the surfaces were already in an altered state. Nevertheless, this letter prompted an airing of the grievance of another, who signed himself W D B S:

The vandalism complained of by your correspondent ‘Marmor’ has been of some duration and first attracted my attention on the opening of the new Graeco-Roman Saloons. Last Christmas I saw a man scrubbing away with some vile compound. The celebrated bust of ‘Clytie’, one of the most beautiful antiques existing, has had its face mauled in this manner, and I am positive that anything beyond the simplest application of water, and that by persons acquainted with the exquisite finesse of sculptured flesh, must prove prejudicial to such a work. I am told this bust was cleaned about ten years ago, and if the scrubbing process is to be renewed every now and then we may bid adieu to the antique beauty of these marbles. Blurred edging and modelling technically called ‘gummy’ will be the inevitable result with the loss of all those delicate touches which give life

and individuality, and over which the sculptor lingered lovingly at the completion of his work. Time needs no human assistance to destroy.

‘Marmor’ waited for an official reply from the Museum and, when none came, decided to keep the issue alive by offering a second letter to *The Times*:

To all national establishments connected with art certain officials are attached whose duty it is to watch over the works committed to their charge, who receive a fixed salary and who doze at their posts.

If ‘Marmor’ had Hawkins in mind, the charge of somnolence was certainly unjust, as a glance at documents detailing the professional life of this tireless individual would show.

Dipping his pen into the vitriol, the writer continues,

Under these are, I believe, others who – their salary varying with the amount of work they perform – are always keenly on the look-out for a job. Good or bad, it is a matter of indifference to them, provided they are paid. They are equally ready and equally competent to scrub the paint off so many square feet of Titian or to deprive of tone, so many square yards of Phidias.

‘Marmor’ goes on to speculate that one of the reasons for this action is to produce a colour in the sculptures that would harmonise more readily with the colour of the walls of the gallery, that had for some years now been a vibrant red. The walls had previously been a purplish-grey which had been very much more to his taste. The Elgin Room had been repainted red in 1839 in response to a rising fashion for strong colour in interior design that had much to do with the revival of ancient architectural polychromy.⁴¹ Once established, the colour was to be increasingly used in the 19th-century Museum as a means of striking a contrast between the gallery walls and the sculptures, which were perceived to be dirty and dingy in appearance.⁴² Had the sculpture been cleaner, then lighter colours might have prevailed. In fact, therefore, the opposite of Marmor’s supposition was the case. It was the walls that were matched to the sculpture, rather than the other way round.

These letters are interesting from a number of viewpoints. Whether or not they express legitimate concerns is difficult to say. Negative factors are their authors’ obvious hostility to the Museum itself, their anonymity and their failure to address their objections in writing first to the Museum. (By contrast John Henning appears a far more credible character.) There is a blanket opposition to all restoration on principle: interfering with ancient sculpture must of necessity be bad and a violation of original finish.

The Trustees met on 26 June 1858 and considered the first two letters (the third appeared that same day) together with a counter-testimonial by Charles Cockerell, the architect.⁴³

As one of the Royal Commission for the site of the National Gallery last year I had occasion to hear the most mortifying evidence to prove the degradation to which these noble works were subjected in these hyperborean climates – but by Mr Westmacott’s operations, I now rejoice with you at their future exemption from further dishonour, and their perfect preservation in our museum to future times. I heartily congratulate you... Mr Westmacott assures me that his preparation contains no chemical mischief whatever... .

The Trustees went into the galleries and satisfied themselves that Westmacott’s actions were to be approved. On 6

January 1859, Hawkins reported that the greater part of the Graeco-Roman sculptures had been cleaned under the continuing supervision of Westmacott, but this was far from an end of the matter.⁴⁴ Within ten years the surface of the sculptures had so deteriorated as to cause Hawkins’ successor, Charles Newton, to contemplate washing them again. He complained of the ‘foulness of the atmosphere which deposits upon them a coat of black, greasy substance, not to be removed except by washing’. Thebad air was attributed to both the London atmosphere and to ‘the necessity of pouring streams of hot air into imperfectly ventilated rooms.’ ‘The effect on the sculpture Galleries of these currents of hot air may be clearly traced on the walls and ceilings which are blackened according to the set of the currents.’⁴⁵ The sculptures were duly washed, but now Newton recommended that, if the exercise were not to be repeated every five years, it would be better to protect at least the frieze under glass.⁴⁶ Newton subsequently reported that the glazing of the frieze was complete and proposed that the pediment sculpture should be similarly protected.⁴⁷ This was never fully carried out, although a trial was made with the Helios group of the east pediment.⁴⁸

Apart from periodic dusting and a general rearrangement of the order of the frieze in 1902, the glass casing remained intact until the dismantling of the 1930s.⁴⁹ The pedimental sculpture continued to undergo periodic washing by the traditional methods.⁵⁰ Then in 1932 came the first signs of a change. Lord Duveen had expressed interest in ‘the actual colours of the marble’, so as to know what material to choose for the wall-lining of his new Gallery.⁵¹ We learn from the diary of the Earl of Crawford, aTrustee, that this was already a pet concern of his.⁵²

Duveen lectured and harangued us, and talked the most hopeless nonsense about cleaning old works of art. I suppose he has destroyed more old masters by overcleaning than anybody else in the world, and now he told us that all old marbles should be thoroughly cleaned – so thoroughly that he would dip them into acid. Fancy – we listened patiently to these boastful follies....

A metope and a block of frieze⁵³ were taken down to the basement and cleaned under the supervision of Dr H J Plenderleith.⁵⁴ The stated intention was to establish ‘an effective means of removing the dirt without risk of damaging the marble or its patina.’⁵⁵ The Plenderleith method, we learn elsewhere, was to apply a neutral solution of medicinal soft-soap and ammonia.⁵⁶

The cleaning of the frieze blocks and metopes according to Plenderleith’s method proceeded through 1932–33.⁵⁷ When cleaned, the sculptures were returned to the gallery, the frieze being replaced in its glass casing. Some of the pediment sculptures were also cleaned at this time including the ‘Iris’ (Figure G) of the east pediment before she was replaced on an experimentally lower pedestal. At the beginning of 1934, the Keeper John Forsdyke reported that in the previous year, ‘all the slabs of the Frieze on the west side of the room were taken down to the Basement for cleaning, and replaced.’⁵⁸ The cleaning then fell into abeyance as the masons were deployed on other duties. On 25 June 1936 Frederick Norman Pryce had become Keeper, and Forsdyke was elevated to Director of the Museum. Under Pryce the cleaning was resumed, and in the summer

of 1937 14 blocks of north frieze together with west frieze Block II mounted on the west side of the room, were taken down, stripped of all additions in plaster and Portland stone, cleaned and replaced on exhibition.⁵⁹ These had already been cleaned in 1932, and this was therefore the second attempt at cleaning them. This phase of cleaning continued through 1937 and the following year when it was stopped on Monday 26 September.

3 Documentary evidence for the cleaning of the sculptures 1937–8

In this section and the three following, I shall present the raw data of the episode arranged, for the sake of the reader’s interest, in the form of a narrative. It is a compelling story and deserves to tell itself. I have, therefore, largely resisted attempting to make value judgements, either of the evidence itself or of the actions and sayings of the people concerned. This will be done in section 7. Transcripts of the full documents referred to will be found in Appendices 1 to 9.

At a meeting of the Standing-Committee of Trustees on 8 October 1938, Forsdyke reported that ‘through unauthorised and improper efforts to improve the colour of the Parthenon sculpture for Lord Duveen’s new gallery, some important pieces had been greatly damaged.’⁶⁰ He asked for a Board of Enquiry to consider the nature of the ‘damage’ and the policy of the Trustees in regard to publication of the facts. The Board was appointed and comprised Lord Harlech, Sir William Bragg, Sir Charles Peers and Sir Wilfred Greene with Lord Macmillan in the chair.

The Director received brief preliminary statements in the form of letters from Pryce, his assistant Roger Hinks, H J Plenderleith, scientist in charge of the Museum’s laboratory, and Arthur Holcombe, Foreman of the masons,⁶¹ who were called as witnesses before the board along with Sydney Smith, Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities, and V A Fisher, mason. The Board’s first ‘Interim Report’ is dated 7 November 1938.⁶² Taking it together with the statements of Frederick Pryce and Roger Hinks,⁶³ events may be summarised as follows.

‘When the washing began’, Pryce recalls, ‘I asked Holcombe if he and the men understood the proper process, and he replied in the affirmative.’ By this he must have meant the cleaning that began in the summer of 1937. He goes on, ‘At the outset I spent much time with the men, and the washing whenever I was present was being done in accordance with the regulation. I have re-examined the slabs of the frieze which were first washed (in the S.W. angle of the Elgin Room) [**Plate 3**], and can see no trace of the use of copper tools. On this point I consulted Dr Plenderleith who, I believe, concurs.’ The sculpture referred to in the south-west corner of the room are the blocks of north frieze showing the cavalcade.

Subsequently, Pryce spent less time in the workshop and there was a long period in the spring of 1938 when he was absent on sick-leave and did not supervise the cleaning at all. Hinks had returned from leave on 29 August 1938 and was together with Pryce in the Department, before the latter went on leave on 16 September. Before leaving, Pryce gave Hinks no special instructions as to cleaning the Parthenon Sculptures. The political crisis in September over Germany’s

invasion of Czechoslovakia involved Hinks in the drawing up of emergency measures for evacuating the collections, with the help of his junior C M Robertson.⁶⁴ In accordance with Pryce’s instruction, Hinks also superintended the work of the masons, ‘who were engaged in mounting various pieces of sculpture.’ He goes on:

I also visited the Annexe of the new Elgin Room, to inspect the Iris from the East Pediment, whose base was to be measured for the cutting of a template, but no work was yet in progress. I noticed that some washing of the lower part of the figure had recently taken place; but as I had just been away for several weeks, and as I assumed that the cleaning of this figure, like that of the rest of the Parthenon sculpture, was contemplated before removal to the new room, I was not surprised to find that the work had been started. I did not observe any signs that unauthorized methods of cleaning had been used, nor were there then any tools or other materials laid out on the trestle on which the figure stood. I did not then pass through Holcombe’s shop or the other basements, because I had received no instructions from the Keeper that any work was to be in progress there. In short I did not spend as much time in the basement as I should have spent there in normal circumstances, because I judged that my first duty during these critical days was to superintend the safeguarding of the collections in the upper rooms, for which the Director had already issued general instructions.

Hinks comes at last to the Director’s revelation to him of his suspicions about malpractice. He had gone to see Forsdyke on the afternoon of Friday 23 September to discuss various matters, and at the end of this interview the Director brought up the matter of the sculptures. In the first ‘Interim Report’ it was said that Forsdyke had first become aware that tools had been used on the sculptures on the evening of Thursday 22 September, but what is not clear from these papers is how Forsdyke suddenly became apprised of the fact or why he decided to mention it then, when the cleaning had been going on for 15 months. The answer seems to lie in a paper addressed to Sir David Wilson, Director, dated 9 February 1984, (Appendix 5) which records a memoir of the episode by Dr R D Barnett, then a retired Keeper of Western Asiatic Antiquities at the Museum.⁶⁵ Barnett remarks that he had long been puzzled as to why an elderly labourer had been allowed to sit

day after day using hammer and chisel (to remove lime stalagmites) and wire brushes (to remove the golden-brown patina) from the Parthenon metopes and frieze slabs, which were solemnly trundled in to him one by one. I wondered whether I should intervene here and pondered long; but I felt much difficulty in thus interfering in another department’s affairs. After all, Forsdyke, though he had by now become Director, must know about it since he had continued to exercise close control over the whole Duveen Gallery scheme from the Director’s office. The matter however was shortly afterwards (how shortly I don’t remember) taken out of my hands.

One day Sydney Smith [Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities] and Mallowan [the Assyriologist] and I were down there (I think) at lunch-time when the ‘cleaner’ [Holcombe? In his workshop] was out. Sydney Smith, noticing what he had been doing, strode over, looked at his tools, and exclaimed ‘Good Lord! Do you see what they’re doing? They’re cleaning the sculptures with wire brushes!’

‘Yes’, I said, ‘and I don’t like it’, (or words to that effect).

‘Don’t ever tell anyone what you’ve seen here today!’ said S S with great finality.

Of course we promised we wouldn’t – indeed I kept my promise for nearly 50 years: however at the time I took S S to mean that he would accept responsibility and do or say whatever

was necessary. In the upshot, he didn’t do anything till that day in October (?) 1938 when it was reported that the Duveen Gallery had been finished and the metopes had been installed in the side galleries. What happened next I only have from hearsay, not personal knowledge, but I understood that Sydney Smith and Mrs Gulbenkian were ushered down to meet Forsdyke in the galleries and Forsdyke remarked of the metopes: ‘They’re looking very white, aren’t they?’, to which S S was able to come back with a smart answer: ‘You know why, don’t you? They’ve been cleaning them with wire brushes!!’

Barnett’s account is artfully designed to discredit all but himself. In the Museum he has a reputation for brilliant scholarship and political cunning. Even in retirement he sought to influence Museum affairs. At the time of his writing, there was a plan for re-combining Barnett’s old department of Western Asiatic Antiquities with Egyptian Antiquities, as in the days of Sydney Smith. Barnett opposed it. His inflammatory memoir is probably designed to embarrass its recipient, and should be taken with a large pinch of salt. Certainly, there is no evidence to confirm his mention of wire brushes ‘to remove the golden-brown patina.’ Perhaps all that can reliably be inferred from it is that, by saying what he knew, Sydney Smith brought out an anxiety that had been building in the Director’s mind, for some time.

Hinks’ account of his interview with Forsdyke the next day continues:⁶⁶

The Director then mentioned the cleaning of the Elgin Marbles, and expressed concern at the appearance of some of the slabs of the frieze. He repeated the conviction of the Trustees that nothing but the method of cleaning invented by Dr Plenderleith should be employed on the marbles, even if this did not achieve the degree of whiteness desired by Lord Duveen. He then expressed his own fear that unauthorised methods might already have been employed on the frieze, especially the use of metal scrapers and abrasives. He then instructed me to look into this matter.

On the following Saturday, Hinks went to look at the frieze and noticed the whiteness of which the Director had complained, but found no indication as to whether this had been achieved by unauthorised methods or by Plenderleith’s method.

On Sunday 25 September Forsdyke passed through the basement and was surprised to find that the Helios group had recently been undergoing treatment. There were copper tools on the bench and a piece of coarse carborundum. It was obvious the tools had been used on the sculptures. On Monday the 26th September, Hinks found Holcombe in his shop with the head of Selene’s horse. He was washing it in the approved way, but on the bench were the various tools and tins of white powder. Hinks challenged Holcombe, who denied using them on the head and denied knowledge of the powder, which he claimed was something left over from the days of his predecessor, William Pinker.⁶⁷ His suspicions aroused, Hinks went immediately to the Annexe of Duveen’s new gallery, where he found two labourers washing the figure of Iris and using copper tools on the drapery. The work was stopped.

Pryce returned to the Museum on Tuesday 27 September. He declared that it had not been his intention to proceed with the cleaning of the pediment sculptures until February of the following year, and that explained why he had not

consulted Plenderleith about ‘how far we should wash’. For the same reason he had said nothing to Hinks, when the latter took over. The only instruction given to Holcombe had been to take down the ‘Iris’, fix a new pedestal and set it up in the new gallery.

The Board were persuaded, contrary to claims by Holcombe, that copper tools were used by him and the labourers under him in cleaning all three pieces. Nor had Holcombe received any instruction, but had taken it upon himself to clean the sculptures as he saw fit. He had acquired some strips of copper from the store and shaped them by flattening and sharpening the ends. Similar tools had been used on the frieze and metopes. He apparently saw no harm in this and had made no effort to conceal the tools. The Board, for reasons not given, ‘did not think it within their duty to make a detailed examination of the metopes and frieze with a view to ascertaining the extent of the damage.’ At any rate the effect was recognised as ‘to remove the surface of the marble and to impart to it a smooth and white appearance.’ Pryce had described the horse head of Selene as having been ‘skinned’. ‘The damage’, the report goes on, ‘which has been caused is obvious and cannot be exaggerated.’

It was recalled that washing the sculptures used to be done in the galleries using water and hard brushes, that is until in 1932 Plenderleith prescribed a ‘neutral solution of medicinal soft-soap and ammonia’, training one mason’s labourer in how to apply this with distilled water. For the next four years only this person washed the sculptures and this to the Keeper’s order. Holcombe could give no satisfactory reply as to why this practice was deviated from. Pryce remarked, however, that a foreman of Lord Duveen, who was employed on the site of the new gallery, ‘had expressed Lord Duveen’s desire that the sculptures should be made as clean and white as possible and this may very well have become known to the workmen.’

The Trustees were very critical of Pryce and Hinks for what was regarded as a dereliction of duty in failing to provide proper supervision over a long period of time, which failure could not be excused on the basis of periods of absence through vacation or ill-health. Nor, in Pryce’s absence, was it even Hinks who had discovered the crime, but it had been left for the Director to reveal.

The first ‘Interim Report’ was submitted to the Standing Committee of Trustees and accepted. The Board met for a fourth time on 15 November to complete the enquiry and to consider what disciplinary action should be taken and to deliberate on how the facts were to be published. The results of this meeting made up the second ‘Interim Report’.⁶⁸

The Trustees re-examined Holcombe and also questioned J F Sinclair and A E Simenton, two of the labourers. Sinclair confirmed that he had been using copper tools to clean the Parthenon Sculptures since June 1937. The report goes on:

He also stated that Daniel, the foreman employed by Lord Duveen, had pointed out to him that one of the slabs, chosen for Lord Duveen to show in his new gallery, was not white enough and that Holcombe had previously told him to see if he could brighten it up. The slab was in consequence re-cleaned. Daniel commended him for getting it whiter. The incident is of importance only as showing that Holcombe and Sinclair and

presumably the other workmen were aware of Daniel’s desire that the sculptures should be made as clean and white as possible for Lord Duveen.

The Board learned from Holcombe, Sinclair and Simenton that a sum of two or three pounds had been given by Daniel to Holcombe to be divided among himself and the workmen after they had performed some heavy work in moving some of the sculptures, and that this sum was shared among them. The Board do not associate this payment with the cleaning operations, except in so far as it was calculated to promote the readiness of Holcombe and the workmen to comply with Daniel’s wishes.

On the question of the fate of the officers, it was decided to terminate the employment of Pryce and Hinks, the conditions as yet undetermined. On the matter of a public statement the Board decided that none need be made.

They have learned with satisfaction that [unspecified] remedial measures applied by the Director and Dr Plenderleith have mitigated to a considerable extent the evidence of the treatment which the three pediment-sculptures have received so far as the eye of the general public is concerned but to the expert the damage will remain discernible. In these circumstances the Board do not recommend any communication to the Press on the subject.

The second ‘Interim Report’ dated 8 December 1938 was presented to the Standing Committee and the Trustees on 10 December 1938 and was accepted. Afterwards the Board met again⁶⁹ and reconsidered the terms of Pryce’s dismissal in the light of medical evidence, which had since become available to them. They now found that, ‘so far as he is concerned, the unfortunate state of matters which the Board have had to investigate ought in large measure to be attributed to his breakdown in health.’ After a month’s sick-leave, therefore, Pryce was to be allowed to retire on medical grounds. Hinks by contrast was to be allowed to remain in post with a severe reprimand and the loss of ten years seniority. Holcombe was dismissed and ceased duty on 9 December 1939.⁷⁰

Pryce’s month of sick-leave expired and he never returned to his duties, as his retirement on medical grounds went through. Bernard Ashmole, Yates Professor of Classical Archaeology in the University of London, joined the Department in January 1939 and took over Pryce’s duties on a part-time basis.⁷¹ On 13 January, his position no longer tenable or tolerable, Hinks tendered his resignation to Ashmole. It was accepted by the Board of Enquiry on 14 January 1939⁷² and at a General Meeting of Trustees on 25 February 1939.

The surviving correspondence between Forsdyke and the Board members is largely routine,⁷³ but two letters from Lord Harlech are telling. He was a hard-liner, who disapproved of Macmillan’s initial instinct:

Price [*sic*] and Holcombe ought to be got rid of and possibly Hinks too.⁷⁴ Price’s evidence was deplorable and I don’t see how he can be entrusted with responsibility any more. Holcombe obviously lied to us, and deliberately did what he did the moment the Keeper’s back was turned wanting to please Duveen. The Trustees and you and the whole Museum have been let down badly, and effective disciplinary action must follow. Frankly, I don’t like Macmillan’s desire to hush it all up and minimize a very bad job.⁷⁵

In the event, Harlech was reassured: ‘Knowing Macmillan’s views I am agreeably surprised at his draft report. He has adopted a good many of my suggestions.’⁷⁶

4The Press scandal of 1939

The Board of enquiry had decided in its second ‘Interim Report’ not to proceed with a public statement. It seems there were second thoughts, however, and many Trustees were undecided as to whether a press statement should be issued or not, and if so what form it should take.⁷⁷ On 3 December 1938 Sir Charles Peers wrote to Forsdyke as follows:

The form of announcement as proposed to be appended to the Report of the Board of Enquiry is as well worded as is possible in the circumstances, and I can’t object to its being used.

But there is no doubt that the publication of this, or any like statement, will result in what I should like by every means to avoid, namely, a serious blow to the reputation of the BM. It seems to me that what is principally entailed on the Trustees is to order the preparation of a careful report on each piece of sculpture which has suffered, so that any student studying these marbles in the future may be safeguarded against mistakes arising from the condition of the damaged carvings. This is our real duty to knowledge, but I do not think that a publication of the fact that damage has been done is of any importance in comparison.

Lord Harlech was in turn anxious not to provoke an ‘unduly alarmist reaction by the lay press, and questions in parliament which will drag out the horrid truth bit by bit and produce the kind of comment we may expect in Germany and Greece anxious to twist England’s tail.’

Stanley Gardiner, a Trustee, recommended publishing at once, so as to avoid the Press making ‘a big show.’

The Archbishop of Canterbury had been talking to Macmillan and they agreed that

no such express publication of what has happened to the Elgin Marbles should be published. He thinks...that it would be sufficient that you should be ready at any time when any expert calls attention to what has happened to give careful and considered reply. Certainly the last people to whom I think any statement should be voluntarily sent would be the Greek Government!

On 15 December Forsdyke replied in agreement to this letter:

In the first place we are not yet able to say what the effect of these improper processes has been, and an incomplete statement would serve no purpose. There is no question of repairs: these could not even be attempted. It will take a long time to make an accurate record of the pieces that were improperly cleaned, and we regard the making of this record as our real duty. When it is made, the Trustees may be asked to consider its publication in an archaeological journal; but I do not agree with Sir William Bragg that we should find any kind of condonation among the experts, least of all from the Greeks. We can offer no excuse for what happened. The stress of war alarms on this occasion, as I explained to the Standing Committee, was invented by Hinks for his defence; and Pryce’s health will doubtless justify his retirement, but not his neglect of duty during the last two years.

Rumours began to circulate and on 9 February 1939, the Archbishop wrote again:

I have heard a rumour that a section of the Press – probably the Beaverbrook Press – has got wind of our recent trouble at the Museum and that if so it may be necessary to have some reasoned statement on behalf of the Trustees ready explaining shortly but adequately the grounds of their action. You may already have prepared a statement. I am sure you will agree with me that it would be a mistake to dwell too fully in any public statement upon the extent of the mischief which was done even though you and I may feel it was very serious. If you have

prepared, or are ready to prepare, any such statement I suggest that it might be well for you to consult Lord Macmillan as to the form of it, whose judgement in these matters is always sound.

Press interest increased and short notices began to appear in *The Telegraph*, which newspaper Forsdyke claimed was hostile to him.⁷⁸ There was speculation that the resignations of Pryce and Hinks were connected with an internal dispute over the cleaning of the sculptures of the Parthenon.⁷⁹ On 21 March there was a further report of rumours that ‘as the result of their recent cleaning the metopes and frieze have lost the warmth of their patina.’ The Director was called upon to give ‘the facts of the case.’

On that same day the *Daily Mail* wrote asking for clarification of the situation. Forsdyke replied that,

When the Trustees of the British Museum have such statements to make, they issue them through the Press Agencies, and you may be sure that no information on this subject will be available for any newspaper which is not also given to the *Daily Mail*. But it seems to me that there is no more that can be said about these matters. As regards the sculpture itself, this is on public view, as it has always been, and any intelligent observer has been able to form his own opinion about its cleaning for the last six months or more.

The statement that the sculpture was on ‘public view’ was only partially true for on 21 March, *The Star* remarked upon ‘sinister blanks’ where some of the pediment sculpture was missing from the display in the Museum and repeated the speculation that the ‘exquisite patina’ of the Marbles had been tampered with. The ‘blanks’ can be explained, however, by the process of removing the sculptures into the new Duveen Gallery.

On 25 March the *Daily Mail* went ahead and published its ‘story’, in a piece which was well informed and broadly right. ‘Elgin Marbles (Worth £1,000,000) Damaged in Cleaning... Traces of patina have been removed leaving an unnatural whiteness.’

Also on 25 March, the *Daily Express* demanded a statement from the Trustees. Forsdyke had one in readiness. In a letter to him dated 29 March 1939, the Archbishop approved of the ‘very quiet and temperate statement’. Still the Museum held back from issuing it and Forsdyke sought to play the incident down. On 1 May an article appeared in *The Telegraph* claiming that the Museum was resorting to ‘ingenious methods’ to conceal from visitors the true state of the Marbles. Casts had replaced the original pediment sculptures of ‘Iris’, Helios and the head of the horse of Selene. The metopes were nowhere to be seen. The report goes on, ‘A rather ungrateful whispering campaign has been started to suggest that the treatment the Elgin Marbles have undergone is the responsibility of Lord Duveen.’ And then, after some observations about the Director, comes a very curious touch: ‘I understand that whatever artistic damage may have been done to the sculptures mineralogists from the Natural History Museum consider that the Marbles, viewed purely as stone, are unimpaired.’

Forsdyke took the articles that were appearing in *The Telegraph* to be the result of a personal animus against him for his having fallen out with a journalist, ‘whom I found established here when I succeeded Hill, and whose expulsion Hill approved.’ There had, however, also been a letter addressed to the Editor of *The Telegraph* (11 May 1939)

by D W S Hunt, fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford. This was the don, later turned diplomat and champion of champions in BBC TV's ‘Mastermind’, Sir David Wathen Stather Hunt. Forsdyke dismissed his intervention as ‘ignorant and foolish’ remarking that if its demands were met the nation would be discredited abroad at a politically critical moment.⁸⁰

On 14 May 1939 a long letter addressed to the Editor by Robert Byron appeared in *The Sunday Times* demanding either a statement from the Museum or the asking of a question in Parliament. Meanwhile, the correspondent had already made up his mind on the matter:

Anyone who knows the patina of Pentelic marble, who has run his hands over the knife-like edges of the Parthenon or the objects in the Acropolis Museum and felt those innumerable tiny asperities and translucencies which make that stone the most vivid material that ever rewarded a carver's skill, can see at once that the marbles in Lord Duveen's new gallery have lost this patina. The lustre and the gentleness have vanished. The lumps of stone remain, robbed of life, dead as casts.

This was a different appreciation of the sculptures from that of Byron's illustrious ancestor, who had dismissed them as Elgin's ‘Phidian freaks’.⁸¹ The author backtracks somewhat in his next paragraph when he says: ‘The Museum authorities may argue, possibly with absolute truth, that the armour of grime with which the marble was coated had already devoured the patina beyond hope of recovery.’ Not unreasonably, however, he points out that the Trustees ‘do not argue this. They argue nothing at all.’

At last the statement was published in *The Times* newspaper on 18 May 1939:⁸²

The Trustees of the British Museum have had under consideration the recent cleaning of the Elgin Marbles in connexion with their rearrangement in the new galleries which have been built by Lord Duveen. They found that unauthorised methods were being introduced in some instances, with the intention evidently of improving the appearance of the marble by removing spots of discolouration from its surface. Since this was done without the knowledge of the officers of the Museum who were responsible for the cleaning, it has not yet been possible to determine precisely the extent to which these methods were applied. To anyone but an expert their effect is imperceptible. The Trustees do not allow any departure from their approved methods, and at once took the necessary steps to ensure that no such innovations should be adopted in the Museum.

It immediately prompted an indignant response from The Press Association asking why the statement had not been put out on general release and why *The Times* had been ‘exclusively favoured’.⁸³

The statement deliberately understated the seriousness with which the Museum viewed the incident. The affair was similarly played down by *The Times* leader that accompanied it. Forsdyke justified this understatement with the theory, which in the event was borne out, that,

However full the announcement may be which the Trustees send officially to the Press, it will be amplified by the representatives of newspapers in London from their own enquiries and observations. I would therefore advise that the official announcement be as brief and bare as possible, and that I be authorised to add details within certain limits in answer to personal enquiries by accredited representatives of the Press.

There then follows a list of sample questions as follows:

What were the improper methods? What damage has been done? (This question to be referred to the enquirers' own powers of observation); Who wanted to improve the colour? Who made the unauthorised efforts? Why were the efforts made? Why were they not stopped? Who are the responsible officers? What has been done about them?⁸⁴

Forsdyke's note against the question, What damage has been done? suggests his continuing unwillingness publicly to confront the issue. In spite of this reticence, however, an accurate report of what had occurred was slowly building in the Press.

The full picture began to emerge when the *Daily Express* tracked Arthur Holcombe down to his home in North London and on 19 May published an interview with him on its front page.⁸⁵

‘I was told to begin cleaning them two years ago. As head man I was put in charge of six Museum labourers... . To get off some of the dirtier spots I rubbed the Marbles with a blunt copper tool. Some of them were as black with dirt as that grate,’ said Mr Holcombe pointing to his hearth. ‘The other men borrowed my copper tools and rubbed the Marbles with them as I did. I knew it would not do them any harm, because the copper is softer than the stone. I have used the same tools for cleaning marble at the Museum under four directors. One or two of the slabs of the frieze came up rather white, and I am afraid they caused the trouble.’

Jacob Epstein, the sculptor and a veteran of previous run-ins with the Museum, saw the piece in the *Express* and wrote angrily to the Editor of *The Times*.

When will the British Museum authorities understand that they are only the custodians and never the creators of these masterpieces?

He was promptly interviewed for *The Evening News* and the report was published the next day with the headline: ‘Epstein is very angry about the way British Museum treated the Elgin Marbles’ and a photograph of a suitably irate looking sculptor.

Eighteen years ago I protested against the cleaning and ‘restoring’ of Greek marbles there... . The only result was that I was ridiculed and abused by everybody and especially by the people who had never in their lives worked on a piece of marble, though artists all over the world were shocked by the news that the Museum authorities had added a false nose to the Demeter of Cnidus.

Now comes the revelation that for 15 months some workman has been scraping the Elgin Marbles with a copper tool. It is admitted that this method is unauthorised; what needs explaining is how it came to be used for all that time without action being taken.

I hear that two officials have resigned, but in the meantime the damage has been done.

I have had some dealings with these museum authorities, and have found them ignorant and opinionated almost beyond belief... .

The obvious and only sensible thing for the Trustees to do is to have an advisory panel of working sculptors whom they can consult on these matters, instead of leaving them to a group of archaeologists and chemists.

One of those implicated in Epstein's attack on the Museum was Sir George Hill, numismatist and Director of the Museum 1931–36. In a letter to *The Times*, 22 May 1939, he expressed irritation at the fact that in his letter to *The Times*, Epstein revived an attack made 18 years previous,⁸⁶ in which

the sculptor had accused the Museum of maltreating the Demeter of Cnidus. Hill denied it. Epstein was stung into a reply in the letter page of *The Times* for 25 May 1939 which included the remark ‘Putting me in my place seems to be of greater importance to the museum officials than the proper care and protection of the Greek marbles.’ He went on to speak of public unease over the present state of the Marbles.

Hill replied in the next day's issue of the same newspaper. The correspondence was, as he remarked, taking a personal turn:

I should be the last to wish to ‘put him in his place’ as to which we have all of us made up our minds by this time The public may well feel uneasy, owing to the agitation which, as Mr Epstein's own experience will remind him, can be only too easily worked up artificially; but how far they can trust those who seek to instruct them in the public Press may be inferred from the fact that they have been asked ... to believe that the group of ‘Cecrops and his Daughter’ has been a victim of such drastic ‘cleaning’ that it now seems ‘little better than withered stone’. Since the original is still in its place on the Parthenon and is represented in the British Museum only by a plaster cast, it is hardly reasonable to hold the Trustees responsible for its present condition.

This was a reference to a piece that had appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* for Monday 22 May by the art critic T Earp. The writer said he had gone to the Museum to see the Marbles cleaned, arranged and newly opened again with the intention of finding out whether reports of damage were true. He claimed he found them to be so:

This is especially the case in the procession of Athenian cavalry on the north side of the frieze. Removal of patina has left the incongruity of stone as bright as though it had been freshly quarried, yet indented with the usage of time.

As we shall see, the cavalcade of the north frieze in fact largely escaped the treatment. There then follows the mistake about Cecrops and his daughter being original marble. He goes on:

Thus the sculptures’ previous unity of tone and of surface-effect has been destroyed, the cleaning either having been checked at some stage or unevenly carried out.

The writer's folly is mitigated by his own complaint at the Museum's reticence about what actually had happened. It highlights, however, the extent to which even so-called art experts found it difficult to tell by looking at the sculptures. Curiously, the next day Earp published another piece in the same newspaper saying that he had asked to see the damaged pieces, but that they were in the new Gallery and that he was refused admittance. He goes on to lament the loss of what he regards as the former unifying patina:

In their new-found brightness the precious relics of Greek art have lost much of their former aspect of mellow antiquity. It is the surface mellowness, the patine [*sic*] which is time's gradual imprint, which for many was so important an element in the beauty of the sculptures as a whole. It knit them in a single unity, and made less obvious the hurt sustained in rough usage at some past period.

Seeing Earp's piece in *The Telegraph* for 22 May, Forsdyke wrote to F N Tribe at the Treasury, which was then the Museum's Government Department:⁸⁷

It is quite evident that this art critic (presumably an ‘expert’) has no idea of what is going on in regard to the Parthenon sculpture. His ‘now open to the public again’ and ‘not yet replaced’ means

that he does not understand that the old Room has never been closed and that the Metopes and other pieces, which are not on view in it, have been removed to their permanent places in the new Room. The examples that he specifies of pieces that have been touched, the Cavalry of the North Frieze, are actually among those that we know were not touched and that the figure of Cecrops and his daughter are not the originals at all, but plaster casts, to which nothing could be done.

This effort entirely bears out what the Trustees said in their statement except that they might have gone farther and said that the effects of cleaning are imperceptible even to an expert of the newspaper kind. It is a pity that there is no means of dealing with this kind of false statement as libel.

Suddenly, in the midst of this controversy, on 25 May Lord Duveen died at the age of 69. The obituaries that appeared in *The Telegraph* and *The Times* the following day did not dwell on the current debate, but focused on his role as a patron of the arts. *The Times*, however, spoke of his delight at providing a new setting for the sculptures of the Parthenon. It was, he was quoted as saying, the best thing he had ever done. He had spent months in finding the perfect background for them. ‘He believed that cleansed they would come as a revelation to the world.

Wait until you see them with the London grime removed and in their first purity. They will be luminous. To me there has never been any loveliness in dirt.

By contrast, a news item in *The Telegraph* for 26 May reported that he had been worried by the scandal and hurt by suggestions that he was somehow behind the cleaning.

The death of Duveen seemed to take the heat out of Press interest in the affair of the cleaning. The last major piece on the subject was a letter addressed to the Editor of *The Manchester Guardian* (9 June 1939) and signed N of London.

This intelligent and well-written statement forms a suitable last word on the affair:

The ultimate question at the bottom of the Elgin marbles controversy is what is meant by the magic word ‘patina.’ No one denies that some of the marbles have been pretty drastically cleaned, in certain cases by methods of which no expert could possibly approve. Nor is it denied that this method of cleaning had been going on unsuspected at intervals during the last fifteen months. The authorities discovered what had been happening, were very properly scandalised, and ordered a return to the harmless soap-and-water method. Folk who like to think that they have scented out a first-rate scandal have not been slow to move and a good deal has been said about it, including the suggestion that the Marbles have been ‘ruined.’ The same kind of thing invariably happens when any dear Old Master (Velasquez) ‘Silver Philip’ was a case in point) has its face washed.

But what, in fact, has happened? The sculptures are about to be housed in the new Duveen Gallery in the British Museum, and, doubtless, the cleaners were anxious that they should look spick and span before moving in. For over twenty centuries before Lord Elgin brought them to London, they have stood up to the weather on the Acropolis. On their way to England they spent some weeks at the bottom of the sea. None of them were unscathed. Few if any portions of them have retained their original surface. Some of them are wrecks of their former selves. What has now been done to them is negligible by comparison with what is happening to the portions still on the Parthenon. Casts of these latter taken in 1802 and again in 1872 reveal the lamentable results of open-air weathering.

The removal of a layer of London soot from the British Museum sculptures – especially from the metopes – has certainly altered their colour; uniformity of colour they never had.

Indeed, slight variation of colour is a characteristic of weathered Pentelic marble. But the fact that the Museum authorities themselves are not quite certain which of them have been subjected to the unconventional methods of cleaning and which have not (some of them certainly have not) is proof that the aesthetic damage is unimportant. Subtleties of modelling, like the veins on the horses’ bellies and the sharp chiselling of their manes are still unimpaired. Only a microscopic comparison between the Marbles in their present state and a set of full-sized photographic enlargements of their old surfaces could reveal the damage. That is a question for the expert. I doubt if the average visitor or even the average art-lover would notice any change beyond that of colour. But then, how many average visitors ever gave them more than a passing glance? If the controversy does nothing else it will teach us to look at them a little more closely in future.

5 Parliamentary questions 1939

S F Markham was ‘Hon Empire Secretary’ of The Museum’s Association and a Member of Parliament. Having seen Robert Byron’s letter in the *Sunday Times*, he wrote to A Esdaile, the Museum Secretary, advising that a written question should be submitted in Parliament.⁸⁸

The next day Forsdyke was informed by F N Tribe of the Treasury Chambers in Whitehall that Markham had ‘an unstarred Question on the Order Paper for answer tomorrow’ (18 May):

To ask the Secretary to the Treasury, whether the Elgin Marbles have now been safely transferred to their new gallery at the British Museum; and any have suffered by removal or any cleaning process.

Forsdyke was asked whether he had any objection to the following reply:

The marbles have not yet been transferred to the new gallery. So far as the latter part of the Question is concerned, I am informed by the Trustees of the British Museum that there has been some unauthorised cleaning of some of the marbles but it is not yet possible to determine precisely what the effect has been. I am assured, however, that the effects are imperceptible to anyone but an expert, and I think it follows that the intrinsic beauty of the marbles has not been impaired.

There was also to be a starred (written) Question from Mr Mander MP on 23 May, asking the Secretary to the Treasury, ‘if he will state the present position with reference to the cleaning and re-erection of the Elgin Marbles in The British Museum.’⁸⁹ It is not clear whether this was in fact asked, but the Standing Committee Minutes of the Trustees for 10 June 1939 record that Mander asked the Question on 6 June and also enquired whether ‘it was correct that the resignation of two officials was connected with the unauthorised cleaning, and that disciplinary action had been taken.’

The same minutes record that on 26 May, Lieut-Commander Fletcher asked ‘whether the unofficial cleaning of the Elgin Marbles continued over 15 months, what steps were taken to bring the methods employed to the notice of the Director during that period’, and, in a further Question, ‘why the Director did not occupy his official residence.’ Capt Crookshank, Financial Secretary to the Treasury had answered that ‘unauthorised cleaning took place for about 15 months prior to last September, and that the cleaning of material was in the care of Keepers of Departments.’⁹⁰

6 Subsequent responses to the 1937–38 cleaning

Public interest in the scandal of the cleaning had begun to

die down, even before the Second World War intervened and necessitated the dismantling of the hardly finished Duveen Gallery. Forsdyke brilliantly supervised the evacuation of the Museum collections, and the Marbles were in safe storage when the Duveen Gallery was badly damaged by enemy bombing. After the War their re-exhibition was a priority for Bernard Ashmole.⁹¹ He had resumed his post at The British Museum, giving up his professorship at University College to devote his energy to the restoration of the emptied and bomb-damaged galleries of the Greek and Roman Department. The immediate priority was the recovery of the sculptures of the Parthenon from their deep shelter in the Aldwych Tube. As Jacob Epstein pointed out, with his usual tendency to sound cross, a whole generation of artists was growing up never having seen these sculptures.⁹²

The Duveen Gallery was a bombed ruin. Ashmole had never been reconciled to its design and had no compunction, therefore, about making his display of the Marbles in the old Elgin Room which, of all the sculpture galleries on the ground floor of the Museum, was the only one still serviceable.⁹³ The first of the sculptures to re-emerge came out on 25 November 1948. Their sudden appearance, trundled on trucks through the public concourses of the Aldwych Tube, attracted Press attention.⁹⁴ Neither then, nor in reports of their eventual display did anybody think to revive the previous controversy. *The Times* trumpeted their return and celebrated the ‘amazing brilliance and freshness’ of the carving of the animal thought to have inspired Keats to write of ‘that heifer lowing at the skies’.⁹⁵ A vindication of Elgin’s actions in rescuing the Marbles was seen in a photograph exhibited with the casts he had made of the west frieze, which had remained behind in Athens. The photograph taken in 1938 showed a loss of up to 20% of the surface that survived in Elgin’s day.

The *Daily Graphic* saw how the sculptures ‘glow with a Mediterranean warmth’.⁹⁶ The newspapers, it seems, were prepared to forgive the past and let the sculptures stand as a symbol of the resurrection of war-torn Britain. The *New Statesman*⁹⁷ captured the élan of the moment: ‘To the post-war generation they are fresh, challenging and alive as once they were to Keats.’ The comparison was again favourably made between the condition of these sculptures and those left behind in Athens. Not everybody, however, was prepared to forgive and forget.

Cesare Brandi

An active lobbyist against the removal of what he considered to be protective and aesthetically enhancing patinas on artworks was Professor Cesare Brandi, head of the Istituto Centrale del Restauro in Rome. In 1950 he entered vigorously into the debate then still raging over the cleaning of pictures at the National Gallery.⁹⁸ In the journal of his own Institute⁹⁹ he revived the pre-War controversy: ‘We are not dealing with patina, nor with washing...’ We have here a ferocious skinning, which has removed the first layer of sculpture...’ Brandi believed that certain coatings on the sculptures, visible today on parts of the sculptures of the Parthenon, were deliberate applications to the finished sculpture of a thin layer of plaster (*intonaco*). He lamented the abrasion of the surface all the more for its having

removed these coatings. ‘It is not a question’, he says ‘of taking off patina: those responsible cannot say that it is simply a matter of taste...’

He admitted that the scouring had not affected all the marbles: the pediments had escaped, with the exception of the Hebe (G) of the east. Also he thought the east frieze figures 28– 61¹⁰⁰ were unaffected as well as parts of the north frieze, which he lists nonsensically as figures 12–44. All the rest of the frieze and the metopes are, he says, abraded.

Brandi’s account suffers from the outrage that so often accompanies public discussion of art restoration. His detailed comments on individual pieces, especially his claim that the sculpture was reworked with sharp tools leaving scratches in the surface, is unacceptable and seriously calls into question his powers of observation. Brandi published two further notes defending his case for all the sculptures of the Parthenon having once been coated in a coloured layer of plaster which, again, is a claim that many may find difficult to accept.¹⁰¹

Besides Brandi, there has been very little academic interest in the cleaning. Subsequent reference to it has come from two other sources: one being published memoirs of persons caught up in the scandal, the other being the lobby for the restitution of the sculptures of the Parthenon to Greece.

There are four principal biographical accounts of the 1930s cleaning.

Jacob Epstein

Let There Be Sculpture, An Autobiography of Jacob Epstein (Readers’ Union, London 1942, other editions 1955 and 1963) chapter XXII ‘The British Museum and Greek Sculpture’.

This is principally a collection of Epstein’s acrimonious correspondence carried on in *The Times* with Museum officials, here spiced with bitter asides.

Roger Hinks

The Gymnasium of the Mind, The Journals of Roger Hinks 1933–63, edited by John Goldsmith (Michael Russell Publishing, Salisbury 1984) 50–61.

Hinks’ private Diary account with John Goldsmith’s commentary offers valuable insights not found elsewhere. Goldsmith pretty much gets it right when he writes, ‘the Trustees were anxious to hush the matter up and, above all, keep it out of the papers. As it turned out, they failed.’

Goldsmith presents Hinks as a somewhat naive victim of Museum politics and in particular of the determination of Forsdyke to save himself:

he had been Director for only two years, and, before that, *he had himself been Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities*. The evidence is not clear, but it seems likely that the cleaning of the sculptures had been initiated by him as Keeper; even if this had not been the case, he was still ultimately responsible for them, as Director. Obviously, if he was to survive, he had to find scapegoats. Pryce and Hinks were the obvious targets.

Goldsmith goes on to ask ‘what actually happened?’ and gives his own version of events. He concludes:

The final irony of the ‘Elgin Marbles scandal’ is that the whole thing was, in any case, a monumental fuss about nothing.

Majority opinion is that cleaning the dirt of ages from the sculptures vastly improved them, and has indeed preserved them. Miss Melina Mercouri, the zealous Greek Minister of Culture, who has demanded the return of the sculptures to Greece, and who would have every motive for criticizing British stewardship, has publicly acknowledged ‘the excellent care given to the Marbles by the British Museum’.

David Lindsay, Earl of Crawford

The Crawford Papers: the Journals of David Lindsay twenty-seventh Earl of Crawford and tenth Earl of Balcarres 1871–1940 during the years 1892–1940, edited by John Vincent (Manchester University Press, Manchester 1984) 591, 593.

A serving Trustee at the time of the scandal, Crawford gives a disappointingly thin account of the affair in two diary entries dated 12 November and 10 December 1938:

The Elgin marble affair is much more serious than I had anticipated, much damage having been done by overcleaning in a drastic manner. Forsdyke much disturbed. Cantuar was in the chair, and the keeper and assistant Hincks [*sic*] were called in to give explanations. Lang began life as a lawyer and his cross-examination of the two men was masterly – I can only say that it was better than Cripps at his best! Why did he not stick to the law?

At BM Elgin marbles affair reached its climax. They have been dangerously overcleaned by using unauthorised methods and instruments. The matter has been carefully investigated by a committee under the guidance of Macmillan and Wilfrid Greene. The outcome is that the keeper of the department retires with a medical certificate. His second-in-command is severely reprimanded and loses ten years seniority, and one subordinate on a weekly notice is no longer required at Bloomsbury. We discussed the affair for the best part of two hours, and settled (much against my advice) that no public announcement should be made. Baldwin was very emphatic against dismissal of any civil servant – said the man’s case would immediately be raised in the House of Commons... .

Bernard Ashmole

Bernard Ashmole 1894–1988 An Autobiography, edited by D Kurtz, (Oxbow Books, Oxford 1994) 68–70.

In 1937 I had been awarded the Florence Bursary of the Royal Institute of British Architects, which enabled me to travel in Greece for some weeks the following year. On my first visit to the British Museum after returning some of the metopes of the Parthenon, a part of the Elgin Marbles, were on exhibition. They had been cleaned in preparation for their move to the new gallery presented by Lord Duveen, the picture-dealer. They were at eye-level, but railed off so that a close view was impossible, but they did look unnaturally white; I ought to have realised that something was wrong, but didn’t.

Not long afterwards John Forsdyke, who had succeeded Sir George Hill as Director of the British Museum, made an alarming revelation. It was that Duveen had in effect bribed the chief mason, who happened to be a drinker and therefore not all that trustworthy, to clean a number of the marbles drastically so as to make them more showy for his new gallery; the mason had removed the patina, which is that change, mainly in colour, of the surface which tends to occur with age, especially in Pentelic marble. The crisis had arisen through a combination of unfortunate circumstances. It was a tradition that keepers of the Departments in the Museum were independent, and were normally advised rather than directed by the Director. This meant that apart from occasional visits by the Director or a Trustee and an annual meeting at which the Keeper presented his report to the Trustees, a Department was left to itself. The then Keeper of the Greek and Roman Department was seriously ill and had been away for some time; his senior Assistant Keeper, though a fine scholar, preferred to read books in the

Departmental Library rather than to make a round of inspection that would include the mason's shop. The result was that the mason carried on his evil work undetected.

Forsdyke explained that the Keeper had retired and his senior assistant had resigned. Would I become Honorary Keeper and hold the fort with the only remaining member of staff, the junior Assistant Keeper? He pointed out that some stone-walling would be necessary against journalists, questions in Parliament and ordinary enquiries – in fact 'holding the fort' about covered it....

The other principal accounts of the cleaning are that of Christopher Hitchens, a self-declared restitutionist, and William St Clair.

Christopher Hitchens

The Elgin Marbles – Should they be Returned to Greece?

(Chatto and Windus, London 1987) 89–93 (re-issue, Verso, London 1998).

Hitchens linked a detailed account of the cleaning to the question of restitution. It has, he says, been argued that the sculptures are safer in London than they would have been in Athens. The cleaning episode, it is argued, undermines this claim. 'If', says Hitchens, 'there are to be arguments about safety and conservation, then they must take account of time and chance in London as well as of time and chance in Athens.' The principal is a fair one, but is unfairly applied by Hitchens, who is largely reticent about the damage in Athens that has occurred to both the Parthenon and the sculpture that remained on it after Elgin's time.

William St Clair

Lord Elgin and the Marbles: The Controversial History of the Parthenon Sculptures (Oxford University Press 3rd edition 1998) chapter 24, 280–313 [herein after referred to as *LEM3*]. 'The Elgin Marbles: Questions of Stewardship and Accountability', *International Journal of Cultural Property* 8, no. 2 (1999) 397–521 [herein after referred to as *IJCP*].

In 1998 William St Clair devoted a chapter of the third edition of his book about the Elgin Marbles to the 1930s cleaning of them. Few post-War scholars had shown an interest in the episode and fewer still in its material consequences for the sculpture. St Clair, therefore, broke new ground by quoting verbatim and at length the Museum's own files. The Museum provided full access to its papers as well as curatorial advice on the sculptures and was unprepared for the violence of St Clair's reaction. His account, as one reviewer remarked, deviated from his previous dispassionate approach towards his subject and had 'the disconcerting effect of changing the whole direction of the original book'.¹⁰² Instead of dealing with the cleaning in the same even tone that had controlled the rest of his account of the Elgin Marbles, St Clair attacked the Museum. He argued that, through a failure of discipline in the 1930s and what he claimed was a cover up then and since, The British Museum's 'stewardship' of the Marbles was, as he put it in the closing paragraph of his book, a 'cynical sham'. The reviewer for the *International Journal of Cultural Property* remarked upon the change:¹⁰³

Having devoted the bulk of his book to arguing that the Ottomans ultimately granted Elgin legal title to the marbles, which in turn permitted Elgin to transfer good title to the British government, St Clair concludes his book by stating that the

'British claim to a trusteeship has been forfeited'. St Clair never explains when, in his mind, the museum's possession of the marbles was converted from one of ownership to one of trusteeship, or in what way the improper cleaning and the cover-up constituted such a violation of the trustee's [sic] responsibility as to warrant forfeiture.

St Clair's 'stewardship' was then a straw man, set up so that he could knock it down. The Museum had never made such a claim of infallibility in its record of curatorship. Its position has always been that if Lord Elgin had not acted as he did, and if the sculptures had not come to the Museum when they did, they would not survive as they do. The *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer saw through St Clair's device: 'St Clair is right to publicize this incident (if nothing else, it is a warning about the irresponsible power of strong-minded millionaires.) But he is too ready to see conspiracy where there is probably only cock-up.'

That the 1930s cleaning was, as the vernacular has it, a 'cock-up', there is no doubt. The Museum paid the price for it at the time with a major press scandal and it has been talked of as an embarrassment ever since. Sixty years on, with all the principal players dead, what seemed most needed was a reasoned assessment of what actually had happened in the 1930s and what the implications were for the sculptures themselves. Instead, St Clair's attack, with its frequent misreading of documents and gross exaggeration of the consequences for the sculpture, generated another press scandal, further muddying the waters.¹⁰⁴ The Museum decided, therefore, to reclaim possession of the subject, which with hindsight it should have done sooner. It held a conference, inviting an internationally distinguished panel of advisers and speakers, amongst whom St Clair was one.

On the eve of the conference, however, St Clair produced a second publication (1999), too late for proper consideration at that event. This maintains the polemical tone of his previous account, but the number of errors and the misrepresentations rise in proportion to its greater length and the expanded range of disciplines it attempts to cover. As this article now represents a substantial element in the bibliography of the sculptures of the Parthenon as a cultural property issue, and will certainly mislead readers without expert knowledge, it seems appropriate to publish here brief corrigenda of some salient points.¹⁰⁵

p.397 The scraping was done, under the incentive of bribes paid by Duveen's agent...

The agent concerned is a certain Daniel, who was charged with overseeing progress of works for the new gallery to house the Parthenon Sculptures. St Clair offers no proof for his accusation and, indeed, it is contradicted by The British Museum Board of Enquiry's own 'Second Report' of 8 December 1938, Section 4, which St Clair himself transcribes on his page 484. There it is emphatically stated that in reference to two or three pounds paid by the agent Daniel for heavy work in moving some of the sculptures, 'The Board do not associate this payment with the cleaning operations, except in so far as it was calculated to promote the readiness of Holcombe and the workmen to comply with Daniel's wishes.' In *LEM3* St Clair admitted that the Board 'did not consider that they amounted to bribery'.¹⁰⁶

p.405 Even today the legacy of this anachronistic attitude can be felt.

Referring to an image in The British Museum's new Parthenon Introductory Galleries, which opened in June 1998, St Clair accuses the Museum of an old-fashioned Winckelmannesque understanding of Greek sculpture in not showing there a reconstruction of ancient metal attachments to the frieze. The image concerned is taken from a computer-generated video, which plays in the Gallery. The omission of metal attachments to the frieze in this medium was a conscious, practical decision and did not reflect adherence to any redundant 18th-century notions of aesthetic self-censorship. Metal attachments to the frieze are commented upon in other information in the Galleries.

p.405, footnote 35 I note that the variegated brownish colors can be seen from the many colored pictures made of the Parthenon, including its sculptures, over a long period. In 1674 the artist of the Carrey drawings chose crayon, [sic] sometimes red on black, sometimes black on red, to capture the color.

In *LEM3* St Clair had claimed that before the 1930s cleaning, the sculptures were largely still covered in what he sometimes refers to as a patina, (but which I should prefer to call an orange-brown coating), which is still to be seen on some of the sculptures of the Parthenon today. He argued that this colour had been removed in the 1930s with the implication that the extent of the cleaning can be measured in proportion to the little that remains: 'The Marbles had left the galleries a warm brown. Most were now a dull unpolished white.' (*LEM3*, 299) This exaggeration and misrepresentation fundamentally undermined his case. I have demonstrated elsewhere that up to 80% of the formerly colour-coated surface had already gone through natural weathering long before the sculptures came to the Museum.¹⁰⁷ In the absence of any documentary evidence to support his claim, St Clair attempted to assert the former presence of the coating from images of the sculpture in oil paintings and drawings. Hence the attempt here to treat the colour of the 17th-century drawings of Jacques Carrey as literal.¹⁰⁸ He makes no allowance for the fact that the use of red chalk was a convention in drawing since the Renaissance and that it should not be taken as an intentional indication of actual colour. In drawing the Parthenon Sculptures Jacques Carrey did not choose the colour of his chalk to 'capture the colour' of the subject, but rather as part of a clear system for distinguishing figures from background. In the case of the sculpture, the artist highlights figures in the pediments, metopes and frieze by contrasting them red against black or black on red. In his rarer landscape drawings the same principle applies: buildings of the city of Athens, irrespective of age and material, are coloured red in contrast to the black of the terrain. William St Clair repeated this error in the paper he read at The British Museum conference on 30 November 1999.

... of the *Temporary Elgin Room* by A Archer, I note that the artist has painted the figures and the background of the frieze as mostly whitish or honey coloured, but, like the artists of the building, he has also used his brush to include some patches of reddish brown, particularly on the background of the frieze.

St Clair's point is not at all clear, but to judge from his overall argument, namely that the 1930s cleaning removed

extensive traces of an orange-brown coating, we may presume that he is embarrassed by the apparent lack of it on the sculptures as they were represented by Archer in a painting done soon after their first exhibition in The British Museum (**Plate 2**). I looked again at the picture and after much searching fancied I saw one or two places where traces of a reddish underpainting were showing through the predominant white of the sculpture. I can see no indication that Archer attempted anywhere to represent the orange-brown coating.¹⁰⁹

For an indication of how the surface of the frieze may have looked in Elgin's day, we can consult the monochrome photographs of the west frieze that were taken while it was still on the building ...

Laying on one side the obvious absurdity of this statement, no acknowledgement is made of the altogether exceptional preservation of the surface coating of the west frieze, which even today distinguishes it from the rest of the frieze, both that in Athens and that in London.¹¹⁰

p.407 Marble is highly porous. [a claim repeated elsewhere, eg pp.412 and 413].

Because of the interlocking mosaic of calcite grains, marbles generally have a very low porosity, much less than 1.0%.¹¹¹ The porosity of newly cut Pentelic marble is measurable and is found to be an extremely low 0.3%. Weathered Pentelic may be a little more porous than this.¹¹²

Some of the Elgin Marbles show unsightly patches of the kind and in the places one would expect from the use of naval hooks or iron lifting gear used during the tortuous journey from the Acropolis of Athens to the museum in London.

St Clair is unspecific as to exactly where he has detected such 'patches', and it is highly unlikely that metal lifting tackle was brought directly into contact with the sculptures during transportation. The standard method of transporting sculpture in Elgin's day was in wooden packing cases filled with sawdust. Considerable expenditure was made by Elgin on these necessary materials to protect the sculptures during transit. Even when some of the sculptures sank aboard the *Mentor*, they remained safe in their cases and were salvaged with ropes attached to the cases.¹¹³

p.412 Among the first actions when the Marbles were transferred to the British Museum in 1816 was the recruiting of a labourer 'for the purpose of lighting and attending the fires, cleaning the Marbles.' The fires, incidentally were needed to keep the naked artists' models from freezing in the London cold. Gas burners were installed in the galleries by 1859, and they too must have caused plenty of soot and other air pollution in the galleries.

St Clair has mangled my own text.¹¹⁴ He confuses an account of The British Museum's Temporary Elgin Room (1817–1832) with another account of the 'Sculpture Room' of London's Royal Academy. It was here and not in the Elgin Room that there were nude models, and gas-burners. The British Museum never used gas in the heating or lighting of its galleries. Nor, to my knowledge, has it yet admitted nude models.

The consumerist [sic] ethic was well represented by Westmacott, the man who regarded colored statues as opening the way to sexual immorality, and who had the private commercial contract from the British Museum to supply and sell casts...

St Clair has confused the personalities of Sir Richard Westmacott and his son Richard Westmacott Jnr. It was the father who had the private contract with the Museum for supplying casts until 1836, when an official cast-service was created. Westmacott Jnr was the ‘chromophobe’.¹¹⁵

p.413 The effect, as was recognized quite soon, was to destroy all the residual traces of polychromy that were previously still visible on the surfaces, and a halt was ordered to the making of new molds from the originals.

This remark refers to the Museum’s making of moulds from the sculptures of the Parthenon. It is another mangled and misleading borrowing from my own research and I shall attempt to disentangle it.

Two separate instances of moulding the Parthenon Sculptures for the manufacture of casts are recorded: the first was in 1817, by Richard Westmacott Snr, shortly after the sculptures entered the Museum; the second was in 1836–1837. The second moulding coincided with a wave of interest in ancient architectural polychromy and an enquiry into whether or not any traces of ancient pigment survived on the sculptures of the Parthenon and other sculptures and architectural members making up the ‘Elgin Marbles’.¹¹⁶

Polychromy

I shall take the polychromy question first. Let it be noted that there is no direct evidence that polychromy, as distinct from the orange-brown coating mentioned above, was ever to be found on the Parthenon Sculptures in The British Museum even before they were moulded. The Italian *formatore* who was responsible for both the 1817 and the 1836–1837 moulding of the sculpture noted that he had never seen any trace of ‘paint or artificial colour ... although he had carefully examined every portion of the surface of each figure.’ At about the same time, Edward Hawkins wrote of the frieze, ‘All the colour with which these sculptures were undoubtedly enriched... has now entirely disappeared.’ He dismisses a claim of there once having been colour on the block of east frieze in the Louvre: ‘no traces of colour can now be detected, and we can scarcely believe but that imagination had much to do with the appearance of blue and gold.’¹¹⁷

In LEM3 St Clair cites Charles Cockerell in 1830 as remarking that traces of ‘colour’ survive on the sculpture and architecture, but Cockerell is unspecific as to what these are,¹¹⁸ excepting a mention of the reclining river god (Ilissus) of the west pediment.¹¹⁹ St Clair chooses only partially to quote Cockerell as saying, ‘A colour which appears to have covered every part of the work is still discoverable in this statue’. St Clair then concludes in his footnote that ‘It is not known what Cockerell had in mind in making this observation, but there is no obvious colour today.’

This is misleading. It could be inferred from St Clair’s selective quotation that what Cockerell may have seen was actual pigment and that this was later removed. But Cockerell’s full sentence should be allowed to run on ‘... in this statue, probably intended to preserve it from the weather. Spon and Wheler [Jacob and George, travellers of the 17th century] observed a whiteness on the sculptures which might have arisen from this preparation.’

It is clear from this that Cockerell is thinking not of

actual pigment, but of a protective wash. Evidence of this apparent ‘wash’ is to be found to this day in the orange-brown and occasionally white coating that still survives on the surface of this sculpture.¹²⁰

The only certain, documented evidence of actual pigment surviving anywhere on the Parthenon Sculptures in The British Museum is my own observation of a trial brush stroke on the reverse of Figure ‘F’ of the east pediment. Analysis showed this to be hydrated lead carbonate, the principal constituent of ‘white lead’.¹²¹ Even this survival, however, although certainly ancient, is of unknown origin. It could have been a trial of a paint mixture in the carver’s workshop intended for some completely other purpose than to decorate the sculpture itself.

The situation in Athens is not very different. Even in the middle of the 19th century and before the ravages of modern urban pollution, Francis Penrose wrote of the sculptures on the Parthenon, ‘There are very slight remains of colour, if any’.¹²² He did find them on architectural members, and these sightings have been confirmed by modern surveys.¹²³ In modern times traces of colour have also been found on sculpture, but these are of dubious origin. Red, for example, has been seen on the background of a metope (East 6) describing serpent-shaped lines, but it is not suggested that this is any part of the original polychromy. One speck of blue is mentioned on the head of a figure from a metope. This has probably migrated from the architecture above.¹²⁴ To my knowledge, there has never been any confirmed mention of pigment on any of the sculptures of the Parthenon excavated on the Acropolis and now in the Acropolis Museum. If, as St Clair claims, it was once so much in evidence on the sculptures in The British Museum, then the question must be asked as to why it is not to be found now on the pieces in Athens.

In sum, there is no basis to the claim that traces of polychromy were still visible on the Parthenon Sculptures prior to the making of moulds. Indeed, reasoning only from the material evidence, or lack of it, the case could be made that the sculptures of the Parthenon were in fact never painted.

Casts

As for the moulding of the sculptures in The British Museum and its consequences, St Clair has again misrepresented my own research. In December 1836 a meeting was held in the Elgin Room of the Museum to discuss possible evidence for the sculptures having once been coloured.¹²⁵ Angelo Sarti was in the process of moulding the sculptures for a second time when, as we have seen, he recalled that, although he had examined the sculptures carefully, he had never seen colour. At this same investigation Michael Faraday learned from the *formatore* that the marble had been washed with soap lyes ‘or some other strong acid’ as part of the moulding process. He remarked that this was enough to remove any traces of colour that there might have been. Following this investigation, the moulding of the sculptures was resumed by Sarti and, when he departed for Italy, his successors.¹²⁶ St Clair implies that the making of new moulds ceased because of the dangers of removing polychromy. This is wrong. The enquiry was independent of the moulding, and

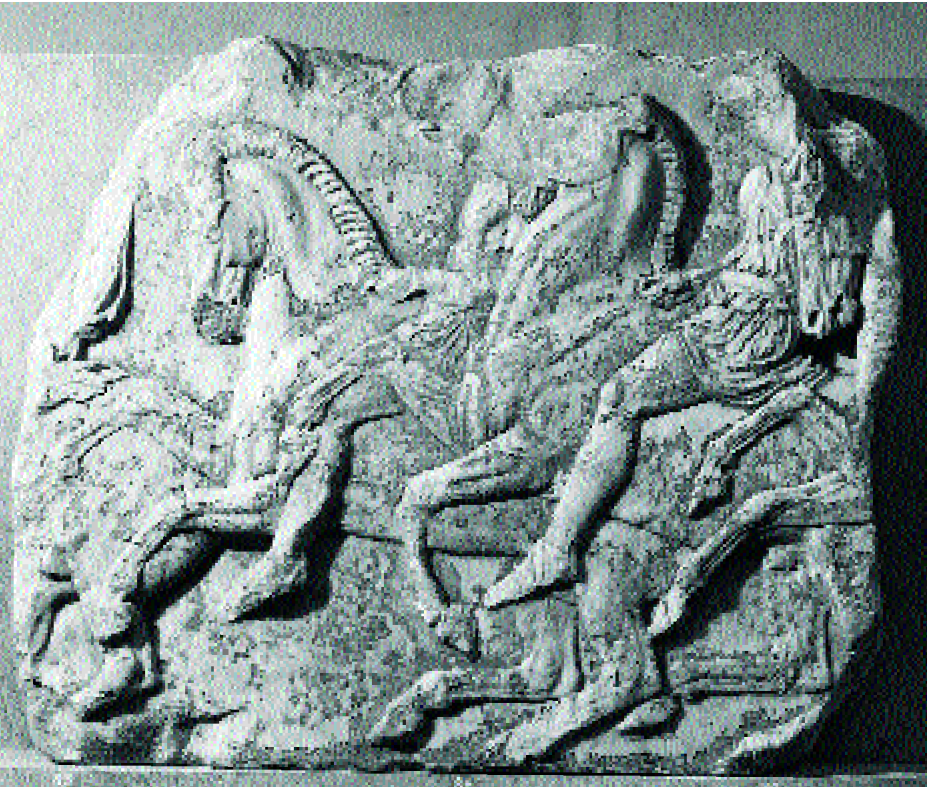


Plate 4 North frieze Block XXXIII showing extensive biological corrosion.

the moulding continued after the enquiry had taken place. ‘The acid’, says St Clair, ‘would have dissolved some of the oxidised surface and entered the marble, a highly porous material, preparing the way for further erosion.’ There is no scientific basis for this statement. St Clair has fabricated a scenario of damage which is not in the documents and cannot be verified on the evidence of the sculptures themselves. On the false claim that Pentelic marble is ‘highly porous’, see my commentary regarding p.407 above.

In passing it may be noted that Faraday’s remark that the processes of taking moulds from sculpture were destructive of polychromy was not necessarily correct. Casting did not remove all traces of colour from the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus frieze in the Museum.¹²⁷

St Clair devotes a section of his essay (pp.414–417) to the atmospheric pollution in The British Museum of the 19th century and the concerns expressed by the Museum itself about possible deleterious effects on the sculptures. I gave a fuller account of this in an article that appeared shortly before his own.¹²⁸

St Clair attempts to illustrate what he proposes as damage as a consequence of this pollution. He shows an engraving (his plate 1) made c. 1838–9 of Block XXXIII (**Plate 4**) of the north frieze cavalcade to illustrate that the sculptures were then in a good state of preservation, even though he himself acknowledges that many missing details are restored in the engraving. In his plate 2, he illustrates the same block as ‘showing extensive flaking from the surface.’ The damage to the surface, to which he refers – a honey-comb decay or pitting – is in fact the product of attack by micro-organisms occurring principally on the north side of the building, the so-called ‘north corrosion’.¹²⁹ It extensively affects the surface not only of north frieze blocks in The British Museum, but also of those in the Acropolis Museum

in Athens. If it is pollution damage in The British Museum, then so it must be in Athens. But of course it is not.

p.418 As the Duveen gallery was being built, and when the Marbles were mostly not on public view, Duveen was allowed to have his own agents in the museum.

On the contrary, the Parthenon Sculptures remained mostly on view while the gallery was being built as is clear from photographs of the time and the monthly reports of Keepers to the Trustees. St Clair attempts to construct a scenario of amuseum that was out of control, its officers unaware of a clandestine operation. The real facts are that even in photographs of the Elgin Room taken during the period of the cleaning, it is possible to see which are the cleaned parts of the frieze and which not (**Plate 3**). It is ironic that over the 15 months when the cleaning was being conducted, when the results were there for all to see, none of the officers of the Museum seemed to notice that anything was wrong. These included the Director, John Forsdyke, who had been elevated to his office from the rank of Keeper specifically with a view to his overseeing the completion of the Duveen Gallery project.

p.421 ... the previous director having been forced to resign after innumerable quarrels with the benefactor [Duveen] over the design of the gallery.

The claim of forced resignation is unsubstantiated by St Clair’s bibliographic reference.¹³⁰ Nor do I know of any other published or unpublished source to support it. All that E Miller says is ‘A further problem, which disturbed much of Hill’s tenure, was the question of the Duveen galleries.’ Sir George Hill KCB (1867–1948) was in his 69th year when he retired in 1936 and records in a personal memoir that when in 1931 he took up the Directorship, he would serve for a term of five years only, which he did.¹³¹ His stated view of the Duveen affair was that, although there was difficulty over the new gallery, a satisfactory compromise was reached.

p.424 The documents provide further evidence that the raw white marble ... was hurriedly coated over with some kind of colored wax.

St Clair’s claim here goes back to his earlier account in *LEM3*,¹³² and a Minute of the Standing Committee of Trustees which records that:

They have learned with satisfaction that remedial measures applied by the Director and Mr Plenderleith have mitigated to a considerable extent the evidence of the treatment which the three pedimental sculptures have received so far as the eye of the general public is concerned but to the expert the damage will still remain discernible.

St Clair supplied no documentary evidence for his presumption that these measures involved the use of ‘coloured waxes’, nor does he cite any in *IJCP*.

‘It was’, he goes on in the same footnote, ‘stated explicitly by Jacob Epstein.’ But what Epstein actually says in a postscript to a chapter of his book is: ‘The last I heard was from a Greek antiquaire who had seen them [the Elgin Marbles] and found that the Museum technicians were attempting to repaint the Marbles back into their original colours!’¹³³ Who Epstein’s informant was, and what he actually saw are not confirmed, and we are here presented with hearsay.

I do not myself rule out the possibility that a tinted wax was used, but there is no hard evidence for it. Nor can St Clair support the claim which he goes on to make in his footnote 135 that the frieze was coated in the same substance. The Trustees Minutes refer explicitly to three pediment sculptures.

Incidentally, it has recently been officially confirmed that the British Museum still applies colored tints to the marble antiquities in its care, a consumerist [*sic*] practice widely regarded as unethical and one which is absolutely forbidden by, for example, the Greek archaeological Service.

In a review of *LEM3* I commented upon the claims he made there for the application of ‘some kind of coloured coating’.¹³⁴ My words were: ‘As far as artificial colouring is concerned, it is not unusual practice to apply a dressing to the surface of marble after cleaning.’ I had in mind the application of a colourless polyethelene glycol (carbo-wax) to many of the sculptures of The British Museum after a programme of cleaning in 1970¹³⁵ and the fact that waxing of sculpture remains widespread practice in British stone conservation workshops as a reversible sealant against dirt.¹³⁶

Re-examining St Clair’s claims, we find:

1. that it is not said that The British Museum still waxes its sculptures;
2. the claim that the practice is widely regarded as unethical is nonsense and is supported by only one unsubstantiated citation.

p.425 In 1939 a fence was put into the gallery that prevented viewers from making a close examination of the exhibits.

St Clair has here in mind Bernard Ashmole’s observation that ‘some of the metopes’ were railed off after cleaning.¹³⁷ In archival photographs of the time it is indeed possible to see that, having been dismantled from the wall adjoining the new Duveen Gallery, some metopes in the old Elgin Room

are standing on the floor and are ringed by open-sided wooden barriers. These barriers were standard for the day and their purpose, like that of their modern counterparts, was to prevent accidents with the public walking into the objects. St Clair generalises Ashmole’s ‘some metopes’ to ‘the exhibits’ with the innuendo that this was a deliberate ploy to conceal the sculptures of the Parthenon from the public. In fact, contrary to the claim he makes on his page 418 (corrected above), the sculptures of the Parthenon remained mostly on show throughout the making of the Duveen Gallery and the associated cleaning. ‘Forsdyke’s barrier rail’ as St Clair referred to it in *LEM3*¹³⁸ is in fact a thing of his imagination.

p.432 The Athens slabs [of the west frieze] therefore enable us to interpret, with some confidence, the evidence of pre-1937 monochrome photographs of the slabs in London, which show surface features that disappeared in 1937 and 1938.

This statement may be compared with that made in footnote 35 of p. 405, for which see above. Here again no allowance is made for the fact that the west frieze, even after the weathering it received on the building until its removal in 1993, has a surface which is exceptionally well-preserved. St Clair suggests that it is to be taken as an indication of how the sculptures in London looked before the 1930s cleaning. Other frieze blocks in Athens, however – both those excavated after Elgin’s time and those removed in 1993 from the south side of the building – have surfaces completely unlike the west frieze blocks. There is no suggestion that they have had their coating artificially removed.

p.435 Plate 17 appears to show the surface shortly after the start of cleaning. It reveals a strange surface texture on the flat background on the left that may be the result of washing or rubbing with abrasives, and there are highly visible scratch marks on the bottom left.

This remark refers to a photograph by Martin Hürlimann of west frieze Block II, one of only two blocks of the west frieze in The British Museum. The marks to which St Clair alludes are not evidence of scratches in the marble, but must be in the print itself or in the negative that produced it. The simple proof is the way in which the lines continue uninterrupted by the contours of rider and horse. All of what St Clair says on the subject of Hürlimann’s photographs and other images he reproduces must be read with circumspection.

Conclusion

St Clair’s handling of both documentary and archaeological evidence has been found to be inaccurate and unreliable. I have restricted my remarks to correcting actual matters of fact, but there is throughout his writing a tendency to make impressive-sounding statements that are either unsubstantiated or are supported only by hearsay and innuendo. We read, for example, ‘The fact that the Marbles had been hurriedly coated was revealed to outsiders, including myself, by some of the staff in a position to know and was not denied by others when invited to comment.’¹³⁹ Where is the fact? Who are the outsiders? Who are the staff? This, what may be called the ‘I have it on good authority’ style of reporting history, serves neither the subject, nor its intended audience well. Again, St Clair refers to the methods of Lord Elgin’s agents as a ‘mixture of threats and bribes’.¹⁴⁰

So-called bribes are explained, but threats are not. And what of those bribes? Why are they treated here at all and in such detail? Such payments, as St Clair knows well, were unavoidable in the Ottoman world and even he is forced to acknowledge that Elgin openly declared an estimate of the cost of them in the evidence he presented to the British Parliamentary Committee that inspected his finances.¹⁴¹ If the amounts are exceptional, it is because the endeavour was so.¹⁴² There can therefore be no issue of accountability here. In a lame attempt to claim relevance, he says it is noteworthy that ‘the same issues involving political influence and bribery, both at the center of government and locally, still arise today when new international efforts are made to discourage the casual and illegal excavation of archaeological sites ...’.¹⁴³ Are these in fact the same issues? How do we equate the moral circumstances governing each case? On the one hand we have a diplomat and Hellenist, a distinguished figure of the Enlightenment, performing an act of rescue, acting with the full knowledge and permission of the legal government of the day, subsequently called to account before a Parliamentary Select Committee, where his actions were again officially sanctioned. On the other hand there is the modern commercial trade in antiquities exported in contravention of the legislation of the country of origin. The answer is that there is no comparison. St Clair’s coupling of the two merely amounts to a slur on the name of the 7th Earl of Elgin.

In the light of these and other shortcomings in St Clair’s essay, we must look now to other accounts of the 1930s cleaning episode for a greater and better objectivity.

Internal British Museum Memoranda

In addition to these published reports, mention should also be made of two internal Museum Memoranda. The first is marked ‘Strictly Confidential’ and was drawn up anonymously as a briefing document for the Trustees at the time of the opening of the Duveen Galleries in June 1962, following repair of war-time damage. The paper is entitled ‘The Elgin Marbles’ and sets out a brief history of their acquisition and of claims for their return, before going on to talk about the cleaning:

The atmosphere of London is said to be harmful to the Marbles. But the sculptures in the British Museum are very much less decayed than those still in the Parthenon. Moreover, their new home, the Duveen Gallery, which has an electrostatic precipitator for cleaning the air, is designed to ensure their satisfactory preservation in the future. As to the method of display, it may be mentioned that, like the British Museum, both the Acropolis Museum in Athens and the Louvre exhibit their sections of the Parthenon frieze at eye level.

In early 1939, rumours were heard of serious damage caused to the Elgin Marbles during cleaning prior to their being moved into the Duveen Gallery newly built to house them. These rumours were dispelled by a statement by the Trustees, published in *The Times* on 18th May, 1939, which ran as follows.¹⁴⁴

The paper continues:

As *The Times* stated at the time, no-one could tell by ordinary methods of inspection which of the Marbles had been cleaned by which method, and it was not known whether any spots of discolouration had in fact been removed. Variations in the colour of the Marbles were the result of weathering during their long life before they were brought to England, and had nothing

to do with cleaning at this or any other time. The approved method of cleaning which had been introduced on the advice of the Museum Laboratory in 1932, consisted in the use of a neutral solution of medicinal soft-soap and ammonia with distilled water. Before this date, ordinary water had been used for cleaning.

Holcombe, foreman mason in charge of the controversial cleaning operations, stated in the press that he had used a blunt copper tool ‘to get off some of the dirtier spots’, but that the tool was softer than marble and no harm had come to the sculptures so treated. (There is no truth in the accusation, repeated as recently as May 1961, that acid was used in cleaning the Marbles). Holcombe also said he had used the same tools for cleaning marble under four directors (i.e. for more than 30 years), and had used them on the Sculptures of the Parthenon for 15 months. Considerable public concern was expressed at the time, notably by Jacob Epstein and it was alleged that the surface of the marble had been seriously affected. The exact extent of the damage cannot now be determined. Disciplinary action was taken by the Trustees against certain officials concerned in the cleaning incident and the then Keeper of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities resigned shortly afterwards on grounds of ill-health.

The second internal Memorandum was sent by Brian Cook, Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities to Jean Rankine, Deputy Director and dated 30 August 1983. Earlier that summer several events had occurred in relation to the ongoing campaign for the restitution of the sculptures of the Parthenon, including the much publicised visit of Melina Mercouri to the Museum in May. In the wake of these events, Cook drew up a report headed ‘Notes for updating the brief on the Parthenon Sculptures’ in which he recorded the principal occurrences. He added a further note entitled ‘Overcleaning of the Elgin Marbles’:

Since detailed reports appeared in many newspapers at the time and since the Museum’s records of the incident are available under the 30-year rule, there can be no question of fudging the issue. The essential facts are that the Departmental Mason (Arthur Holcombe) and labourers working under his charge used a copper tool to remove some persistent marks from the surface of some of the Marbles, including traces of the gold and yellow ‘patination’ that Pentelic marble acquires when exposed to the air for long periods. This was done without the authority or even the knowledge of the Keeper or Assistant Keeper. The facts were brought to light by the sculptor Jacob Epstein who stated that the cleaning had been going on for some 15 months. The Museum stopped the unauthorised work at once. Holcombe, who was 72, was sent into retirement on pension at three weeks’ notice. The Keeper (F N Pryce) went into early retirement, allegedly on grounds of ill health, and R Hinks (AK) resigned to join the Warburg Institute. At the same time the Director claimed that there was no connection between their departures and the overcleaning, but since the connection was admitted in the House of Commons there is no point in attempting to keep up the pretence.

The actual extent of the damage is open to exaggeration (as recently by Tzedakis),¹⁴⁵ and I recommend that the Trustees should first observe it for themselves and then decide whether to authorise publicity of the facts. Archaeologists who wish to consider the question in more detail will look first at the metopes and frieze: the metopes and cavalcade of the north frieze were cleaned, the east frieze was not, and the difference is obvious. On the other hand, a non-specialist may find it difficult to imagine what the metopes and north frieze were like before cleaning. It would therefore be worthwhile to look at the east pediment. Most of the figures were untouched but the lower part of E [*sic* for G] (‘Hebe’) was treated on the front. The line of demarcation is readily visible about half-way up the thighs. An earlier photograph in the departmental archives (glass negative broken) shows that ‘patination’ in the cleaned area was not in fact extensive.

The ‘plain copper tool’ used for cleaning was formerly kept in the Director’s office. I have never seen it myself, but Denys Haynes once told me that he had done so. Again it may be worthwhile to discover the implement and consider whether or not to make it public.

There has been a persistent rumour that Duveen was responsible for persuading Holcombe to undertake the work. This was denied at the time, e.g. in *The Daily Telegraph*, but I heard it myself in the USA during the 1960s, when an allegation of bribery was added. I know of no documentary evidence to support either the basic rumour or the extra allegation.

7 An evaluation of the documentary evidence

Between 1937 and 1938 unsupervised masons in The British Museum abraded the surface of some of the Parthenon Sculptures with copper chisels and carborundum, a practice not officially sanctioned. The Museum held an internal Board of Enquiry, which found evidence of dereliction of duty on the part of two senior Museum officials and the Foreman of masons. All three left the Museum as a result. Against the advice of some Trustees, the Director Sir John Forsdyke and the Board Chairman, Lord Macmillan attempted to play down in public what they privately described as serious damage. The attempt failed. The affair leaked into the newspapers and a scandal eventually ensued.

There have been suggestions of a continuing cover up. These must be rejected on the basis that the Press scandal of the day, and frequent and extensive coverage of the episode since, renders such concealment redundant. That scandal has remained alive, nevertheless, and the Museum has been accused of contributing to its persistence by never having published a full account of the episode, nor having made a proper assessment of how the ‘cleaning’ affected the sculptures. This omission is partly attributable to Forsdyke’s understatement at the time, partly to the interruption of the Second World War and partly, it must be said, to the Museum’s own reticence since the incident.

These papers represent the fullest record to date of the episode. So far as its own archival documents are concerned, however, the Museum can give no guarantee that what was said 60 years ago is reliable evidence for what was actually done to the sculptures. The Museum held an internal enquiry that was not independent. The results were not published. The Director of the Museum said one thing in private and another in public. Although there was talk of a report on the material consequences of the cleaning, none followed. Now, 60 years on, the sculptures remain the only reliable witness.

The documents are not a solid base from which to interpret the cleaning. Perhaps they were not intended to be such. The Museum was in the 1930s socially a very small place, with rivalries and petty jealousies rife among its exclusively male community. At the time of the cleaning, Forsdyke had only recently been promoted to his Directorship. Formerly he had been Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities. It is said that the decision was made not to go outside the Museum for a successor to the previous Director, Sir George Hill, because the major project of the day was Lord Duveen’s new gallery for the sculptures of the Parthenon.¹⁴⁶ It was thought that Forsdyke was peculiarly well-qualified to see this through to completion. In the

Museum, it does not seem to have been a popular appointment, least of all with Forsdyke’s former peers, the Keepers. One of these was Sydney Smith, by all accounts a difficult Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities (1931–48). He and Mrs Gulbenkian had been ushered into the gallery, where Forsdyke made the fateful remark, ‘They’re coming up rather white, aren’t they?’ It must have been a shock to Forsdyke when, in front of a visitor, his old rival turned on him with the words, ‘And I can tell you why...’¹⁴⁷

One of those who lost his job as a result of the furore that ensued was the promising young scholar, Roger Hinks. He died in 1963 after long service with the British Council. In the excellent edition of Hinks’ diaries, John Goldsmith has suggested that Forsdyke’s behaviour over the cleaning episode was less than honourable, and that much of what was said and done was designed to save his own neck.¹⁴⁸ The inference is that if Forsdyke were to survive, he had to construct a case against the scapegoats, the Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities, Frederick Pryce and his assistant Roger Hinks. So it was that what had been going on under Forsdyke’s nose for 15 months suddenly became a case of gross dereliction of duty by subordinates in his former Department. ‘The damage which has been caused is obvious and cannot be exaggerated’, was the conclusion of the report of the Trustees’ Board of Enquiry. Why then was it not noticed before? The fact is that both then and since the ‘damage’ was far from obvious and has been much exaggerated.

No less problematic is the highly inflammatory report to the Board of Enquiry by Harold Plenderleith, who at the time of the cleaning was scientist in charge of the Museum’s laboratory. William St Clair reports a conversation with him in 1997, shortly before his death, in which Plenderleith recalls that Forsdyke hated everyone, ‘was much feared and was effective in getting his own way.’¹⁴⁹ Plenderleith also had cause to feel animosity towards his peers, especially in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities. He was a pioneer of conservation science. In 1932, under pressure from Lord Duveen to brighten up the Parthenon Sculptures and rid them of their accumulated dirt, the Museum had charged Plenderleith with the task of devising a safe but effective means of cleaning the sculptures. This he did, and the sculpture was cleaned with a neutral solution of medicinal soft-soap and ammonia. At some point, however, the Museum masons, under the charge of the officers of the Greek and Roman Department, left off Plenderleith’s method and initiated the unauthorised cleaning of their own devising. Already before the final ‘discovery’, Plenderleith had intervened when he saw metal tools being used.¹⁵⁰ But why had he allowed it to continue? As with Forsdyke, so with Plenderleith, we must ask why, if the cleaning was as bad as later claimed, was it allowed to go on for 15 months? The sculptures were not kept hidden after they were cleaned, at least so far as the frieze and metopes are concerned, but were returned to public view pending their redisplay in Lord Duveen’s new gallery (**Plate 3**). Why, it must be asked, in the very small world of The British Museum, was an unauthorised cleaning, the results of which were for all to see, allowed to continue by the very people who subsequently condemned it?

Plenderleith complained that sculptures were chipped with copper chisels, the marks then removed by polishing with a loss of up to a tenth of an inch (2.5mm) of surface. If true, such action would indeed have damaged the sculptures to the extent of removing important detail in drapery and anatomy. However, as the sculptures themselves bear out, this was not done. The rubbing of the surface with a copper tool, although not itself advisable, is not the same as chiselling. So why did he say it? There was perhaps a degree of personal outrage on his part against the officers of the Greek and Roman Department for their having ignored his instructions. This may have distorted his judgement.

In connection with Plenderleith’s testimony, it is interesting to read his correspondence 15 years later with Professor Homer A Thompson of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens.¹⁵¹ On 30 May 1953, Thompson proposed to clean off the historical coatings on the east inner frieze of the Hephaestum (Theseum) a sister monument of the Parthenon situated on a hill overlooking the Athenian Agora. On 1 July Plenderleith replied laying out a range of possible approved methods. Among them is cited the use of the very tools which he had condemned in the cleaning of the Parthenon Sculptures:

(2) Chiselling by wooden wedges: If good results obtained up to a point you could go one stage further with a soft copper chisel as used for cleaning marble gravestones. This has about the same degree of hardness as marble in Moh’s scale.

(3) Abrasives? Definitely dangerous but possibly justified for removing spots. Sharp sand, pumice or carborundum, applied with plenty of water, but better to avoid them if possible on sculpture.

Professor Thompson did avoid them, but went instead for steel chisels and brass brushes! The cleaning was done between June and September of 1953 by two Greek workmen under the direction of Miss Alison Frantz.¹⁵² Thompson himself wrote to Plenderleith:¹⁵³

After experimenting with implements of wood, bone, copper and brass, we found that light chisels of steel gave the best results, being both speedier and, where it was thickest, the deposit flaked off under gentle tapping, but for the most part it was loosened by the edge of the chisel under pressure applied by hand. Over much of the background, where the ancient surface tooling was somewhat rougher, a soft brass brush was used; in these areas no effort was made to remove the last particles of deposit from the miniature depressions, particularly since it soon appeared that the thoroughly cleaned figures stood out more effectively against a slightly off-white ground... .

The 1950s cleaning of the Hephaestum frieze is a remarkable, but hitherto overlooked event in the history of conservation (**Plates 23–25**). In advising on it, Plenderleith seems himself to have forgotten what he had said 15 years earlier in condemnation of the removal of ‘spots’ from the Parthenon Sculptures using copper chisels and abrasives. By all the same arguments that condemned the cleaning of the Parthenon Sculptures in The British Museum, the stripping of the ‘patinas’ from the Hephaestum with steel chisels and wire brushes, should not have happened. No criticism was voiced then, nor since. Let us be clear; the Hephaestum cleaning is not mentioned here with the intention of attaching scandal to it. I wish, however, to demonstrate the degree to which The British Museum incident has been

isolated from similar cases and to ask the question why it should be so. The answer is that interest in the scandal has overshadowed interest in what actually was done.

Hitherto, those who have commented upon the episode since the sculptures were re-exhibited after the War have done so from the point of view of a scandal. Some have done it privately in their diaries, published posthumously (Hinks, Crawford). Others have declaimed aloud in the political arena of the debate over the ownership of the Parthenon Sculptures (Hitchens, Tzedakis). Others still have shouted their protest from the high ground of moral indignation (Epstein, Brandi, St Clair). The combination of outrage and scandal has obscured the need for proper assessment of what actually was done. Brandi’s account, for example, is coloured by rhetoric, while his observations about the sculpture are more sensation than sense.

A preoccupation with scandal has not only obscured what was done in 1937–38, but also what happened to the sculptures before then. The 1930s cleaning has a broader context, which to some extent explains it. It is interesting to discover that modern instigators of public outrage at the Museum’s treatment of the sculptures have their forerunners in such persons as ‘Marmor’, the anonymous author of complaints in *The Times* about the Victorian scrubbing of them. Nor is The British Museum alone in having a history of such criticism. In the 19th century ‘Verax’ (J Morris Moore) was to the National Gallery what ‘Marmor’ was to the Museum.¹⁵⁴ It is also interesting to reflect upon the degree to which criticism of cleaning the Parthenon Sculptures has followed the pattern of controversy over the cleaning of pictures at the National Gallery. There have been others, but there were three main periods of controversy, in 1846–53, 1936–7 and 1946–7. Each acted as a prelude to debate over the cleaning of the Parthenon Sculptures: in 1857–8, 1938–9 and 1950.¹⁵⁵ Of the 1936–37 controversy Philip Hendy writes: ‘There has never been anywhere so protracted an argument over the cleaning of a single picture. It began with an article by the art critic of *The Daily Telegraph* published 19 December 1936, but the resulting correspondence soon spread to *The Times* and other newspapers. By March 1937 more than 50 letters and a dozen articles had been printed, and a broadcast had been made.’¹⁵⁶

From this we can deduce how well-primed was the public for the cleaning scandal of the sculptures of the Parthenon in 1938–39.

The lust for scandal has continued. The restitution lobby, in particular, has focused its attention on the cleaning of the sculptures of the Parthenon. Christopher Hitchens is one of those who has dwelt upon the episode at length as part of the argument for returning the sculptures to Greece. With a long account of the cleaning, he counters the claim that ‘The marbles are safer in London than they would have been in Athens’, and concludes: ‘if there are to be arguments about safety and conservation, then they must take account of time and chance in London as well as of time and chance in Athens.’¹⁵⁷ I would agree. Hitchens, however, fails to apply his own fair principle. In order to balance the argument, he should have given instances of

where the Acropolis sculptures have suffered in Athens. Architectural sculptures that Lord Elgin did not remove from the Acropolis – the Caryatids of the Erechtheum, the battle friezes of the Temple of Athena Nike, the pedimental sculptures of the Parthenon and its west Ionic frieze – have all been damaged by continued exposure to the weather. The west frieze was only taken down from the Parthenon in 1993 and now presents a major problem of conservation. The Nike Templefrieze has only just come down. Its pollution-ravaged surface compares unfavourably with the casts made of it by Lord Elgin. In her book on the Parthenon pediment sculptures, the Greek archaeologist Olga Palagia writes of the statues of Kekrops and his daughter: ‘B and C were finally removed from the [west] pediment to the Acropolis Museum in 1977 after the industrial pollution of modern Athens had wreaked havoc on their delicate surface.’¹⁵⁸

8 The surface condition of the Parthenon Sculptures

The unreliability of documentary evidence leaves the sculptures of the Parthenon as their own best witness for the consequences of the cleaning of the 1930s. As was, however, demonstrated at The British Museum conference that gave rise to these proceedings, even this material evidence is subject to differing interpretations.

i. Method and terminology

Use of photographs

There may be dissent over the extent to which the condition of the sculpture before-and-after cleaning can be inferred

from old black-and-white photographs. There are two principal photographic sources: those published by A H Smith in his monumental book, *The Sculptures of the Parthenon* (1910). The other is the photographs by Frédéric Boissonnas and W A Mansell for Maxime Collignon’s publication, *Le Parthénon* (1912). It is right to be cautious about the use of such images, but it is also my firm conviction that if the right questions are asked of them, they can be a valuable and indispensable resource.¹⁵⁹

Use of casts

These are most effective when documenting substantial losses, such as the well-known instance of damage occurring through continued weathering of the west frieze and other sculptures left on the Parthenon after Lord Elgin’s time.¹⁶⁰ Again, there is the loss of a fragment of drapery from south metope III mentioned at the conference by A Mantis¹⁶¹ and the flake from the rump of one of the horses of west frieze Block II observed by St Clair.¹⁶² More problematic is the attempt to use casts as a record of the condition of previous surfaces. While casts can record a given surface remarkably accurately, they can also replicate the plastic form of sculpture while at the same time presenting an altered or entirely new surface.

Even in the former case, where the surface is faithfully reproduced, reading a cast is problematic. St Clair claims to see evidence of the removal of tool marks in a comparison of a 19th-century cast with the original of the shoulders of the Helios of the east pediment. When the two were brought

together in the Duveen Gallery, however, his claim was shown to be unfounded. The marks of the claw-chisel indicated on the cast are preserved in the sculpture.¹⁶³

Original surface

There is the problem of the terminology used to describe the surface condition of the sculptures of the Parthenon, both those in London and in Athens. One difficulty has to do with the notion of an original surface. The term has been used with no strict definition of what this actually means. As we see them displayed in the Duveen Gallery of The British Museum, the sculptures are the product of their history in the Museum and in other previous lives. The variety of surfaces that result are in a sense all original, but what seems mostly to be meant by the term is ‘the nearest we come to the ancient finished surface as left by the carver’s final touches’.

Patina

This term has been used to mean more than one thing. I shall not here enter into a lengthy discussion of its origin and use.¹⁶⁴ Suffice it to say that I have avoided the word altogether in preference for coating, by which I have in mind the orange-brown coatings which were discussed at length in an article with A Middleton.¹⁶⁵

ii. Types of surface encountered in the sculptures – an overview

Natural weathering

It is important at the outset to set the whole issue into proper perspective by observing first that the sculptures as they now are owe the greater part of their surface to natural weathering. For example, in many parts of the north frieze blocks showing the cavalcade, large areas of pitting framed within discernible contours are the result of attack by biological growth on the permanently shaded north side of the temple (Plate 4). This natural damage is repeated over much of the north frieze, both in London and in Athens. It accounts for substantial loss of the original surface.¹⁶⁶

Another sort of weathering is the visible impact of wind and the rain, ice and dust which the wind drives against the stone. Parallel lines in the marble represent the contours of the geological bed of the stone. They are differentially weathered so that softer elements are stripped out leaving the harder elements standing proud. Where this weathering occurs, even the higher surface is always below that which was originally carved. A good example of it is to be found in the distinctive markings of the head of Selene’s horse from the east pediment (Plate 5).

Finishing processes

Where neither natural weathering nor cleaning has removed it, the original surface as defined above survives. Although never extensive, and now less than it was, nevertheless enough survives of the original surface to show that the carvers did not work the stone to one uniform finish. Instead, in one relief or, in the case of the pediment sculptures, in a single figure, a variety of finishing processes is found:

- At one extreme there are the high polishes of some parts

- of Helios from the east pediment and Ilissus from the west (Plate 6);¹⁶⁷
- then, more common, there are the smoothed, but unpolished surfaces;
- the parallel lines left by the rasp (Plate 7);
- the coarser result of the claw chisel (Plate 8);
- and in some places, the coarsest of all, is the heavy pitting of the point (Plate 9).

Over this combination of worked surfaces are laid the effects of two and a quarter millennia of weathering, and on top of this again the effects of nearly 200 years of Museum cleaning.

The nature of the 1930s cleaning

Within the 1930s cleaning, even in the case of a single piece, there is not just one treatment, but rather a variety of different treatments can be found all on the same stone. Interference with the surface of the marble in the 1930s, whatever we think of its absolute merits was by and large carefully and thoughtfully done. It was not the aggressive violation that is implied in the documents of the Board of Enquiry. In particular, Plenderleith’s deposition to the Board suggesting the chipping of the marble and the rubbing of it down to a depth of one tenth of an inch (2.5mm) does not represent the actual situation. His account was perhaps more an expression of his professional frustration than a reflection of what actually was done.

Nor does the colourful language of Cesare Brandi, writing in 1950 reflect the true situation. His talk of a

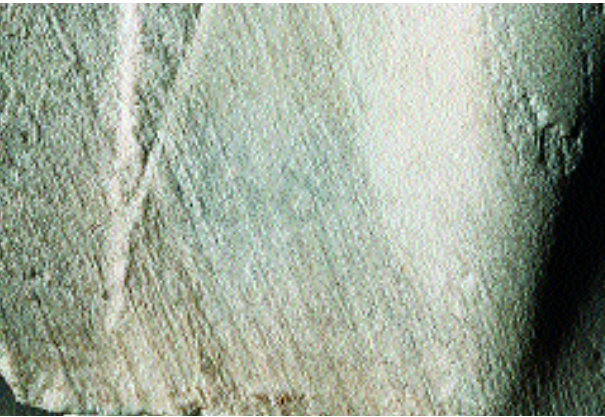


Plate 5 East pediment figure O. Head of a horse of Selene. Detail of weather erosion of the marble grain.



Plate 6 East pediment figure A. Helios. Detail of the proper right shoulder showing polish.



Plate 7 West frieze Block I. Marshal in cavalcade. Detail of background above proper right foot showing traces of rasp.



Plate 8 North frieze Block XXIV. Chariot scene. Detail of hub of chariot wheel showing traces of claw chisel.



Plate 9 South metope XXX. Lapith and Centaur. Detail of left edge of block showing work with a point.

‘ferocious and irreverent scouring’ implying an extensive removal of original surface is unacceptable. Claims that iron tools were used to scratch the marble and that a point was used to outline the figures against their background are insupportable. The tools are today preserved in the Museum’s Department of Conservation. There are no iron ones among them, nor do official documents speak of such (Plate 10).

iii. Types of surface – a detailed analysis

Surfaces unaffected by the cleaning of the 1930s

Unaffected surfaces, both weathered and tooled in antiquity, can be found in the great majority of pediment sculptures and in the east frieze. There is also the tray-bearer of the north frieze. The cavalcade of the north frieze is affected only in very particular places. south metope XXVII is also virtually untouched.

Weathered surfaces affected by the cleaning of the 1930s

There are subcategories here:

- a) There is the buffing of the biologically-attacked surfaces of the horses of one of the north frieze chariots (Plate 11). There is a slight blunting of the pitting and a blurring of its contour edges.
- b) Different again is the rubbing of surfaces destroyed by wind and rain. In order to understand what was done here, first let us again identify a weathered surface that is not affected by rubbing. On the thighs of the Lapith of metope XXVII can be seen a clear line demarcating two surfaces (Plate 12). On one side (right) is the weathered and unrubbed surface; this is stratigraphically lower than the smooth surface on the other side. This smooth surface has coating and, although some of this may have been removed in the 1930s or earlier, its smoothness is not the result of over cleaning. It is very close to the surface as left by the ancient carver. The line, between these two surfaces – weathered and preserved – marks the edge of the rain-and wind-shadow and is entirely natural. There is very little, if any rubbing of the weathered surface on this stone. Not even the background is seriously affected, as in the case of other metopes.

On south metope XXIX by contrast the weathered surface is rubbed, mostly on the background, but the rubbing is also carried over onto the figure of the girl. The weathering of the drapery of the girl appears smooth, milky and blunted (Plate 13).

- The rubbing of weathered surface also occurs in the lower drapery, front and back of figure G of the east pediment. This is perhaps the best of all examples, for here a clear boundary can be seen in the difference between the unrubbed drapery above and the rubbed drapery below (Plate 14). There was very limited removal of coating here, since the original surface survived only in the sheltered folds of the drapery. The difference between rubbed and unrubbed is slight and there is no discernible drop in level such as is suggested by Plenderleith’s report.
- c) Another type of surface is that of the back of the head of Selene’s horse. Old pre-clean photographs show very little patina, some biological attack and an otherwise relatively smooth surface (Plate 15). Suggestions that the front of the



Plate 10 Tools used in the 1930s cleaning of the Parthenon Sculptures.

head is spoiled by over cleaning cannot be substantiated, and are indicative of how little this problem has been understood. The back is, however, rubbed (Plate 16). d) A fourth type of weathered surface is to be found in the Ionic frieze. Partially sheltered for so long by the coffering of the peristyle, this is less destroyed than the surface of the more exposed metopes, but nonetheless the original finish has been weathered away. How is it certain that the original surface was not scraped off in the 1930s? If it was scraped off then, signs of the coating would show up in the pre-clean photographs. They do, but only in isolated areas that are the exceptions proving the rule. Where sculpture, such as the east frieze, was unaffected by the 1930s cleaning we see a surface in the photographs that is remarkably similar to that which we see today. Where the surface was affected, as in the north, south and west friezes, the sculpture is unnaturally smooth, and the sugary texture of the marble has a milky finish. The effect is concentrated more on the backgrounds than on the figures. There is no very great loss of surface, but where it does occur, there is some blunting of detail. There is not, however, any loss of detail such as veins in flesh or folds of drapery.

It may be wrong to presuppose that such blunting, the creation of an artificial *sfumato*, must necessarily all be the result of the 1930s cleaning. One area where it occurs is the heads of the horses of one of the north frieze chariots, Block XXIV (Plate 17). It is certain that this was polished in the 1930s, but take out the dirt that shows in Boissonnas’ photograph, and would the image be very different?

It is also important to take into account the fact that the polyethelene glycol wax put on to protect the sculptures after they were last cleaned is contributing to this *sfumato* by closing the pores of the marble and making it appear smoother. This protective coat, commonly known as carbowax, has served the sculptures very well in keeping out the dirt and preventing the need for another clean since 1970. It may, however, be suggesting that the smoothing is more than it actually is (Plates 18–19).

That said, substantial parts of the frieze, the metopes and much less of the pediment sculptures did have their weathered areas rubbed smooth by the 1930s cleaning, and this is a change between the way they were before and how they appear now.

Coated surfaces affected by the cleaning of the 1930s

In the 1930s the coating was more extensive over the south



Plate 11 North frieze Block XXIV. Chariot scene. Detail of horse showing perimeter of area corroded by biological attack.



Plate 13 South metope XXIX. Lapith and Centaur. Detail of draped proper left leg of Lapith girl, showing result of cleaning.



Plate 12 South metope XXVII. Lapith and Centaur. Detail of proper right thigh of Lapith showing weather-line.



Plate 14 East pediment figure G. Running girl. The upper thigh bears a line distinguishing between the cleaned surface below and the unaffected area above.



Plate 15 East pediment figure O. Head of a horse of Selene. Back view showing result of cleaning.



Plate 16 Late-19th century photograph of same view as Plate 15, before the 1930s cleaning.



Plate 17 North frieze Block XXIV. Chariot scene. Detail of heads of horses.

frieze than ever it was on the north. There never was, however, on either frieze anything like the survival of coating that St Clair has claimed was on the sculptures when they came to the Museum in 1816.¹⁶⁸ The simple proof is the lack of coating on frieze blocks in Athens. Not only is the north side of the frieze susceptible to biological attack, but also to erosion by wind. I am assured by my colleagues in Athens that the run of blocks from the north frieze displayed in the Acropolis Museum have never had their coatings artificially removed. The only explanation therefore for the absence of coating on the Acropolis Museum blocks is that, it was never there when the blocks were found. Only some joining fragments and Block X of the north frieze have coating. Block X has a different history from the rest having been removed from the building to make a window at the time of the conversion of the temple into a church.¹⁶⁹ Its different surface can be explained therefore by its different fortune. All other blocks are denuded of their coating, we must suppose by natural causes. If that is true of the Acropolis sculptures, then it follows that it must also be true of The British Museum's blocks from the north frieze. In the Boissonnas photograph, the few traces of the coating that remain can be readily picked out, notably that around the calf of the boy on north frieze XLVII. This coating was largely removed in the 1930s (**Plate 20**).

There are two separate categories for the removal of coating in the 1930s:

- a) coating removed and resulting surface unpolished;
- b) coating removed and resulting surface polished.

An instance of category (a), coating removed and surface unpolished, can be found in the now speckled cloak of the marshal who appears on west frieze Block I (**Plate 21**). This retained its dark coating up until the 1930s, as early photographs show (**Plate 22**). In the 1930s this coating was largely removed, leaving traces on the background and on the figure. This speckled effect is very reminiscent of the cleaning of the Hephaesteum Temple frieze in the Athenian Agora, with steel chisels and wire brushes, in the 1950s (**Plates 23–25**). The precise methods of this cleaning are well documented.¹⁷⁰ Homer Thompson, Field Director of Agora Excavations, explained how, using steel chisels and brass brushes, the Greek workmen stripped the coatings, leaving traces only where they were sheltered in the recesses of the ancient tooling (**Plate 25**). 'In these areas', writes Thompson, 'no effort was made to remove the last particles of deposit from the miniature depressions, particularly since it soon appeared that the thoroughly cleaned figures stood out more effectively against a slightly off-white ground.' The resulting cameo effect was curious even for the time.

An instance of (b), coating removed and surface polished, can be found on a Parthenon north frieze block in The British Museum where the remains of coating were removed in the 1930s in one localised area (**Plate 26**). The abrasion was restricted to this one place and not carried over the body of the block. This is an exception that proves the rule that the cavalcade of the north frieze is largely unaffected by the unauthorised cleaning.

The south frieze cavalcade had retained more of its coating and consequently was more affected than that of the north. On a block of the south frieze before and after



Plate 18 North frieze Block XXIV. Chariot scene. Detail of flank of horse with carbowax present.



Plate 19 Detail similar to that shown in Plate 18, with rectangular patch of carbowax removed.

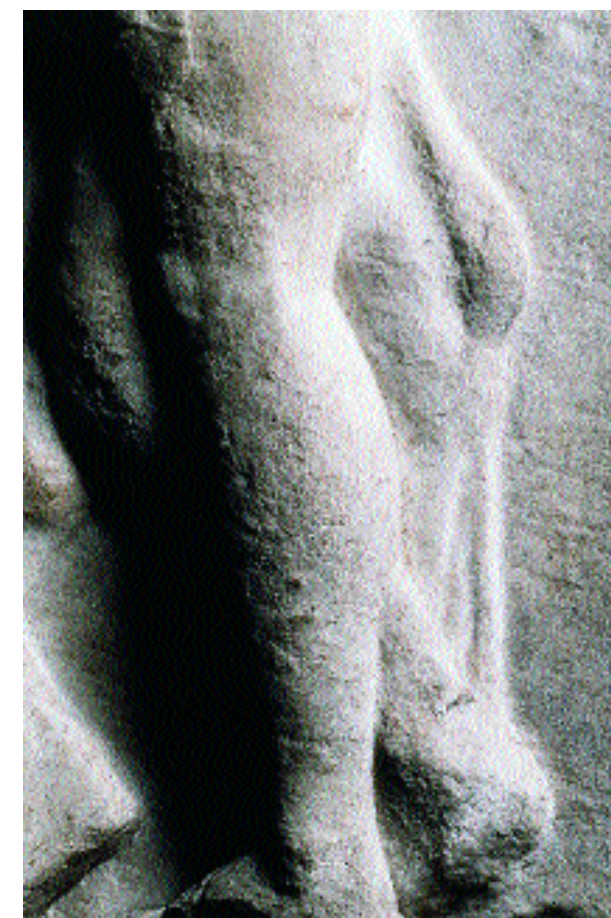


Plate 20 North frieze Block XLVII. Cavalcade. Detail of calf of boy, showing result of removal of coating in the 1930s.



Plate 21 West frieze Block I. Marshal. Detail of cloak showing speckled effect resulting from removal of coating in the 1930s.



Plate 22 Late-19th-century photograph of subject shown in Plate 21, before cleaning.

cleaning (**Plates 27–28**) the coating lies extensively over the marble, streaked by the erosion of natural weathering. The surface today is speckled with coating and it was not polished. There is, however, extensive polishing of the background of many blocks of the south frieze, both previously coated and uncoated. The whole of the background of south frieze Block XIX showing horsemen is extensively rubbed, both where coating remained and where it did not (**Plate 29**).

The coating is removed with varying degrees of care. On the whole the standard of care is high. This was not the violent scrub it is often portrayed as. Little of the marble, if any, is removed in the process. The situation is not, however, always the same. In one inconspicuous place on a metope we find coating removed with an indiscernible interference with the marble stratum (**Plate 30**). In another, where less care has been applied, there is visible scratching or gouging of the surface (**Plate 31**). Happily, this is by far the exception rather than the rule.

It is, of course, now considered dangerous ever to remove a historic surface, no matter how disfiguring, from the body of an ancient sculpture. One fragment of the Parthenon frieze in the Acropolis Museum has had its coating removed and the detail is unnaturally blurred. This is the fragment of Block V of the east frieze showing the head of Iris.¹⁷¹ It used to be shown in the Acropolis Museum with a cast of the remainder of the block preserved in The British Museum. It was afterwards separated from the cast and is

now shown as an isolated fragment.¹⁷² It was probably then that the surface was stripped back to the raw marble (**Plates 32–33**). The Hephaesteum frieze is a more serious case. The removal of coating from sculptures in a protected, museum environment has a limited effect. In the case of sculpture exposed to weathering, removal of the coating appears to speed up the continued erosion of surface. Already by 1974, when at the behest of J Dörig, the east frieze of the Hephaesteum was cleaned and photographed again, all traces of the colours reported in the 1950s had disappeared.

iv. Conclusion

I shall sum up by answering three major questions:

1. *How much of the total area of the sculptures was affected by the cleaning of the 1930s?*

It should now be evident why the answer to this question is not so straightforward as it might seem, but an estimate at least should be given here. Taking together Helios, the backs of the heads of his horses, part of figure G and the back of the head of the horse of Selene we arrive at a figure of some 10% of the total east pediment. Of the frieze, the east was not touched at all and I am going to exclude the cavalcade of the north, because it is so little affected and it would be misleading to include it. The total area then, covering the two blocks of the west frieze, the chariot sequence of the north frieze and most of the south amounts to about 40%. The metopes are more affected, but not all to the same



Plate 23 Elias Makris using a steel chisel to strip coatings from the east frieze of the Hephaesteum in Athens in 1953.



Plate 24 Hephaesteum east frieze. Seated god partially stripped.



Plate 25 Hephaesteum east frieze. Detail showing speckled effect after removal of coatings.

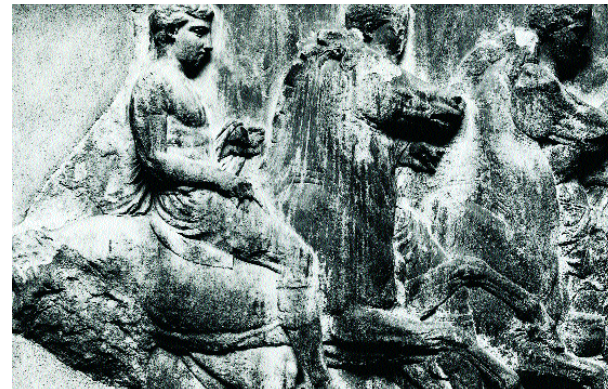


Plate 27 South frieze Block X. Cavalcade. The weathered coating present before cleaning.



Plate 29 South frieze Block XIX. Cavalcade. Detail showing area of background affected by the 1930s cleaning.



Plate 26 North frieze Block XLII. Cavalcade. Detail of bottom right-hand corner affected by removal of coating in the 1930s.



Plate 28 South frieze Block X. Cavalcade. The coatings removed.



Plate 30 South metope VI. Lapith and Centaur. Detail of the broken upper leg of a Centaur showing coating removed.

degree and more on the backgrounds than on the figures and I would estimate their figure at around 60%.

2. *Are the sculptures ruined?*

Some people have said that, with their disfiguring coatings removed, the sculptures look better than ever.¹⁷³ Certainly, to judge from photographs, they look better now after their 1930s cleaning and the further cleaning of 1969–70, than they did for much of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th. Much of this 19th-century dirt still marred the sculptures in the 1930s. Indeed, even now some blocks of the frieze have a different colour because they retain carbon from pollution. These are the most weathered blocks of the north and south friezes that were not affected by the 1930s clean. There can be no doubt that some part of the outrage expressed at the 1930s cleaning had to do with the fact that people had become used to seeing the sculptures in their dirty state.¹⁷⁴

Setting these considerations on one side, the fact that the cleaning was unauthorised was a scandal; the way the Museum tried and failed to cover it up, was a scandal, but – was what actually was done a scandal? One can understand why Duveen, and his agents, wanted to clean the sculpture the way they did. Their motives were no worse than those that inspired the cleaning of the Hephaestum. Alison Frantz wrote innocently of her joy at seeing the sculptures after cleaning ‘to be as fresh as the day they were made.’ In the 1950s, as in the 1930s, the importance of preserving original surface was not the priority it is today. ‘The Greek archaeological authorities’, wrote Thompson, ‘inspected the work both during its progress and after; they expressed themselves as well-pleased – thank goodness.’¹⁷⁵ Now, however, stripped of its historic surfaces, coated in grime and discoloured by pollution, the Hephaestum frieze has lost its charm.

3. *Should they have done it?*

Once again, laying aside the scandal, the short answer to that question is, no. It cannot, however, be an absolute judgement. It is an archaeological one. Archaeologists are greedy for information. We want it all there, with nothing taken away, no matter how disfiguring. Since, more often than not, we cannot have it all, we have invariably to resort to reconstructing it. What we do not want to be told is that evidence was there once, but was taken off because it didn’t look very nice. But this is only one point of view and since the beginning of archaeology, others have seen it differently. No shame or scandal should attach to such a view when it is expressed openly. The scandal of The British Museum’s cleaning of the sculptures of the Parthenon 60 years ago is not what they did, but the way they did it.

St Clair has a different view. He suggests the historical responsibility of The British Museum is to preserve the sculptures of the Parthenon in the condition they were in when they first came to the Museum, and that anything short of that is a failure. If that were the case, then everybody throughout the world charged with responsibility for maintaining the material culture of the past, has failed. All museum curators know that objects in their care change as part of their museum life. Some museums have better

archives than others, and The British Museum’s history is better documented than most. In *Archaeologists and Aesthetes* I charted the history of the sculpture collections of The British Museum and wrote extensively of the many changes that the sculptures of the Parthenon underwent, including those occasioned by the foulness of the London atmosphere. No reviewer attached scandal to that account. No one attempted to condemn the present by the mistakes of the past. Events in the past, over which the present can have no control, were seen properly as what they are, history.

The controversial cleaning of the sculptures of the Parthenon happened 60 years ago. All those involved are dead. The British Museum does not defend their mistakes, nor claim a right to a record of impeccable curatorship. No museum could. The British Museum is not infallible; its history is pretty much a formula for the human condition itself, a series of good intentions marred by the occasional mistake. The 1930s cleaning was such a mistake. That event colours, but does not change, the Museum’s overall commitment to safeguarding the Marbles. The historical justification of the Museum’s claim to safeguard them has not been the ‘cynical sham’ of infallibility that St Clair attributes to it,¹⁷⁶ but the simple fact that if the sculptures had not come to the Museum when they did, they would not survive as they do. This is not an opinion – it is a fact. In an ideal world Elgin’s men would not have damaged the Parthenon in removing the sculptures, but in an ideal world the Athenians of the 5th century AD would not have attacked the metopes with chisels; Morosini in the 17th century would



Plate 31 South metope VIII. Lapith and Centaur. Detail of underside of crouching Lapith. Scratches are visible in the coating on the calf.



Plate 32 East frieze Block V. Head of Iris in Athens, fragment before cleaning.



Plate 33 East frieze Block V. Head of Iris in Athens, after cleaning.

not have aimed his cannons at the temple, and in this century Nicholas Balanos would never have been put in charge of its restoration, nor would modern pollution have destroyed its surface.

The cleaning of the sculptures of the Parthenon in the 1930s was an unfortunate incident of another generation and another age. The tragedy of the present generation has been to witness the progressive deterioration of the sculptures that have been left until recently on buildings in Athens, while some are still exposed. The continued deterioration of the west frieze still on the building until 1993, and the spoiling of all the Acropolis sculptures exposed to acid rain until the recent removal of some, but not all, to the shelter of the Acropolis Museum, is the tragedy of our time.

Writing in *The Times* newspaper,¹⁷⁷ the editor Peter Stothard called for an end to the ‘Chisellers’ War’. He saw the setting out of a full report of what happened at The British Museum in the 1930s as a precondition of such peace and demanded transparency in the process. I would agree and only add that if transparency is desirable for one, it is so for all. And, as we look out from our glass-houses into those of our neighbours, who will dare to cast the first stone?

Notes

- Jenkins 1992, 225–28.
- Jenkins 1999, 43–45.
- Nick Fielding, *The Mail on Sunday*, 7 June 1998, trailing St Clair *LEM3*.
- Scrapbook in Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities.
- See below, page 4.
- Jenkins 1988.
- LEM3*, 289.
- LEM3*, 299.
- LEM3*, 281.
- LEM3*, 289. For the painting see Jenkins 1992, 38 and 76, fig. 9 with colour pl. II.
- LEM3*, 289.
- For a colour reproduction of Leighton’s portrait see Jones *et al* 1996, 190–191, no. 84.
- St Clair 1999, 418.
- See below pages 12–19.
- For the full text see page 11.
- LEM3*, 308.
- LEM3*, 310.
- LEM3*, 312.
- The *fortuna* of these and other sculptures of the Museum is told in Jenkins 1992, *passim*.
- Smith 1916, 297–98.
- Jenkins 1992, 81–90.
- Jenkins 1992, 90–101; 221–29.
- Jenkins 1992, 223, fig. 84.
- Jenkins 1992, 226 and 1994, 205.
- Jenkins 1992, 225–26.
- The text which follows in this section was first published as Jenkins 1999.
- LEM3*, 147–50.
- OP XXXXIII 5, July 1845, letter from J Henning to J Forshall, Museum Secretary.
- For Nollekens, see Smith 1828 *passim*.
- OP XXXII, 6 January 1845, letter to W R Hamilton.
- Jenkins 1990, 202.
- Jenkins 1990, 104–105. Note that in his attack on the Museum’s stewardship, *LEM3*, 286, St Clair falsely reports my own research to claim that the Museum made moulds from the original sculptures c. 1901–1912.
- C 3301, 11 December 1830.
- C 6624, 8 March 1845.
- OP XLVI, May 1851.

- OP LVI, 26 March 1857; Report of the Select Committee on the Site of the National Gallery, Parliamentary Papers 1857, session 2, XXIV.
- OP LVI, 30 April 1857; Sub-Committee on Antiquities 15 May 1857.
- Sub-Committee on Antiquities 19 June 1857; Westmacott, letter 8 January 1857; Hawkins, 17 June 1857; Faraday, 13 June 1857.
- Jenkins 1992, *passim*.
- C 9373, 27 March 1858.
- Jenkins 1992, 86–88.
- Jenkins 1992 48–55.
- C 9421, 26 June 1858; OP LX, 25 June 1858.
- OR LXII, 6 January 1859.
- OR 9 October 1867.
- OR 25 June 1868.
- OR 8 October 1873.
- C12848, 8 November 1873; Jenkins 1992, 98–99, fig. 31.
- OR April – December 1902.
- OR July 1871; June 1926.
- OR 23 January 1933.
- Crawford 1984, 8 May 1931, 537.
- South metope XXXI and south frieze XIII – in both Michaelis and Jenkins numbering.
- OR April 1932.
- OR 23 January 1933.
- See below, page 8.
- OR for these years.
- OR February 1934.
- OR These were NXXXI, XXXIII, XXXVII–XLVII which at the time were numbered in the Museum as N26, 28, 32–42.
- C 5488.
- Appendix 1 with Forsdyke’s letter to Pryce.
- Appendix 2.
- Appendix 3 and 4.
- Later Lincoln Professor of Classical Archaeology, University of Oxford.
- Appendix 5.
- Appendix 4.
- For Pinker, see Jenkins 1992, 192.
- Appendix 6.
- Appendix 7.
- British Museum Archives Letter Books: Departments in Particular, May 1932 – July 1941.
- Jenkins 1994, 203.
- Appendix 8.
- Appendix 9 arranged chronologically.
- Cf Hinks 1984, 60, where in his diary entry for 29 December 1939 the writer says he was told that Harlech had spoken up for him.
- Undated letter marked ‘Sunday’.
- Dated 28 October 1937.
- Appendix 10. Letters are arranged chronologically.
- Appendix 11, arranged chronologically.
- The Telegraph*, 19 March 1939.
- Appendix 10, letter to Sir Henry Alexander Miers, 12 May 1939.
- Byron *English Bards and, Scotch Reviewers* (1809), lines 1027–30.
- Appendix 11.
- Appendix 10, letter dated 18 May 1939.
- Appendix 11.
- Appendix 11.
- Epstein’s letters on the ‘Elgin Marbles’ are reprinted in Epstein 1942, 181–88.
- Appendix 10.
- Notices given on 16 May 1939, reported in the *Evening Standard*, 17 May 1939.
- For other Parliamentary interest in the affair, see *LEM3*, 302.
- Jenkins 1994, 203–209.
- Letter to *The Times*, 9 September 1948.
- Jenkins 1994, 207.
- Evening Standard* and *Evening News*, 25 November 1949
- 5 September 1949.
- 6 September 1949.
- Undated cutting in the scrapbook in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities.
- ‘The cleaning of pictures in relation to patina, varnish and glazes’, *The Burlington Magazine* XCI, July 1949, 183–88, and see also XCII, October 1950, 297–98.
- Brandt 1950.

- 100 Blocks V to VIII in both Michaelis and Jenkins numbering.
- 101 Brandt 1951 and 1953.
- 102 M Beard, ‘Plunder Blunder’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 June 1998, 5–6.
- 103 Rudenstine 1999, 370–71.
- 104 Some of these errors and misrepresentations were corrected in I Jenkins, ‘Dirty Play in a Game of Marbles’, *The Times*, 11 June 1998, and in Jenkins 2000, 9–15.
- 105 St Clair 1999. My reply here was first published in Jenkins 2001. I am grateful to Oxford University Press and the editors of *IJCP* for permission to reproduce the text.
- 106 *LEM3*, 298. The Board of Enquiry’s ‘Second Report’ postdates and replaces the letter to Macmillan which Forsdyke wrote on 3 November 1938, quoted by St Clair on 470. It also condemns as hearsay Bernard Ashmole’s suggestion that ‘Duveen had in effect bribed the chief mason’ – Ashmole 1994, 69.
- 107 See objections to this misapprehension in the works cited at note 104.
- 108 For Carrey’s drawings reproduced in colour, see Bowie and Thimme 1971.
- 109 See above note 10.
- 110 For a history and analysis of the surface condition of the west frieze of the Parthenon, see Galanou and Dogani 1993.
- 111 Ashurst and Dimes 1990, vol I, 144–45, 155–57 and vol II, 75–76, 241.
- 112 Skoulikidis 1994, 15.
- 113 Smith 1916, 248–51.
- 114 Jenkins 1992, 53 and 75.
- 115 For Westmacott Snr, the cast-maker, see Jenkins 1990, 89–114. For Westmacott jnr see Jenkins 1992, 50–51.
- 116 I cover the search for polychromy in Jenkins 1988, 183–207 and casting in Jenkins 1990, 89–114.
- 117 Jenkins 1988, 185–86. Hawkins 1839, 44. The reference is to A L Millin, *Monumens antiques inédits ou nouvellement expliqués* (Imperial Press 1806) vol 2, 48.
- 118 *LEM3*, 285; Cockerell 1830, 26.
- 119 Cockerell, 11.
- 120 The principal subject of Jenkins 1988.
- 121 Jenkins 1988, 188–89.
- 122 Penrose 1851, 56. In his pl. 1, he did not indicate any colour traces on the metopes but does show red and blue on the architecture.
- 123 Kouzeli 1989, 168–69.
- 124 Kouzeli 1990, 241–43.
- 125 Jenkins 1988, 185–86.
- 126 Jenkins 1990, 103–105.
- 127 Jenkins 1990, 194–97; Jenkins 1997, 35–40.
- 128 Jenkins 1988, 43–45.
- 129 Dogani 1989, 154.
- 130 Miller 1973, 332.
- 131 Hill 1988, 45.
- 132 *LEM3*, 299.
- 133 Epstein 1942, 188. I have consulted a different edition with different pagination from that seen by St Clair.
- 134 Jenkins 1998, note 104 above; Oddy forthcoming.
- 135 Jenkins 1999, 13.
- 136 The fact that waxing of sculpture is currently practised has been confirmed to me by The British Museum’s own stone conservation section, by John Larson of the Conservation Centre of National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside and by Trevor Proudfoot of Cliveden Conservation Workshop.
- 137 Ashmole 1994, 68.
- 138 *LEM3*, 305.
- 139 St Clair 1999, footnote 135.
- 140 St Clair 1999, 400.
- 141 Select Committee 1816, Appendix 5, xvi. We read here of ‘Presents, found necessary for the local authorities, in Athens alone – 21,902 *piastres*’. These are mentioned again in Appendix

6, xix. At the same enquiry to the question ‘Did it [the removal of sculptures from the Parthenon] appear to create any sensation either among the principal persons or the inhabitants of Athens?’, W R Hamilton replied, ‘No unpleasant sensation whatever; they seemed rather to feel it as a means of bringing foreigners into the country, and of having money spent among them.’

- 142 Ibid 6.
- 143 St Clair 1999, 402–403.
- 144 The statement follows – see Appendix 11.
- 145 M Yiannis Tzedakis, Director of Antiquities, Greek Ministry of Culture and Science at the ICOM General Assembly, 2 August 1993, described the cleaning as a ‘disaster’.
- 146 *TheDaily Telegraph*, 1 May 1939: His selection by the Trustees in 1936 met with some criticism owing to his lack of administrative experience. At that time he had only been Keeper of a Department for four years. It was, however, considered that the new Elgin Room was the largest problem facing the Museum and the Trustees are said to have taken the view that it would be wise to appoint someone whose expert knowledge was particularly connected with Greek antiquities.’ See also Hood 1998, 30.
- 147 R D Barnett Appendix 5.
- 148 Goldsmith in Hinks 1984, 50–61.
- 149 *LEM3*, 297.
- 150 *LEM3*, 295.
- 151 Manuscripts in British Museum Department of Scientific Research archives.
- 152 Frantz 1954, 244–48; Thompson 1954, 65–66; Daley 2000, 57–59. See also Harrison 1988, 339–49. The frieze was cleaned again in 1974, when the colour traces observed in the 1953 Agora notebook had disappeared: Harrison 1988, 340 and Dörig 1985, xi.
- 153 Letter dated 4 November 1953.
- 154 Hendy 1947, xiii and xix.
- 155 Hendy 1947, xii–xx.
- 156 Hendy 1947, xviii.
- 157 Hitchens 1987, 92–93.
- 158 Palagia 1993, 43.
- 159 Galanou and Dogani 1994, 1–13.
- 160 Jenkins 1990, 111–114; Galanou and Dogani 1994, 13
- 161 Mantis’ paper will be published elsewhere; for comment on Mantis’ observations see Boardman 2000, 251.
- 162 St Clair 1999, 435.
- 163 *LEM3*, 311. The suggested loss of tool marks is refuted by Boardman 2000, 249, pl. 5.
- 164 Hughes 1993; Craddock and Giumlia-Mair 1993.
- 165 Jenkins 1988.
- 166 See above page 17.
- 167 Haynes 1975, 131.
- 168 See above page 1.
- 169 Jenkins 1995, 149.
- 170 See above page 21.
- 171 Jenkins 1994a, 78.
- 172 Casson 1921, 104 no. 855 for the ‘before’ image and Brouskari 1974, 140, fig. 272, for the ‘after’. Boissonnas pl. 127 shows a cast of the Iris head incorporated with the remainder of the block preserved in The British Museum and a detail of the heavily coated original head in Athens still attached to a cast of The British Museum’s sculpture.
- 173 Boardman pers comm at 1999 British Museum conference.
- 174 Hendy 1947, vi–vii.
- 175 The British Museum Department of Scientific Research archives, letter dated 4 November 1953.
- 176 *LEM3*, 336.
- 177 *The Times*, 5 November 1999.

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Appendix 1**Internal correspondence between Forsdyke and the officers concerned****To Pryce from Forsdyke**

Strictly Confidential

27th September, 1938

The Keeper

Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities

My dear Pryce,

You will remember that I told Duveen recently, when he pressed for further cleaning of the Parthenon ‘Iris’, that we could not try to clean these marbles beyond the point of ordinary washing; and I told you at the same time that even this must not be done without advice from Plenderleith, since he instructed me long ago that wetting may be dangerous.

But last week I found by the accident of walking through your Department that the Frieze of the Parthenon was being scraped with copper chisels and that the Helios group, was being skinned with similar tools and a carborundum rubber. I enclose a report by Plenderleith on the damage done to the Helios group, which I must submit to the Trustees at their next meeting I shall be glad if you will let me have your explanation of what has happened, to be submitted with this report.

Meanwhile I instructed Hinks that all cleaning work on the Parthenon was to be stopped. You may go on again now, so far as is really necessary, but only with our normal washing by skilled men, and with Plenderleith’s authority and supervision. I have not had time to enquire into the various degrees of responsibility involved in this disaster, but it is clear that Holcombe must at once give up his position as senior mason. Let Fisher take over the general supervision of the shop, and let Holcombe do nothing but act as foreman of the moving gangs, if you think he is still trustworthy in that position.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd E J Forsdyke)

Director and Principal Librarian

From F N Pryce to Forsdyke, 29 September 1938

Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities

British Museum London wc1

29 September 1938

Dear Forsdyke,

The standing orders you gave for the washing of the marble have not been altered in any way by me, but often reiterated. The men all knew they were to wash with Dr Plenderleith’s preparation and do nothing else.

The only time I have ever seen the copper tools in use was when the metopes came down from the walls, and I saw

them used to remove the cement, etc, from the edges. It seemed to me legitimate to use thus the stock implements provided in the Department to get rid of accidental accretions. I have regularly inspected the work and never seen the men using the chisels, and think that this abuse must be very occasional. The men when questioned admitted that they have used them on other occasions, but say – only to remove similar accretion. They state that they have never touched the marble with carborundum.

I can offer no explanation of what happened to the Helios in my absence, except that the men may have been trying to cut short the cleaning process and were not under continuous supervision. It would have been better to have had Holcombe in the room; I did not think this necessary, because I had come to consider that the men knew their job. Yours sincerely,
F N Pryce

From Hinks to Forsdyke

Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities

British Museum

London wc1

26 September 1938

My dear Forsdyke,

I have stopped all cleaning of the Parthenon sculpture, pending your examination of the horse’s head and the Iris with Plenderleith. [Pencil mark says Helios?]

Just before I saw you this morning, I went down to Holcombe’s shop and found him washing the horse. He was using Plenderleith’s mixture with a brush, but on his bench were a tin of some white powder and a bottle of blue stuff. I asked him what they were; he replied evasively that he did not know, and that they were left there from Pinker’s day. I told him to take them away. On his bench were several of these copper scrapers. Holcombe told me that he had not used them on the horse’s head. He also told me that the two men who were working on the Iris had instructions to use nothing but Plenderleith’s soap with a brush and clean water. I went into the Elgin Annexe and found them with a complete array of copper scrapers, which they were actually at that moment using. I told them to stop.

Yours ever,

R P Hinks

[rest of letter not relevant to Parthenon Sculptures]

Research Laboratory
British Museum, London WC1
Confidential

Report on an unauthorised method of cleaning the Elgin Marbles

My attention has been called today to an experiment in the ‘renovation’ of two of the Elgin marbles conducted by the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities without my knowledge, and which I regret to have to condemn in the strongest possible terms.

According to this process, the surface of the marbles has been chipped with a variety of copper chisels, the tool marks being removed thereafter from the marble by rubbing with a piece of carborundum; the surface patina has thus been skinned off, with what I feel to be most disastrous results, exposing the light crystalline sub-surface of the stone in its raw condition, in some places to a depth of about one tenth of an inch below the original tooled surface. It was apparently the intention to remove the whole of the surface of the marble in this way had the work not been interrupted by its chance discovery.

I have examined the tools used.
The whetted cutting edges of the copper chisels are decidedly harder than marble and these edges have nevertheless been blunted and turned over by impact during use.

The interstices of the carborundum block were found to be clogged with marble dust particles and there can be no doubt that its use was not restricted to the sharpening of chisels. Carborundum is more than twice as hard as marble (9:4 on Moh’s scale) and that any such process should have been entertained in connection with the Elgin marble collection passes my comprehension.

I much regret that it has been possible for such an unfortunate method to have been tried in view of the work which has already been done to ensure that the mildest possible neutral reagents would alone be used in removing surface dirt. In the two marbles in question, the original surface, already largely gone, can never be restored. It remains to be seen whether any other highly-cleaned Parthenon sculptures owe their surface to surgery rather than washing.
H J Plenderleith
26th Sept 38

From Holcombe to Forsdyke
Oct 4th 1938
Sir John E Forsdyke

Dear Sir
As you requested I questioned the men and they said that it was after we had cleaned about eight slabs of the Frieze one of the recent lot was found some hard substance. I gave permission to gradually ease it off with, a small copper tool. I personally have cleaned 10 Slabs & 3 Fragments of the Frieze & three Metopes & I can honestly assure you that the Frieze was cleaned entirely with Dr Plenderleith’s cleaning material. But on the Metopes, I occasionally used a copper tool.

& it seems unthinkable that men who have had dealings with the marbles for so many years & know the penalty of damage should do anything that would in any way damage the Elgin Marbles I can only say whenever I went in to see them at work they were always doing it properly but should any of them have taken an advantage when I was not there. I think Sir John you would be able if you saw them to get at the truth sooner than they would tell me. I sincerely thank you for your great kindness and fairness when I saw you. & you know my heart is in the G&R Department & that I would not tolerate any act of damage.

Yours respectfully
Arthur S Holcombe

Appendix 2
The first ‘Interim Report’

Private and Confidential
British Museum
Parthenon Sculptures
Interim Report by the Board of Enquiry appointed by the Standing Committee of the Trustees of the British Museum at a meeting on 8th October 1938

1. The Board of Enquiry was appointed by the Standing Committee at their meeting on 8th October, 1938 in the circumstances and with the terms of reference set out in the following extract from the Minutes:-

Damage to Sculpture of the Parthenon
‘The Director reported that through unauthorised and improper efforts to improve the colour of the Parthenon sculpture, some important pieces had been greatly damaged. He asked for a Board of Enquiry to consider the nature of the damage and the policy of the Trustees in regard to publication of the facts; to determine the responsibility for the damage; and to advise upon the necessary disciplinary action. The Committee appointed Lord Harlech, Lord Macmillan, Sir William Bragg, Sir Charles Peers and Sir Wilfrid Greene as the Board of Enquiry, with power to take whatever action they should consider necessary.’

2. The Board met at the Museum on the 11th and 20th of October and the 1st of November 1938, with Lord Macmillan in the Chair. At the first meeting Sir Charles Peers alone was absent, having unfortunately sustained an accident which prevented his attendance; at the two other meetings all the members were present.

3. The Board examined the following witnesses:-

Mr F N Pryce, Keeper of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities
Mr R P Hinks, First Class Assistant Keeper
Mr Sidney Smith, Keeper of the Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities
Dr H F Plenderleith, Deputy Keeper in charge of the Laboratory
A S Holcombe, Foreman Mason
V A Fisher, Mason
J E Gorman/A W T Lovelock, Mason’s Labourers.

They had also the advantage of hearing and conferring with the Director who was present throughout the meetings. It may be noted that the Director before his appointment to his present office was Keeper of the Department concerned from 1932 to 1936.

The pieces of sculpture which were represented as having been damaged by the treatment to which they had been subjected were minutely examined by the members of the Board.

4. The portions of the Parthenon sculptures in question are three in number, namely, the Selene horse’s head, the Helios group and the figure of Iris, all belonging to the East Pediment. On the 16th of September Mr Pryce left the Museum on short holiday leave. The three pieces of sculpture were then in their proper places in the Elgin Room. Before he went away Mr Pryce gave no instructions either to Mr Hinks, who took charge in his absence, or to anyone else with regard to either moving the sculptures or cleaning them beyond a direction to Holcombe to prepare a mounting for the Iris figure which involved its removal from the pedestal. The Director informed the Board that he had previously reminded Mr Pryce that this figure must not even be washed without the authority of Dr Plenderleith in view of the precarious condition of its surface. While Mr Pryce was absent it came to the notice of the Director on the evening of Thursday 22nd September that tools had been used in the cleaning of the Parthenon sculptures. He instructed Mr Hinks on the morning of 23rd September to see that improper methods were not being used. On Sunday 25th September the Director happened to have occasion to pass through the basement of the Department. He was surprised to find there the Helios group in process of cleaning. On the bench he observed a number of copper tools and a piece of coarse carborundum, and from the appearance of the sculptures he at once saw that the copper tools had been used on the sculptures. On Monday morning 26th September the Iris was found by Mr Hinks to be undergoing similar treatment in an annex of the new Duveen Gallery, and the Selene horse’s head in the Foreman Mason’s workshop. The Director ordered all further cleaning operations to be stopped and instituted an enquiry into what had occurred. Mr Pryce returned to duty on Tuesday 27th September.

5. Although Holcombe denied that he had used any copper tool in cleaning the horse’s head, which he dealt with himself personally, the Board are satisfied that copper tools were used by Holcombe and the labourers under him in cleaning all the three pieces of sculpture in question. Holcombe admitted that apart from the instruction to prepare a mounting for the Iris figure he had received no specific instructions from the Keeper or the Assistant Keeper either to remove or to clean the sculptures. He appears to have assumed that he was at liberty to proceed at his own hand with the process of removing and cleaning. He

apparently had obtained some strips or rods of copper from the store and had fashioned those into tools of various shapes by flattening and sharpening the ends. He said that he had used similar tools on other occasions for cleaning marble and he apparently regarded himself as entitled to use them on the Parthenon sculptures. No effort was made to conceal them and they were lying exposed to full view on the bench when the Director first observed them.

6. In the course of the evidence given by Holcombe and the labourers it emerged that they had used tools in cleaning the metopes and frieze on which they had previously been engaged for some time. The Board did not think it to be within their duty to make a detailed examination of the metopes and frieze with a view to ascertaining the extent of the damage done, but they were impressed by the fact that such improper methods of cleaning had been allowed to be in operation over so long a period.

7. The effect of the methods employed in cleaning the sculptures has been to remove the surface of the marble and to impart to it a smooth and white appearance. Mr Pryce described the Selene horse's head as having been 'skinned.' The surface of the sculptures, showing the evidences of two thousand years of exposure to the climate of Greece, was a document of the utmost importance. There being no possible doubt about the history of the Parthenon sculptures they came to the Museum as authentic masterpieces of Greek work of the fifth century B.C and for purposes of study and comparison they are of inestimable value. The damage which has been caused is obvious and cannot be exaggerated.

8. The Board inquired as to the staffing and routine of the mason's workshop and as to the methods of cleaning sculpture. The following statement prepared by the Director summarises the position:-

The Staff consists of 3 Masons and 6 Labourers. The latter are mostly needed for moving heavy statuary; they are not all masons' labourers by trade, and those who are have no skill in working stone and marble, and are not allowed by the rules of the trade to use tools.

The Foreman Mason is a foreman mainly in respect of the moving operations, which he directs and supervises but does not initiate. He does not direct the work of the other masons, but is responsible to the Keeper for the discipline and order of the workshop.

The Masons' work is done under the specific orders of the Keeper or the officer in charge of the Department, and demands his personal supervision. It consists mainly in mounting sculpture, with occasional mending, but cleaning is not masons' work.

All the officers of the Department knew several years ago that it is dangerous to let masons clean sculpture, because they are inclined to prefer their own trade processes to our scientific ones.

Washing the sculpture in the Galleries used to be done periodically by the labourers with ordinary water and hard brushes, but in 1932 this procedure was stopped, and the Research Laboratory was asked to devise a safer and more

effective method. Dr Plenderleith then prescribed a neutral solution of medicinal soft-soap and ammonia, and trained one masons' labourer to apply this in the proper manner with the proper brushes and distilled water. No other person washed or cleaned sculpture for the next 4 years, and no washing was done except by the Keeper's order and under his supervision.

It was the tradition of the Department that the Keeper or the officer in charge made his round of the masons' shop his first duty in the morning. Important moving operations or work needing direction during progress often meant a visit from the Keeper several times a day.

9. The Board have been unable to obtain any satisfactory explanation of the grave departure in this instance from the proper practice of the Department. They have, however, ascertained from Mr Pryce that a foreman employed by Lord Duveen in connection with the new Parthenon Gallery had expressed Lord Duveen's desire that the sculptures should be made as clean and white as possible and this may very well have become known to the workmen.

10. While the damage to the sculptures was directly occasioned by the unauthorised actings of Holcombe, it is impossible to acquit the Keeper and the Assistant Keeper of serious dereliction of duty. Their main responsibility is the preservation and protection of the valuable works of art committed to their care. Nevertheless, owing to absence of direction and to inefficiency of supervision in the Department, Holcombe was able to remove and to undertake the cleaning of the sculptures in question at his own hand without the knowledge, of either the Keeper or the Assistant Keeper. This can only be taken as indicating a most unfortunate slackness and want of system in the administration of the Department. In the case of Mr Pryce it is true that he had in the course of this year been suffering from ill health necessitating his absence from work for two periods, and also that he was on holiday leave when the particular unauthorised actings of Holcombe with the Pediment sculptures took place. But the work of cleaning the Parthenon sculptures was a long and delicate process, calling for a definite programme and careful and systematic supervision. It was the duty of Mr Pryce to see to these matters. It should have been made clear to the staff that no piece of sculpture must be removed and no piece of sculpture must be cleaned without specific orders from Mr Pryce himself or, in his absence, his deputy. No such step was taken, with the result that Holcombe considered himself entitled to remove the Helios group and the Selene horse and to start to clean those two pieces and the Iris statue on his own initiative. The necessity for specific instructions with regard to the cleaning of each individual piece was all the more imperative by reason of the fact that the condition of the sculptures varies considerably and special care was necessary in certain cases, for example, the Iris statue. Mr Pryce informed us that when the cleaning first began he gave instructions to Holcombe that it was only [to] be done according to the approved methods. But it was his duty to see that these instructions were being carried out. In this duty he failed, with the result that tools were improperly

used in cleaning the metopes and the frieze slabs without his ever knowing it. The improper practice thus begun was continued in the case of the Pediment sculptures during Mr Pryce's absence. But the fact that he was absent on that occasion does not free him from responsibility for the damage done to these sculptures, since if he had exercised proper supervision when the cleaning of the metopes first began the practice would have been stopped at the very beginning. Moreover, when he left for his holiday he ought to have given proper instructions to his deputy, Mr Hinks, with regard to continuing the work of cleaning the sculptures, but he failed to do so. Mr Pryce's neglect of his duties is all the more serious in view of the fact that he had been Deputy Keeper since 27th November 1934 and Keeper since 25th June 1936 and had had the management of the Sculpture Galleries and workshops from 1925 to 1932, during Mr Walter's Keepership, and was presumably conversant with the proper procedure to be observed in connection with the moving and cleaning of the sculptures under his charge. When questioned as to how this occurrence could have taken place if there had been proper supervision Mr Pryce was unable to answer, and when asked as to what steps should be taken to prevent the possibility of the recurrence of such an incident he exhibited little faculty of resourceful suggestion.

As regards Mr Hinks, who entered the employment of the Museum on 18th January 1926 and was promoted to his present rank on 22nd June 1936, the Board find that in his case also there was serious dereliction of duty. He was in charge of the Department when Holcombe removed the sculptures in question and set about cleaning them and yet he was quite unaware either of their removal or of the starting of the cleaning process. If he had been maintaining

proper supervision he could not have failed to be aware of what was happening. Yet it was not till after the Director had discovered the mischief that Mr Hinks, for the first time during Mr Pryce's absence, visited the masons' workshop. He failed to carry out at once the orders given to him by the Director and he did not indicate any realisation of the seriousness of the matter. Being interested in other sections of the Department he appears to have shown little concern as to the Parthenon sculptures which were under his charge while Mr Pryce was on leave.

11. As regards the disciplinary action to be taken, the Board have been given to understand that in accordance with the practice in the Civil Service an officer against whom any charge of default in duty is made is entitled to have a statement of the charge in writing and to be afforded an opportunity of answering it. If the Trustees should approve of this Interim Report it will accordingly be necessary that the relevant passages attributing fault to Mr Pryce and Mr Hinks be communicated to them and that any statements which they may make in answer should be considered. They should also have an opportunity of being heard by the Standing Committee, if they so desire.

Until this procedure is carried out it would obviously not be proper for the Board to deal with that part of their terms of reference which directs them 'to advise upon the necessary disciplinary action,' and they have also meantime postponed the branch of their remit relating to the policy to be adopted by the Trustees with regard to the publication of the facts.

The Board have accordingly thought it right at this stage of their Enquiry to present this Interim Report for the consideration and directions of the Trustees.

Appendix 3

The case against Pryce, and his reply

Forsdyke to Pryce

8th November 1938

F N Pryce Esq

Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities

Dear Pryce,
I enclose extracts from the Report of the Trustees’ Board of Enquiry into the damage done to the Parthenon sculpture, which refer to your own part in this matter. They are in effect a charge of neglect of duty against you.

You should let me have your answer to the charge in writing before Saturday next, November 12th, in order that the Standing Committee may consider it with the Board of Enquiry’s report. You should also be ready to appear before the Standing Committee at that time, in case they wish to examine your case further.
Yours sincerely,
E J Forsdyke
Director and Principal Librarian

Extracts from the 'Interim Report' of the Board of Enquiry into damage done to sculpture of the Parthenon

Mr F N Pryce

The portions of the Parthenon sculptures in question are three in number, namely, the Selene horse’s head, the Helios group and the figure of Iris, all belonging to the East Pediment. On the 16th of September Mr Pryce left the Museum on short holiday leave. The three pieces of sculpture were then in their proper places in the Elgin Room. Before he went away Mr Pryce gave no instructions either to Mr Hinks, who took charge in his absence, or to anyone else with regard to either moving the sculptures or cleaning them beyond a direction to Holcombe to prepare a mounting for the Iris figure which involved its removal from the pedestal. The Director informed the Board that he had previously reminded Mr Pryce that this figure must not even be washed without the authority of Dr Plenderleith in view of the precarious condition of its surface. While Mr Pryce was absent it came to the notice of the Director on the evening of Thursday, 22nd September, that tools had been used in the cleaning of the Parthenon sculptures. He instructed Mr Hinks on the morning of 23rd September to see that improper methods were not being used. On Sunday, 25th September, the Director happened to have occasion to pass through the basement of the Department. He was surprised to find there the Helios group in process of cleaning. On the bench he observed a number of copper tools and a piece of coarse carborundum, and from the appearance of the sculptures he at once saw that tools had been used on the sculptures. On Monday morning, 26th September, the Iris

was found by Mr Hinks to be undergoing similar treatment in an annex of the new Duveen Gallery, and the Selene horse’s head in the Foreman Mason’s workshop.

Although Holcombe denied that he had used any copper tool in cleaning the horse’s head, which he dealt with himself personally, the Board are satisfied that copper tools were used by Holcombe and the labourers under him in cleaning all the three pieces of sculpture in question. Holcombe admitted that apart from the instruction to prepare a mounting for the Iris figure he had received no specific instructions from the Keeper or the Assistant Keeper either to remove or to clean the sculptures. He appears to have assumed that he was at liberty to proceed at his own hand with the process of removing and cleaning. He apparently had obtained some strips or rods of copper from the store and had fashioned those into tools of various shapes by flattening and sharpening the ends. He said that he had used similar tools on other occasions for cleaning marble and he apparently regarded himself as entitled to use them on the Parthenon sculptures. No effort was made to conceal them and they were lying exposed to full view on the bench when the Director first observed them.

In the course of the evidence given by Holcombe and the labourers it emerged that they had used tools in cleaning the metopes and frieze on which they had previously been engaged for some time. The Board did not think it to be within their duty to make a detailed examination of the metopes and frieze with a view to ascertaining the extent of the damage done, but they were impressed by the fact that such improper methods of cleaning had been allowed to be in operation over so long a period.

While the damage to the sculptures was directly occasioned by the unauthorised actions of Holcombe, it is impossible to acquit the Keeper and the Assistant Keeper of serious dereliction of duty. Their main responsibility is the preservation and protection of the valuable works of art committed to their care. Nevertheless, owing to absence of direction and to inefficiency of supervision in the Department, Holcombe was able to remove the Helios group and the Selene horse’s head, and to undertake the cleaning of all the three sculptures in question at his own hand without the knowledge of either the Keeper or the Assistant Keeper who was in charge of the Department at the time. This can only be taken as indicating a most unfortunate slackness and want of system in the administration of the Department.

In the case of Mr Pryce, it is true that he had in the course of this year been suffering from ill health necessitating his absence from work for two periods, and also that he was on holiday leave when the particular unauthorised actings of Holcombe with the Pediment

sculptures took place. But the work of cleaning the Parthenon sculptures was a long and delicate process, calling for a definite programme and careful and systematic supervision. It was the duty of Mr Pryce to see to these matters. It should have been made clear to the staff that no piece of sculpture must be removed and no piece of sculpture must be cleaned without specific orders from Mr Pryce himself, or, in his absence, his deputy. No such step was taken, with the result that Holcombe considered himself entitled to remove the Helios group and the Selene horse and to start to clean those two pieces and the Iris figure on his own initiative. The necessity for specific instructions with regard to the cleaning of each individual piece was all the more imperative by reason of the fact that the condition of the sculptures varies considerably and special care was necessary in certain cases, for example, the Iris figure. Mr Pryce informed us that when the cleaning first began he gave instructions to Holcombe that it was only to be done according to the approved methods. But it was his duty to see that these instructions were being carried out. In this duty he failed, with the result that tools were improperly used in cleaning the metopes and the frieze without his ever knowing it. The improper practice thus begun was continued in the case of the Pediment sculptures during Mr Pryce’s absence. But the fact that he was absent on that occasion does not free him from responsibility for the damage done to these sculptures since if he had exercised proper supervision when the cleaning of the metopes first began the practice would have been stopped at the very beginning. Moreover, when he left for his holiday he ought to have given proper instructions to his deputy, Mr Hinks, with regard to continuing the work of cleaning the sculptures, but he failed to do so. Mr Pryce’s neglect of his duties is all the more serious in view of the fact that he had been Deputy Keeper since 27th November, 1934, and Keeper since 25th June, 1936, and had had the management of the Sculpture Galleries and workshops from 1925 to 1932, during Mr Walters’ Keepership, and was presumably conversant with the proper procedure to be observed in connection with the moving and cleaning of the sculptures under his charge. When questioned as to how this occurrence could have taken place if there had been proper supervision Mr Pryce was unable to answer, and when asked as to what steps should be taken to prevent the possibility of the recurrence of such an incident he exhibited little faculty of resourceful suggestion.

Statement in answer to the charge of neglect of duty

Mr F N Pryce

1. I would emphasise that I had no intention of beginning the washing of the pedimental figures at the period under review. Other and urgent work was before us (in the Third Graeco-Roman Room, which had begun before I returned). Further, I wished the washing of the pediments to be the last of the Elgin Room activities, not only that the marbles might be freshly cleaned for the opening, but because much labour would be saved if, after washing, these heavy masses could be transferred directly to their new mounts. February 1939 seemed to me the suitable date on which to begin the washing. It was for this reason that I had not yet consulted Dr Plenderleith as to how far we should wash, and for the same reason I said nothing about washing to Mr Hinks when I handed over to him.

2. The instructions I gave Holcombe on leaving were to take down the Iris, prepare its mounting, and set it up in the new gallery. This was at Lord Duveen’s request conveyed through the Director. I explained the matter fully to Mr Hinks, emphasising that he should personally check the position of the mount. Holcombe moved the Iris half-way, then deviated from his instructions. The job would have occupied the men until they were wanted elsewhere; had it been finished more quickly, there are always various jobs of a routine nature on which the men can be usefully employed. There was no necessity to begin washing, to find employment for the men.

3. The standing instruction in the Department is that no sculpture is moved without express authority. Holcombe had not acted without authority in the past and I had no reason to anticipate that he would act on impulse in my absence.

4. When the washing began, I asked Holcombe if he and the men understood the proper process, and he replied in the affirmative. At the outset I spent much time with the men, and the washing whenever I was present was being done in accordance with regulation. I have re-examined the slabs of the frieze which were first washed (in the SW angle of the Elgin Room), and can see no trace of the use of copper tools. On this point I consulted Dr Plenderleith who, I believe, concurs. It would appear then that the proper process was known to the men and at first followed by them, and that I had reason for being satisfied on this point. Subsequently I spent less time in the workshop, but when on duty I regularly visited the men daily. I never caught them in the use of unauthorised tools. There was of course a long period in the spring of this year when washing was in progress and when I was absent or under medical treatment.
F N Pryce
11 November 1938

Appendix 4

The case against Hinks, and his reply

Forsdyke to Hinks

8th November 1938
R P Hinks Esq
Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities

Dear Hinks,
I enclose extracts from the Report of the Trustees’ Board of Enquiry into the damage done to the Parthenon sculpture, which refer to your own part in this matter. They are in effect a charge of neglect of duty against you.

You should let me have your answer to the charge in writing before Saturday next, November 12th, in order that the Standing Committee may consider it with the Board of Enquiry’s report. You should also be ready to appear before the Standing Committee at that time, in case they wish to examine your case further.
Yours sincerely,
E J Forsdyke
Director and Principal Librarian

Extracts from the 'Interim Report' of the Board of Enquiry into damage done to sculpture of the Parthenon

Mr R P Hinks
The portions of the Parthenon sculptures in question are three in number, namely, the Selene horse’s head, the Helios group and the figure of Iris, all belonging to the East Pediment. On the 16th of September Mr Pryce left the Museum on short holiday leave. The three pieces of sculpture were then in their proper places in the Elgin Room. Before he went away Mr Pryce gave no instructions either to Mr Hinks, who took charge in his absence, or to anyone else with regard to either moving the sculptures or cleaning them beyond a direction to Holcombe to prepare a mounting for the Iris figure which involved its removal from the pedestal. While Mr Pryce was absent it came to the notice of the Director on the evening of Thursday, 22nd September, that tools had been used in the cleaning of the Parthenon sculptures. He instructed Mr Hinks on the morning of 23rd September to see that improper methods were not being used. On Sunday, 25th September the Director happened to have occasion to pass through the basement of the Department. He was surprised to find there the Helios group in process of cleaning. On the bench he observed a number of copper tools and a piece of coarse carborundum, and from the appearance of the sculptures he at once saw that tools had been used on the sculptures. On Monday morning, 26th September, the Iris was found by Mr Hinks to be undergoing similar treatment in an annex of the new Duveen Gallery, and the Selene horse’s head in the Foreman Mason’s workshop.

Although Holcombe denied that he had used any copper

tool in cleaning the horse’s head, which he dealt with himself personally, the Board are satisfied that copper tools were used by Holcombe and the labourers under him in cleaning all the three pieces of sculpture in question. Holcombe admitted that apart from the instruction to prepare a mounting for the Iris figure he had received no specific instructions from the Keeper or the Assistant Keeper either to remove or to clean the sculptures. He appears to have assumed that he was at liberty to proceed at his own hand with the process of removing and cleaning. He apparently had obtained some strips or rods of copper from the store and had fashioned those into tools of various shapes by flattening and sharpening the ends. He said that he had used similar tools on other occasions for cleaning marble and he apparently regarded himself as entitled to use them on the Parthenon sculptures. No effort was made to conceal them and they were lying exposed to full view on the bench when the Director first observed them.

While the damage to the sculptures was directly occasioned by the unauthorised actions of Holcombe, it is impossible to acquit the Keeper and the Assistant Keeper of serous dereliction of duty. Their main responsibility is the preservation and protection of the valuable works of art committed to their care. Nevertheless, owing to absence of direction and to inefficiency of supervision in the Department, Holcombe was able to remove the Helios group and the Selene horse’s head, and to undertake the cleaning of all the three sculptures in question at his own hand without the knowledge of either the Keeper or the Assistant Keeper who was in charge of the Department at the time. This can only be taken as indicating a most unfortunate slackness and want of system in the administration of the Department.

As regards Mr Hinks, who entered the employment of the Museum on 18th January, 1926 and was promoted to his present rank on 22nd June, 1936, the Board find that in his case there was serous dereliction of duty. He was in charge of the Department when Holcombe removed the sculptures in question and set about cleaning them and yet he was quite unaware either of their removal or of the starting of the cleaning process. If he had been maintaining proper supervision he could not have failed to be aware of what was happening. Yet it was not till after the Director had discovered the mischief that Mr Hinks, for the first time during Mr Pryce’s absence, visited the masons’ workshop. He failed to carry out at once the orders given to him by the Director and he did not indicate any realisation of the seriousness of the matter. Being interested in other sections of the Department he appears to have shown little concern as to the Parthenon sculptures which were under his charge while Mr Pryce was on leave.

Statement in answer to the charge of neglect of duty

Mr R P Hinks
11 November 1938
The Director has communicated to me the sections of the Report of the Trustees’ Board of Enquiry into the damage done to the Parthenon sculpture, which refer to my own part in the matter; and has instructed me to make a statement regarding what is in effect a charge of neglect of duty against me.

In accordance with these instructions I beg leave to submit to the Standing Committee the following answer to the charge of serious dereliction of duty, in failing to maintain proper supervision of the workshops during the period when I was in charge of the Department, in failing to carry out at once the orders given to me by the Director to enquire into the conduct of the workshops, and in failing to indicate any realization of the seriousness of the situation discovered by the Director.

It appears to me that these charges may best be answered by a detailed account of the sequence of events during the time when the Department was in my care.

On 29 August last I returned to the Museum after five weeks’ leave of absence, partly on official duty, in Northern Europe. From then until the Keeper went away on 16 September I was occupied in arranging and labelling the Bronze room, and in revising the Catalogue of Bronzes, as well as in dealing with my share in the general work of the Department which had accumulated during my absence abroad.

When I took charge of the Department on 16 September the political crisis was rapidly developing. I conceived it to be my first duty to make arrangements for the safeguarding of the immediately movable and especially fragile and precious objects in the Gold Ornament Room, the Terracotta Room, the Bronze Room, and the Vase Rooms. I instructed Mr Robertson to take charge of the vases, and devoted myself to the gems and gold ornaments, the bronzes, and the terracottas. On looking into the departmental records, I found that the salvage-lists were insufficiently detailed and explicit; and I accordingly drew up new lists, with instructions where to find the appropriate keys and other equipment. I made out detailed directions for the salvage, in case of emergency, of the Gold Ornament Room; and I drew a plan of the Bronze Room, in order to show the sequence in which its contents were to be removed. I measured the cases in the Gold Ornament Room and the Bronze Room, in order to ascertain how many boxes would be needed for the storage of their contents. I made arrangements with the Keeper of the Department of Coins and Medals to borrow surplus medal cabinets for the immediate disposal of the gold ornaments and gems; and I assembled in the Fourth Vase Room Annexe such packing cases as were forthwith available for the reception of the select bronzes. I also attended to the Keeper’s correspondence, as well as my own, and other departmental affairs during the Keeper’s absence. Downstairs, in accordance with the Keeper’s instructions, I superintended the work of Fisher and Brennan, who were engaged in mounting various pieces of sculpture. I also visited the Annexe of the new Elgin Room, to inspect the Iris from the East Pediment, whose base was to be measured for

the cutting of a template, but no work was yet in progress. I noticed that some washing of the lower part of the figure had recently taken place; but as I had just been away for several weeks, and as I assumed that the cleaning of this figure, like that of the rest of the Parthenon sculpture, was contemplated before removal to the new room, I was not surprised to find that the work had been started. I did not observe any signs that unauthorized methods of cleaning had been used, nor were there then any tools or other materials laid out on the trestle on which the figure stood. I did not then pass through Holcombe’s shop or the other basements, because I had received no instructions from the Keeper that any work was to be in progress there. In short, I did not spend as much time in the basement as I should have spent there in normal circumstances, because I judged that my first duty during these critical days was to superintend the safeguarding of the collections in the upper rooms, for which the Director had already issued general instructions.

On the afternoon of 23 September (not the morning of that day, as stated in the Report), I asked to see the Director on various matters of departmental business. He received me about 3.30 p.m. We discussed first the estimates for the printing of the Guide to the Department; then the redecoration of the Third Graeco-Roman Room; then the provision of packing cases and packing materials for the storage of the contents of the upper rooms in case of emergency, the Director giving me various instructions in connexion therewith. The Director then mentioned the cleaning of the Elgin marbles, and expressed concern at the appearance of some of the slabs of the frieze. He repeated the conviction of the Trustees that nothing but the method of cleaning invented by Dr Plenderleith should be employed on the marbles, even if this did not achieve the degree of whiteness desired by Lord Duveen. He then expressed his own fear that unauthorized methods might already have been employed on the frieze, especially the use of metal scrapers and abrasives. He then instructed me to look into this matter.

On the morning of Saturday, 24 September, in accordance with the usual practice of the Department no washing or moving of sculpture was due to take place. Following the Director’s instructions of the previous afternoon, I saw Holcombe in the Third Graeco-Roman Room, and ordered him to move and cover two pieces of sculpture by the doorway, before the builders arrived to take down the pediment which the Director had ordered to be removed; and also to detach a number of reliefs from the wall, in accordance with the Keeper’s instructions, confirmed by the Director. I then examined the slabs of the frieze indicated by the Director; but although I noticed the whiteness of which the Director complained, I could not discover any evidence that unauthorized methods of cleaning had been used, and could form no opinion whether or not this degree of whiteness was obtainable by Dr Plenderleith’s method, unassisted by abrasion. As the political situation was by then becoming increasingly serious, I returned to the Office of the Department to make arrangements for the provision of boxes and packing materials of various kinds, also in accordance with the Director’s instructions of the previous afternoon.

Immediately on reaching the Museum on Monday morning, 26 September I went down to Holcombe's shop in order to investigate the methods of cleaning in use. I found Holcombe washing the head of Selene's horse. When I came into the room, he was using Dr Plenderleith's method in the approved way; but he had on the bench various copper tools, a piece of abrasive stone, and various tins of powdery substance. When I questioned him about the tools, he denied having used them on the head. I told him on no account to use them, and ordered him to remove from the bench the tins of powder and the abrasive stone. When I asked what the powder was, he replied evasively that he did not know, and that it was something left over from Pinker's time. My suspicions were then aroused, and I went at once to the Elgin Room Annexe, where I found two labourers washing the figure of Iris and using copper tools on the drapery, although Holcombe had told me the moment before that they were on their honour to use nothing but Dr Plenderleith's method. I told them to stop work, and set out to report the matter at once to the Director. I met him by chance in the galleries. He then told me that he had given orders for all washing to be stopped; and when I returned at once to Holcombe's shop and the Elgin Ante-Room, I found that the Director's message had just arrived. I then wrote a letter containing an interim report to the Director; and asked the Keeper on the telephone to return at once.

On Tuesday, 27 September, the Keeper returned from leave, and I reported to him at once what had been happening, and asked him to see the Director immediately.

Meanwhile, the crisis had become acute; and Mr Robertson and I completed our precautionary measures during the ensuing days. On Saturday, 1 October, the crisis being then over, I went away for a week's leave, returning to the Museum on Monday, 10 October.

During the ten days while I was in charge of the Department the risk of an immediate outbreak of war led me to decide what the most urgent need of the moment was to make all possible arrangements for the instant evacuation of the upper rooms on the outbreak of hostilities. No plans had been communicated to me for the safeguarding of the sculpture galleries, whereas the necessity for the clearing of the upper rooms was the subject of several orders from the Director's office. My answer, therefore, to the charge of neglect of duty must be that I believed that in these exceptional circumstances the first duty of the responsible officer irrespective of his specialist qualifications, was to devote himself to the safeguarding of the collections in the

upper rooms, in accordance with the explicit instructions of the Director. This was my reason for devoting myself first and foremost to the most vulnerable part of the collection, and for paying less attention than I should have paid in normal conditions to the work in progress downstairs. R P Hinks

Hinks to the Director

Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities
8 December 1938

My dear Director,
I have given further careful thought to the charge of serious dereliction of duty in the Board of Enquiry's Interim Report on Damage done to the Parthenon Sculpture; and I wish to make a further statement in answer to that charge.

You will remember that I was absent from the Museum on sick leave from the end of September 1936 until the middle of March 1937, except for a short interval in December. On returning to duty, my first care was to make up as far as possible for the time lost during my illness by devoting myself principally to the tasks which the Keeper had entrusted to me: namely, the redecoration and rearrangement of the Bronze Room and the revision of the Catalogue of Bronzes.

During the Keeper's absence on subsequent occasions I attended to his instructions about the cleaning, repairing, and mounting of various pieces of sculpture. On no occasion did the Keeper instruct me to supervise the washing of the Parthenon sculpture; and I inferred from this – mistakenly, as I now see – that the routine which you had introduced was being followed and that the safeguards which you had devised were being maintained.

Events have unhappily shown that I should have given more general and more constant supervision to the work in progress in the masons' shops; and I wish to take this opportunity of expressing my profound regret for the damage which, through this failure of mine, was done to the Parthenon sculpture during the time when I had charge of the Department.

In view of the strictures upon my conduct in the Board of Enquiry's Interim Report, and the lack of confidence which they imply, I believe that the Trustees will expect me to tender my resignation; and I therefore beg that you will place my position unreservedly in their hands. Yours sincerely,
R P Hinks

Appendix 5

Barnett's memo

To: The Director, The British Museum

Strictly Private and Confidential
From: Dr R D Barnett
9th February 1984

The Cleaning of the Parthenon Sculptures
I first met John Forsdyke, then Deputy Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities, when I was a student at the British School of Archaeology at Athens in 1931-2. When I joined the BM staff in 1932, in department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities under Sydney Smith, Forsdyke took some interest in me and caused me to be appointed London Secretary of the British School. In 1934? Forsdyke became Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities, in which capacity he was heavily involved in the plans for building the new Parthenon galleries financed by Lord Duveen, and for the new exhibition there of the 'Elgin Marbles'. About this time I saved Greek and Roman from some possible embarrassment by reporting to Forsdyke that I had overheard a journalist boasting of a 'scoop' in interviewing, without permission, their stonemason – a man called Fisher – about restorations etc.

In spring 1935 I was sent out by the Trustees to assist in Mallowan's excavations at Chagir Bazar in North Syria. I returned to the BM in [vacat]. At that time my department (Egyptian and Assyrian) shared with the Greek and Roman department a storage space known as the Carthaginian Basement. Here I often worked and was puzzled, amazed and worried at seeing an elderly labourer who sat day after day using hammer and chisel (to remove lime stalagmites) and wire brushes (to remove the golden-brown patina) from the Parthenon metopes and frieze slabs, which were solemnly trundled in to him one by one. I wondered whether I should intervene here and pondered long; but I felt much difficulty in thus interfering in another department's affairs. After all, Forsdyke, though he had by now become Director, must know about it since he had continued to exercise close control over the whole Duveen Gallery scheme from the Director's office. The matter, however was shortly afterwards (how shortly I don't remember) taken out of my hands.

One day Sydney Smith, Mallowan and I were down there (I think) at lunch-time when the 'cleaner' was out. Sydney Smith, noticing what he had been doing, strode over, looked at his tools, and exclaimed 'Good Lord! Do you see what they're doing? They're cleaning the sculptures with wire brushes!'

'Yes', I said, 'and I don't like it', (or words to that effect). 'Don't ever tell anyone what you've seen here today!' said S S with great finality.

Of course we promised we wouldn't – indeed I kept my promise for nearly 50 years: however at the time I took S S to mean that he would accept responsibility and do or say whatever was necessary. In the upshot, he didn't do anything till that day in October (?) 1938 when it was reported that the Duveen Gallery had been finished and the metopes had been installed in the side galleries. What happened next I only have from hearsay, not personal knowledge, but I understood that Sydney Smith and Mrs Gulbenkian were ushered down to meet Forsdyke in the galleries and Forsdyke remarked of the metopes: 'They're looking very white, aren't they?', to which S S was able to come back with a smart answer: 'You know why, don't you? They've been cleaning them with wire brushes!!'

The rest is history, though unpublished: heads rolled in all directions, blistering reports were written. I heard Plenderleith at the lunch club admit that the surface of the horse's head or nose from the pediment on which the wretches had just got started, had been partly removed to the depth of 1/16th". Certainly the removal of all the patina from the reliefs and metopes was pretty thorough and has (in my view) removed the top skin of the stone into which the master sculptor finished off his work, and without which the sculptures become dead and lifeless, like Roman copies. The appearance of these once magnificent sculptures before they were thus ruined may only be gauged now from an old publication. Curiously enough, the only sculptures from this monument which appear to have survived unscathed are those of the gods (who seem to have saved themselves), the divine figures in the round from the west pediment, and the relief showing the seated gods and goddesses at the centre of the frieze. Perhaps they saved themselves.

Forsdyke sent for me and asked me why I didn't intervene. I told him I had been forbidden. He asked me whether if I saw someone murdering his wife I would not have intervened. I said the cases weren't parallel and it was not for me to interfere in the affairs of another department (which meant in effect questioning the Keeper's and even the Director's control) especially when I had been explicitly ordered not to do so.

I think Forsdyke forgave me, but not Sydney Smith with whom a long and very bitter running war was now started, lasting till they both retired in 1950 or thereabouts. R D B
February 1984

Appendix 6

The second ‘Interim Report’

Private and Confidential
British Museum
Parthenon Sculptures
Second Report by the Board of Inquiry appointed by the
Standing Committee of the Trustees of the British Museum
at a Meeting on 8th October, 1938

1. The Board beg to refer to their previous Interim Report of 7th November 1938 which was laid before the Standing Committee of the Trustees at their Meeting on 12th November 1938. Prior to that Meeting the passages of the Board’s Interim Report attributing neglect of duty to Mr Pryce and Mr Hinks were communicated to them and they each submitted a written statement in answer. These statements were laid before the Meeting of the Standing Committee along with the Board’s Interim Report, and Mr Pryce and Mr Hinks were each called in separately and afforded an opportunity, of which they availed themselves, of supplementing their written statements and answering questions addressed to them by members of the Committee and the Director.

2. The Committee, having taken into consideration the Board’s Interim Report, the written statements by Mr Pryce and Mr Hinks and the results of the interviews, resolved in terms of the following extract from the Minutes of the Meeting:-
The Committee accepted the Interim Report of the Board of Enquiry, and requested the Board to meet at 4.15 p.m. on November 15th in order to complete its enquiry and to make recommendations particularly in regard to the disciplinary action to be taken and the publication of the facts.

3. The Board held a fourth meeting on the 15th of November 1938 at which all the members were present except Sir Charles Peers who communicated his views in a letter to Lord Macmillan of 14th November. The Board examined J F Sinclair and A E Simenton, two of the labourers who had been engaged in the cleaning of the sculptures; and A S Holcombe, the Foreman Mason, was recalled and further examined. Sinclair stated that he had used copper tools in cleaning the Parthenon marbles since June 1937. He also stated that Daniel, the foreman employed by Lord Duveen, had pointed out to him that one of the slabs, chosen for Lord Duveen to show in his new gallery, was not white enough and that Holcombe had previously told him to see if he could brighten it up. The slab was in consequence recleaned. Daniel commended him for getting it whiter. The incident is of importance only as showing that Holcombe and Sinclair and presumably the other workmen were aware of Daniel’s desire that the sculptures should be

made as clean and white as possible for Lord Duveen.

4. The Board learned from Holcombe, Sinclair and Simenton that a sum of two or three pounds had been given by Daniel to Holcombe to be divided among himself and the workmen after they had performed some heavy work in moving some of the sculptures, and that this sum was shared among them. The Board do not associate this payment with the cleaning operations, except in so far as it was calculated to promote the readiness of Holcombe and the workmen to comply with Daniel’s wishes.

5. The Board have investigated the position with regard to the dismissal of Keepers and Assistant Keepers of Departments. These officers are appointed by the three Principal Trustees, viz., the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor and the Speaker of the House of Commons, under the powers conferred by the Statute 26 Geo.II, c.22 S17. The form of appointment in use declares that the appointment is ‘subject to and until a removal from the said employment and service by the Principal Trustees of the British Museum for the time being, without prejudice to the power of removal for misbehaviour or neglect of duty vested in the Trustees of The British Museum by Section XV of the Act of Parliament of 26 George II, cap.xxii and subject to the provisions of the Acts of Parliament and the Orders in Council governing the retirements and superannuations of the Civil Service.’ Section XV of the Act provides that the Trustees ‘shall and may at their pleasure...suspend or remove...for misbehaviour or neglect of duty’ any officer appointed by the Principal Trustees. As regards the powers of the Standing Committee, the existing Statutes and Rules in Chapter I paragraph 7 direct the Committee to ‘inquire as often as they think fit into the conduct of the Officers...of the Museum and give directions accordingly’, but they do not confer on the Committee any power to dismiss or remove Officers.

6. The Board have given anxious consideration to the question of the disciplinary action to be taken in the cases of Mr Pryce and Mr Hinks. After fully discussing the matter (without the presence of the Director) they have come to the conclusion that the interests of the Museum require that Mr Pryce and Mr Hinks be no longer retained on the staff of the Museum. As to the precise form which the termination of their appointments should take the Board are of opinion that this is a matter to be determined by the Trustees. The possible courses are (1) that they be permitted to resign; (2) that they be removed from office on the ground of their inability to discharge efficiently the duties of their offices; (3) that they be dismissed for neglect of duty. In the last

mentioned case no retiring allowance would be granted; in the second case the Treasury have a discretion to grant a retiring allowance (Superannuation Act, 1887, sections 2 and 9); and in the first case presumably some retiring allowance would be payable if the resignation were on the ground of health, but not otherwise. The Treasury authorities, who have been unofficially consulted, have expressed a desire that they should be informed beforehand as to the disciplinary action to be taken.

7. The Board accordingly recommend that the Trustees in conjunction with the Principal Trustees at the Meeting of the Trustees to be held on the 10th of December 1938 terminate the appointments of Mr Pryce and Mr Hinks in such manner as may be deemed appropriate; and they suggest that Sir James Rae КСВ, КВЕ of the Treasury be invited to be in

attendance for the purpose of consultation, if thought desirable.

8. As regards the question of apprising the public of what has occurred the Board are of opinion that a public statement need not be made. They have learned with satisfaction that remedial measures applied by the Director and Dr Plenderleith have mitigated to a considerable extent the evidence of the treatment which the three pediment-sculptures have received so far as the eye of the general public is concerned but to the expert the damage will remain discernible. In these circumstances the Board do not recommend any communication to the Press on the subject.

British Museum
November, 1938

The final Report (Pryce’s health, decision on Hinks)

Private and Confidential
British Museum
Parthenon Sculptures
Third and Final Report by the Board of Inquiry appointed by the Standing Committee of the Trustees of the British Museum at a meeting on 8th October, 1938

In their Second Report, dated 8th December, 1938, the Board in paragraph 7 made a recommendation regarding the disciplinary action to be taken in the cases of Mr Pryce and Mr Hinks. So far as regards Mr Pryce the Board when considering his case were not in possession of the information regarding his state of health which subsequently became available and which was communicated to the meetings of the Standing Committee and the Trustees on 10th December. The Board desire to place on record that if, in preparing their Second Report,

they had had before them the medical certificates of Dr Gilbert Chubb and Dr A J Reid Taylor their recommendation as regards Mr Pryce would have taken a different form. They are satisfied that, so far as he is concerned, the unfortunate state of matters which the Board have had to investigate ought in large measure to be attributed to his breakdown in health. They accordingly find themselves entirely in agreement with the course adopted at the meeting on 10th December, whereby Mr Pryce has been granted sick leave for a month on the understanding that he will resign his appointment when the month expires. While no similar considerations apply to the case of Mr Hinks, the Board recognise the expediency in the circumstances of imposing the penalty of a severe reprimand and the loss of ten years seniority rather than terminating his appointment.
British Museum
December, 1938

Hinks resigns

Hinks to Ashmole
Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities
British Museum
London WC1
13 January 1939

My dear Ashmole,
I have given further careful thought to the charge of serious dereliction of duty in the Board of Enquiry’s interim report on Damage done to the Parthenon Sculpture; and I wish to make a further statement in answer to that charge.
You will remember that I was absent from the Museum on sick leave from the end of September 1936 until the middle of March 1937, except for a short interval in December. On returning to duty, my first care was to make up as far as I could for the time lost during my illness by devoting myself principally to the tasks which the Keeper had entrusted to me: namely, the redecoration and rearrangement of the Bronze Room and the revision of the Catalogue of Bronzes.
Events have unhappily shown that during the Keeper’s absence on subsequent occasions I should have given more general and more constant supervision to the work in progress in the masons’ shops; and I wish to take this opportunity of expressing my profound regret for the damage which, through this failure of mine, was done to the Parthenon sculpture during the time when I had charge of the Department.
In view of the strictures upon my conduct in the Board of

Enquiry’s interim report, and the severe reprimand which (as I learn from the Director’s letter of 31 December) the Trustees administered to me at their meeting on 10 December, I believe that the Trustees will expect me to tender my resignation. I should have done so before, had I not been reluctant to leave the Department without a Keeper; but since you have very generously consented to take charge of it, I beg that you will ask the Director to place my position unreservedly in the hands of the Trustees.
Yours sincerely,
R P Hinks

Committee, 14 January 1939, Hinks’ resignation accepted
The Director submitted a letter from Mr Hinks, 13 January, tendering his resignation to the Trustees in view of the strictures passed upon his conduct by the Board of Inquiry into damage done to sculpture of the Parthenon, and expressing his profound regret for his failure in the supervision of the masons’ shops during the Keeper’s absence. The Committee, having considered the letter, resolved to accept as from 28 February 1939 the resignation thereby tendered by Mr Hinks, and to recommend to the General Board that in view of the statements made in the letter and of Mr Hinks’ resignation, the resolution of the General Board passed on 10 December 1938 reducing Mr Hinks 10 years in seniority and pay be rescinded in so far as regards that reduction. The Committee also resolved that, pending the decision of the General Board, no reduction be made in the salary payable to Mr Hinks.

Appendix 9

Correspondence between the Director and Trustees *re: culpability*

Lord Harlech to Forsdyke

5 Mansfield Street, w1
Personal
Sunday

Dear Forsdyke
I am afraid I shall be out of London all this week. I have to go to Shropshire & North Wales till Thursday & spend all day at Cardiff on Friday 28th for the Annual Meeting of the National Museum of Wales of which I am President. Next Saturday to Monday I shall be with my in laws at Hatfield. So I can't attend a meeting of the sub committee on the damage to the Parthenon Sculptures.

I have written my views pretty fully to MacMillan & whatever the other members of the sub committee think I am clear that Price & Holcombe ought to be got rid of & possibly Hinks too. Price's evidence was deplorable & I don't see how he can be entrusted with responsibility any more. Holcombe obviously lied to us, & deliberately did what he did the moment the Keeper's back was turned entirely to please Duveen. The Trustees & you & the whole Museum have been let down badly, and effective disciplinary action must follow. Frankly I don't like MacMillan's desire to hush it all up and minimize a very bad job.

What I mainly want to make clear is that when it comes to the Standing Committee you can rely absolutely on my personal support.

I hope the Sub-Committee will be able to report to the Standing Committee by next Saturday week.

Yrs Sincerely
Harlech

My address till Thursday will be Brogyntyn, Oswestry.

Macmillan to Forsdyke

Private and Confidential
44 Millbank, Westminster, sw1
19th October, 1938

My dear Director,
Sir William Bragg has suggested that it might be helpful to our investigation if we had a practical demonstration of the cleaning process by way of experiment. I agree & now write to ask if it would be possible for you to have available tomorrow afternoon a fragment of old marble (preferably Pentelic, like the Elgins) together with the cleaning materials used. We should like to have a demonstration, separately & independently, by the mason & Mr Plenderleith & for this purpose you might kindly arrange for their attendance.
Yours sincerely,
Macmillan

Lord Harlech to Forsdyke

5 Mansfield Street, w1
28 Oct 1938

Dear Forsdyke
Knowing MacMillan's views I am agreeably surprised at his draft report. He has adopted a good many of my suggestions. It is of course not easy for us to say what exactly should be the disciplinary consequences without hearing further from you your considered advice.

If the Standing Committee is on Nov 5th I am afraid I cannot possibly be there as I have to attend the quarterly meetings of the Shropshire County Council in Shrewsbury that day to be sworn in etc as an Alderman in place of my father.

I'll attend the subcommittee on Tuesday but I have to be at Broadcasting House at 7 p.m. to broadcast to the Dominions on the short wave at that hour.

Yours sincerely,
Harlech

[Pencil marks on top of page 2 of this letter – someone else's notes]

Forsdyke to Lord Chancellor

Private and Confidential
The Rt Honble The Lord Chancellor,
The House of Lords, Westminster, sw1
25th November, 1938

Dear Lord Chancellor,
The Board of Enquiry, which has been investigating the facts of the damage done to the Parthenon Sculpture, will present its Final Report to the Standing Committee of the Trustees on Saturday, December 10th, and the questions of disciplinary action which are involved will be submitted to the General Board on the same day.

The dismissals of two senior officers of the Museum will have to be considered, and since the whole matter is exceptionally important, and staff appointments are particularly the concern of the Principal Trustees, I think that you may wish to be present, and hope that you may be able to do so.

I shall send you a draft of the Final Report as soon as it is ready.

Yours sincerely,
(Sgd E J Forsdyke)
Director and Principal Librarian

The Earl of Crawford and Balcarres to Forsdyke

9th November 1938
7 Audley Square, w1

Dear Sir
I am shocked by the report about the Parthenon sculpture. If all is well, I shall attend on Saturday.
I keep asking myself why the cleansing process upon the metopes had not been detected.
Yours sincerely,
Crawford & Balcarres

The Archbishop of Canterbury to Forsdyke

Lambeth Palace, SE1
10th November 1938
Private and Confidential

Dear Forsdyke,
I thank you for sending me a copy of the Interim Report of the Board of Enquiry into the damage done to the Sculpture of the Elgin Marbles. I have read it with care and with very great distress. I cannot imagine how able and responsible people like Messrs Pryce and Hinks can have shown such culpable carelessness. But we shall read or hear what they have to say when the Standing Committee meets on Saturday. I am very sorry that this painful episode should have occurred.
Yours very sincerely,
Cosmo Cantuar

W H Bragg to Forsdyke

The Royal Society
Burlington House
London w1
January 11 1939

Dear Forsdyke,
I shall not be able to attend the meeting of the Standing Committee on Saturday as I shall be out of town. I take my Christmas holidays rather late because I must be at the Royal Institution when the children's lectures are given.

I have no suggestion to make respecting the third report of the Parthenon Committee. I would however like to say that if the Standing Committee could see their way to reducing Hinks' ten years to five, I should be pleased. I think that the firm steps that have been taken will lead to radical improvement; and the damage to the sculptures has fortunately been approximately repaired, in appearance at least. It might be possible now to relax the first severity without impairing the effect of the disciplinary action.

I shall be at the Royal Society tomorrow (Thursday). If it suited you to send papers there for my signature I would return them at once.

Yours sincerely,
W H Bragg

Appendix 10

General correspondence

Lord Harlech to Forsdyke

5 Mansfield Street,
W1
1.12.38

Dear Forsdyke,
Many thanks for the copy of the draft public announcement. I am a little doubtful about the wisdom of the use of the word ‘some’ in the last line but one. The word ‘some’ might be taken by the public to mean a large number. Sooner or later it will have to come out which are the individual pieces which have been damaged and I would greatly prefer more frankness and definition. Accordingly I would suggest that the word ‘three’ should be substituted for the word ‘some’.
Yours sincerely,
Harlech

Lord Harlech to Forsdyke

5 Mansfield Street,
W1
3.12.38

Dear Forsdyke,
All right! But there will be headlines in the lay press and telephone calls to know the extent of the damage and certainly exaggeration.
Would it help to add ‘As soon as the occurrence of improper and unauthorized methods of cleaning was discovered by the director all further cleaning of the marbles was immediately stopped and fully investigated by a special committee of the trustees who have recommended certain disciplinary action which will be published in due course.’
There will be a long and slow investigation by the expert world as you say, but what concerns me is an unduly alarmist reaction by the lay press, & questions in parliament which will drag out the horrid truth bit by bit and produce the kind of comment we may expect in Germany & Greece only anxious to twist England’s tail. We ought to do what we can to minimize this sort of reaction if we can. Of course the sooner it is known that Pryce, Hinks & Holcombe especially the last are out of the Museum for good the better.
Yours sincerely,
Harlech

Sir Charles Peers to Forsdyke

Chiselhampton House,
Stadhampton, Oxford
3rd December, 1938

Dear Forsdyke,
Parthenon Sculptures

The form of announcement as proposed to be appended to the report of the Board of Enquiry is as well worded as is possible in the circumstances, and I can’t object to its being used.

But there is no doubt that the publication of this, or any like statement, will result in what I should like by every means to avoid, namely, a serious blow to the reputation of the BM It seems to me that what is principally entailed on the Trustees is to order the preparation of a careful report on each piece of sculpture which has suffered, so that any student studying these marbles in the future may be safeguarded against mistakes arising from the condition of the damaged carvings. This is our real duty to knowledge, but I do not think that a publication of the fact that damage has been done is of any importance in comparison.
Yours sincerely,
Charles Peers

Lord Harewood to Forsdyke

32 Green Street,
W1
Dec 7th 1938

Dear Forsdyke,
I regret that I have to go to Yorkshire on Saturday 10th and may not be able to come to the British Museum even for the Standing Committee.
If the opinion of absentees is required on the case of Messrs. Pryce & Hinks, I incline to the view they should be ‘removed from office on the ground of their inability to discharge their duties’ etc.
My reason for selecting this one of the 3 courses suggested by the Board is that it appears to be the only one under which they could get any pension? And I presume they have a long and mostly meritorious service behind them.

Possibly I am wrong in thinking their service to be long. In that case I should vote for ‘permission to resign’; and if it is not ‘meritorious’ I should vote for dismissal.
Yours sincerely,
Harewood

J Stanley Gardiner to Forsdyke

Bredon House,
Selwyn Gardens,
Cambridge
Dec 7:38

Dear Sir John,
I hate to be absent when serious matters come up for consideration but I have to leave for Ireland to-morrow on

affairs concerned with its Nat. University. My apologies.
The one thing that seems to me important is that we should publish at once, so as to avoid the Press making a big show of the whole matter. I have been called upon occasionally to straighten out a couple of the less reputable papers re discoveries and new ideas in Science. I was rung up by one asking if I knew anything about the ‘serious damage in the Museum’, the thought of this being done by the class of maniac who puts his umbrella through a picture. This, Reporter’s Idea, let me out comfortably.
Yours,
J Stanley Gardiner

The Archbishop of Canterbury to Forsdyke

Lambeth Palace, SE1
14th December 1938
Private and Confidential

Dear Forsdyke,
I think I ought to send you the enclosed letter from Sir William Bragg. Please return it with your comments.
I had the opportunity of a short talk with the Lord Chancellor this afternoon and he was of opinion that no such express publication of what has happened to the Elgin Marbles should be published. He thinks, and I am disposed to agreed with him, that it would be sufficient that you should be ready at any time when any expert calls attention to what has happened to give a careful and considered reply. Certainly the last people to whom I think any statement should be voluntarily sent would be the Greek Government!
Yours very sincerely,
Cosmo Cantuar

Letter presumably from Forsdyke to The Archbishop of Canterbury

[not clear who sender is, no signature on copy]
15th December, 1938
His Grace
The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury,
Lambeth Palace,
SE1

Dear Lord Archbishop,
I am sure that anyone who fully understands the facts and the position in regard to the Parthenon sculpture must agree with the decision which was reached by the Trustees.
In the first place we are not yet able to say what the effect of these improper processes has been, and an incomplete statement would serve no purpose. There is no question of repairs: these could not even be attempted. It will take us a long time to make an accurate record of the pieces that were improperly cleaned, and we regard the making of this record as our real duty. When it is made, the Trustees may be asked to consider its publication in an archaeological journal; but I do not agree with Sir William Bragg that we should find any kind of condonation among the experts, least of all from the Greeks. We can offer no excuse for what has happened. The stress of war alarms on this occasion, as I explained to the Standing Committee, was invented by Hinks for his defence; and Pryce’s health will doubtless justify his retirement, but

not his neglect of duty during the last two years.
I return Bragg’s letter herewith.
Yours sincerely,

The Archbishop of Canterbury to Forsdyke

Old Palace, Canterbury
16th December 1938
Private

Dear Forsdyke,
This is just to acknowledge with thanks your letter of December 15th. I am relieved that you do not think it would be well at present to encourage Sir William Bragg’s proposal. I have written to him more or less on the lines of your letter to me.
You know how very real my sympathy with you is in this most unfortunate occurrence.
Yours very sincerely,
Cosmo Cantuar

The Archbishop of Canterbury to Forsdyke

Lambeth Palace, SE1
Confidential
9th February 1939

My dear Forsdyke,
I have heard a rumour that a section of the Press – probably the Beaverbrook Press – has got wind of our recent trouble at the Museum and that if so it may be necessary to have some reasoned statement on behalf of the Trustees ready explaining shortly but adequately the grounds of their action. You may already have prepared such a statement. I am sure you will agree with me that it would be a mistake to dwell too fully in any public statement upon the extent of the mischief which was done even though you and I may feel that it was very serious. If you have prepared, or are ready to prepare, any such statement I suggest that it might be well for you to consult Lord Macmillan as to the form of it, whose judgment in these matters is always sound. I may have a word with you on the matter on Saturday morning.
Yours very sincerely,
Cosmo Cantuar

P Jeannerat to Forsdyke

Daily Mail,
Editorial Department,
Northcliffe House, London, EC4
March 21st, 1939

Dear Sir John Forsdyke,
May I respectfully ask you whether a statement could be made to the *Daily Mail* regarding the rumours connected with an alleged recent cleaning of the Elgin Marbles?
I should be glad to call at the Museum any day and hour you may care to choose. Perhaps you will feel that the matter is of public interest, and an early official reassurance would be most welcome.
Yours faithfully,
(Sgd P Jeannerat)

Forsdyke to Jeannerat

22nd March, 1939

P Jeannerat Esq

Daily Mail,

Editorial Department,

Northcliffe House,

EC4

Dear Sir,

I should be glad to give you the appointment for which you ask if I could give you any useful information, but as the Permanent Head of a Government Department I am not, of course, able to make statements for publication about the policy and conduct of my Department.

When the Trustees of the British Museum have such statements to make, they issue them through the Press Agencies, and you may be sure that no information on this subject will be available for any newspaper which is not also given to the*Daily Mail*.

But it seems to me that there is no more that can be said about these matters. As regards the sculpture itself, this is on public view, as it has always been, and any intelligent observer has been able to form his own opinion about its cleaning for the last six months and more.

The more or less recent retirements of two members of the staff have also been subjects of newspaper comment, and the reasons for their retirements have been published. It is clear that their personal affairs cannot be discussed beyond that point by anyone but themselves.

Finally, the notices in *The Daily Telegraph* are directed at me personally, and although I am quite unmoved by them, it would be improper for me, as a Civil Servant, to reply through any newspaper.

Yours faithfully.

(Sgd E J Forsdyke)

Director and Principal Librarian

Christopher Hussey, Editor, *Country Life* to Forsdyke

Country Life,

2-10 Tavistock Street,

Covent Garden, wc2

March 30th, 1939

Dear Sir,

As you are no doubt aware, there are very disquieting rumours gaining circulation with regard to the effects of unauthorised cleaning on certain of the Elgin marbles. I believe that these are very much exaggerated, and am proposing to have an editorial note to that effect in next week's issue of '*Country Life*', but I am naturally anxious to co-operate so far as possible with the British Museum authorities in the matter, and am accordingly hoping that you will not be averse to my writing to you on the matter.

I gather that it can be truly said that so far as the public are concerned all the marbles that have been cleaned, whether by authorised or unauthorised methods, will appear the better for it, also that the pediment groups and the majority of the frieze sculptures and the metopes are unaffected. I understand, however, that in certain cases a tool and/or chemicals was employed without authority on

the surfaces of some of the pieces.

I have no intention of attempting to exaggerate the incident, but I thought of concluding the paragraph with the hope that a statement will shortly be published, if only to put a check on idle gossip. I was wondering whether you could see your way to having a word on the telephone with me on the matter, if possible tomorrow morning, as the next issue of '*County Life*' will be going to press that day, though additional material can be checked up till mid-day on Monday.

Assuring you of our desire to assist the British Museum to the fullest extent,

I am,

Yours faithfully.

Christopher Hussey

Editor

Sir Henry Alexander Miers to Forsdyke

18 Aberdare Gardens,

West Hampstead,

London, NW6

12th May, 1939

Dear Forsdyke,

I received to-day from Markham a cutting from The *Daily Telegraph* containing a letter from D W S Hunt about the Elgin Marbles, and Markham wished to see me about it, but I shall be away to-day and unable to meet him. You have probably seen the letter which refers to a paragraph in 'London Day by Day' on May 1st, which I have not seen and therefore do not know what exactly is the matter. However Hunt is a Fellow of Magdalen; I shall be at a College meeting next Wednesday and can probably arrange to meet him then and hear about his grievances.

I may add that I was rung up by the *Sunday Dispatch* at 2.5 on March 25th, enquiring whether the Trustees had that morning been considering the Elgin Marbles. I replied that the Trustees would not meet at Bloomsbury till May to consider British Museum matters. The *Sunday Dispatch* man, Knight, said he supposed that reports about the cleaning of the Marbles were exaggerated; he had not seen anything wrong with them. I laughed and said of course he had not, and added that I had not read recent rumours in the Press, that nothing was being done and that all was well.

Yours sincerely,

(Henry A Miers)

Forsdyke to Miers

12th May, 1939

Sir Henry Alexander Miers DCL, DSC, LL.D, FRS

18 Aberdare Gardens,

West Hampstead,

NW6

Dear Miers,

The activity of *The Daily Telegraph* in the matter of the Elgin Marbles is, I believe, a form of personal attack upon me, in consequence of a necessary difference of opinion which I had with a journalist whom I found established here when I succeeded Hill, and whose expulsion Hill approved.

No other newspaper takes any notice of it. I think that Markham would do more harm than good by raising the question in the House of Commons, but he may be useful, if the question is put, in asking the proper supplementary questions. I will gladly see Markham.

The young man Hunt of Magdalen must have been put up by the newspaper people to write his letter. It is ignorant and foolish for a man in his position. A 'lover of Greek art' would at once have come and seen for himself what the effect of the unauthorised cleaning has been, and a sensible person would know that to publish the details of official negligence at this moment would only discredit the nation abroad, and could do no good.

There was an excellent editorial note in '*Country Life*' of April 8th

Yours sincerely,

(E J Forsdyke)

Forsdyke to Tribe

16th May, 1939

F N Tribe Esq, CB, CBE

Treasury Chambers,

Whitehall,

SW1

Dear Tribe,

Here is the statement which I prepared some time ago about the Parthenon Sculpture. I did it very carefully with Lord Macmillan and had it approved by the Archbishop. You could let me know by telephone what you think about it.

Yours sincerely,

(E J Forsdyke)

S F Markham to A Esdaile, British Museum

The Museums Association

Chaucer House

Malet Place

London WC1

16th May, 1939

Dear Esdaile,

Thank you for your letter of the 12th May. You have doubtless seen, since then, Robert Byron's letter in the *Sunday Times*, and I think that, under the circumstances, a written question in Parliament would be the best method of dealing with the problem. You will understand the difficulties of the position when I add that, during the last week, I have had over a dozen enquiries as to what has happened, and have had an article submitted to me for my prior observations by one of the leading reviews.

I have been able to keep this latter out of print. Perhaps, therefore, you will appreciate the reason why I am putting the question. I can assure you that it is with no desire to embarrass the British Museum Authorities, but rather the reverse.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd S F Markham)

Esdaile to Markham

17 May, 1939

S F Markham Esq

The Museums Association,

Chaucer House,

Malet Place,

WC1

Dear Markham,

Thank you for your letter of the 16th. We understand the position in which you have been placed and that your attitude is as, of course, we should have expected, entirely friendly.

We have not, as some seem to think, been hiding from publicity and the question and answer will do good at home at least. Abroad I am afraid that with Byron's help the enemies of this country may get a handle, but they have so many already.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd J H Witney for A Esdaile)

Secretary

Tribe to Forsdyke

Treasury Chambers,

Whitehall,

SW1

17th May, 1939

Dear Forsdyke,

As I told you, Mr Markham, MP has the following unstarred Question on the Order Paper for answer tomorrow:-

'To ask the Secretary to the Treasury, whether the Elgin marbles have now been safely transferred to their new gallery at the British Museum; and whether any have suffered by removal or any cleaning process.'

Would you see any objection to the following reply?

'The marbles have not yet been transferred to the new gallery. So far as the latter part of the Question is concerned, I am informed by the Trustees of the British Museum that there has been some unauthorised cleaning of some of the marbles but it is not yet possible to determine precisely what the effect has been. I am assured, however, that the effects are imperceptible to anyone but an expert, and I think it follows that the intrinsic beauty of the marbles has not been impaired.'

So far as Mr Mander's Question for the 23rd May is concerned, we might reply simply by reference to the above answer with a slight amplification on facts unless events in the meanwhile have developed in such a way that a further reply is then desirable.

Could you telephone me tomorrow morning and let me know if you think the above reply is suitable, as it might be desirable to issue the reply tomorrow?

Yours sincerely,

(F N Tribe)

Henry Martin FSA, to The Secretary, British Museum

Editor-in-Chief
The Press Association,
PO Box no. 67,
23 St Bride Street,
London EC4
May 18 1939

Dear Sir,
To-day's '*Times*' has a statement issued apparently by the Trustees of the British Museum regarding the recent cleaning of the Elgin Marbles.

I shall be grateful if you will inform me why a similar statement was not issued to the Press Association for distribution to the London and provincial Press. The subject is one of national interest, and already I am having inquiries why '*The Times*' should have been exclusively favoured. Yours faithfully.
(Henry Martin)
Editor-in-Chief

Esdaile to Henry Martin

22 May, 1939
Henry Martin Esq, FSA
The Press Association,
23 St Bride Street,
EC4

Dear Sir,
With reference to your letter of the 18th, I can only reply that the statement issued to *The Times* and not to The Press Association was issued by the Trustees.

I am unable to state what the Trustees' reasons for their policy were. Your letter will be laid before the Board in due course.
I am, dear Sir,
Yours faithfully.
(Sgd A Esdaile)
Secretary

Forsdyke to Tribe

22nd May, 1939
F N Tribe Esq, CB, CBE
Treasury Chambers,
Whitehall,
SW1

Dear Tribe,
I send herewith the first page of the early edition of *The Daily Telegraph* containing the irresponsible article about which I told you. I have underlined the false statements in red ink.

It is quite evident that this art critic (presumably an 'expert') has no idea of what is going on in regard to the Parthenon sculpture. His 'now open to the public again' and 'not yet replaced' means that he does not understand that the old Room has never been closed and that the Metopes and other pieces which are not on view in it, have been removed to their permanent places in the new Room. The examples that he specifies of pieces that have been touched, the Cavalry of the North Frieze, are actually among those that we know were not touched and the figures of Cecrops and his daughter are not originals at all, but plaster casts, to which nothing could be done.

This effort entirely bears out what the Trustees said in their statement except that they might have gone farther and said that the effects of cleaning are imperceptible even to an expert of the newspaper kind. It is a pity that there is no means of dealing with this kind of false statement as libel. Yours sincerely,
E J Forsdyke

Appendix 11

Press cuttings

The Daily Telegraph 19 March 1939

Elgin Marbles -

I learn that Mr F N Pryce, Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum, has resigned his post. Prof. Bernard Ashmole is to succeed him. Until recently he was Yates Professor of Archaeology at London University. He has been for some weeks in provisional charge of the department.

Mr Pryce's resignation was followed by that of his assistant, Mr Roger Hinks. Mr Hinks, who shines socially not less than in scholarship, has received an appointment at the Warburg Institute library of rare historical books and manuscripts in South Kensington.

It is officially stated that the reported disagreement at the Museum over the cleaning of the Elgin Marbles is not connected with these resignations.

-And 'Museum Discipline'

The marbles were under Mr Pryce's care, and I understand that his treatment of them raised in the mind of Sir John Forsdyke, the Director, a question of 'Museum discipline.' Mr Pryce's resignation is said to be on the ground of his health, which has not been good for some time.

Sir John Forsdyke and Prof. Ashmole are Buckinghamshire neighbours. Sir John* has a farm near Chesham, and Prof. Ashmole lives in a house he built at Amersham.

Its modern architecture at first greatly startled the inhabitants of that town.

[*note in pencil 'Quite untrue, but an old and persistent error of one of the editorial staff of the DT J]

The Daily Telegraph 21 March 1939

Elgin Marbles Too Clean?

Archaeologists, I hear, are anxious about the state of the Elgin marbles in the British Museum. Ten days ago I mentioned that Mr F N Pryce and Mr Roger Hinks, the Keeper and Assistant Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities, had resigned.

It is being said by those qualified to express an opinion that as the result of their recent cleaning the metopes and frieze have lost the warmth of their patina.

The Elgin marbles are more than a national possession. Successive Greek Governments have been anxious to see them restored to their places on the Parthenon. It has been an argument against this that their preservation was better assured in the Museum.

However ill or well founded the anxiety about their

condition may be, a statement by Sir John Forsdyke, the Director of the Museum, giving the facts of the case would be welcome.

The Star 21 March 1939

'Patina' Was Just Dirt To This Cleaner

by A G Thornton
Hypersensitive fellows are complaining that certain of the Elgin Marbles have lost their patina.

Passing over the hopeless ones who think that the Elgin Marbles are a Scottish ground game, we come to the larger artistic minority who do not know a patina when they see it.

This is a British Museum business, and a certain amount of mystery surrounds these famous marble sculptures (part-worn) brought back by the 7th Earl of Elgin from Athens more than 100 years ago.

Not A Word

Recently somebody (his name is never mentioned now) started giving these BM marbles a wash and brush up, thus jeopardising, in the opinion of some, the exquisite patina – the accumulation of grime caused by long exposure to atmosphere.

Like the mouldy bits of gorgonzola, this patina is much admired by artistic epicures.

To-day the usual parties were conducted around the Bloomsbury mausoleum, and not a word was said about any patina. Cecrops and his daughter were as usual upset about something, though it was difficult to say what as they have no faces. Across the road Selene was performing her usual act of descending into the sea and Demeter was holding her hands up in horror.

Woman's Viewpoint

But there were sinister blanks. Selene, for instance, had lost her horse. Iris had gone and the horses of Helios were also missing. But it is all right really. They are all having a move into new and better service flats (or stables) in the new Elgin room.

A number of other pieces were boarded up as for an air raid. It was an air raid really, because the masons were making a new doorway and these valuables had to be protected from the flying splinters and dust.

But the Elgin glories remain, particularly that sculptured glory of glories, the Fates. As one entranced woman tourist said, 'Aren't their frocks lovely, and haven't they worn well?'

Daily Mail 25 March 1939**Elgin Marbles (Worth £1,000,000) Damaged in Cleaning**

By William Hall

Reports of irreparable damage to the Elgin Marbles, priceless world-famous treasures housed in the British Museum, have been whispered in art circles during the past few weeks. Yesterday I was permitted to see the damage.

In the new £80,000 gallery, which has been presented by Lord Duveen to house the Marbles, and is to be opened soon, there are already a number of slabs from the Parthenon frieze. They bear figures of Greek youths and maidens, some on horseback, some afoot and, undoubtedly they have been damaged during cleaning.

Traces of patina have been removed, leaving an unnatural whiteness. Patina, the result of a process closely resembling oxidation, develops on marble in the passing of centuries.

In the case of the Elgin Marbles, it has given to the pieces a lovely orange-golden sheen which, in the eyes of art lovers, greatly increases the attractiveness of the lovely Marbles, and it is this sheen which has been removed from a number of them.

Washed by Experts

The British Museum authorities are greatly concerned that the damage should have been done, even inadvertently, but it was pointed out to me that only experts are likely to detect it.

It is not intended to withdraw the over-cleaned pieces from public view. They are being placed in the new gallery, and will be on show when it is opened.

It is the rule to wash the Marbles in distilled water, using a light sponge and a special liquid soap prepared in the museum's laboratory, and those engaged in the task are specially instructed.

Fifth Century BC

Removal of the patina occurred during cleaning operations while the former keeper of the Roman and Greek antiquities, Mr F N Pryce, was temporarily absent through illness. Mr Pryce last year resigned his appointment. Shortly after the damage was discovered a report was prepared for the trustees, who include Dr Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Maugham, the Lord Chancellor, Earl Baldwin, and Lord Harlech.

The Elgin Marbles, which, if they could be priced at all, would be valued at £1,000,000 at least, were brought to Britain from Athens just over a century ago by the seventh Earl of Elgin. They date to the fifth century BC, and are believed to have been carved under the direct supervision of Phidias, greatest sculptor of classical antiquity.

The Greeks never forgave Lord Elgin for what they called his 'robbery' of the Marbles, although he removed them from the Acropolis only for safe keeping in Britain, under an agreement with the Turkish authorities then in power.

Daily Express 25 March 1939**Mystery At The Museum**

There has been trouble at the British Museum.

There have been resignations – notably that of ROGER HINKS, of the Department of Greek & Roman antiquities.

Visitors have noticed with surprise the whiteness of the Elgin Marbles – the sculptured groups which schoolboys have been taught to revere as ancient art's highest achievement ever since they were pinched for us from Greece in 1806.

They have recently been given a thorough 'scrubbing' which some critics regret.

Museum trustees have conferred earnestly about the matter.

There has been so much talk about it that they ought surely to issue a statement.

Anything to do with the welfare of the British Museum – which the State subsidises to the extent of getting on for £200,000 a year – is of public interest.

Country Life 8 April 1939**The Elgin Marbles**

The disquieting rumours now current that some of the Elgin Marbles have been 'ruined' by unauthorised cleaning are, of course, wholly untrue and can be dispelled by simply looking at those on view in the Elgin room at the British Museum. Routine washing with soap and water was authorised in preparation for the removal of the sculptures to the new Duveen Room, but in the process it appears that other means of cleaning were employed without the knowledge of the Museum authorities. Gossip speaks of the patina of some of the pieces being destroyed; even of the surface being removed to an appreciable extent. Confirmation is afforded of some irregularity having taken place by the resignation of an official; but, so far from any material damage having been done, even an expert eye would find it difficult to distinguish between the sculptures cleaned by authorised means and those by unauthorised. The pediment groups do not seem to be involved. From the layman's point of view the pieces cleaned actually look all the better. But it is the infringement of archaeological canons that makes the incident serious: the fact that, without the knowledge of the authorities, means of cleaning other than those prescribed by them should have been employed, and thus, not the marbles themselves, but the documentary record of their handling, have been technically damaged.

The Daily Telegraph 1 May 1939**Elgin Plaster Casts**

Ingenious methods are employed by the British Museum authorities to conceal from visitors the state of the Elgin Marbles after their recent 'cleaning.'

I visited the Museum during the week-end and found that the figure of Iris in the East Pediment and the horses of the Sun and Moon at either end of this had been replaced by life-like casts. The square metopes, showing Centaurs and

Lapiths struggling, are not on view in any form.

A rather ungrateful whispering campaign has been started to suggest that the treatment the Elgin Marbles have undergone is the responsibility of Lord Duveen. It is to him that the erection of the new Elgin Gallery is due.

Lord Duveen, of course, is not an official of the Museum, and the Marbles have never been in his charge.

Director's Responsibility

They are the responsibility of the Director, Sir John Forsdyke.

His selection by the Trustees in 1936 met with some criticism owing to his lack of administrative experience. At that time he had only been Keeper of a Department for four years.

It was, however, considered that the new Elgin Room was the largest problem facing the Museum, and the Trustees are said to have taken the view that it would be wise to appoint as Director someone whose expert knowledge was particularly connected with Greek antiquities.

Sir John Forsdyke has denied that the retirement of his former colleagues, Mr Pryce and Mr Hinks, is connected with any trouble over the cleaning of the Marbles. From this it is clear that Sir John himself assumes full responsibility.

I understand that whatever artistic damage may have been done to the sculptures mineralogists from the Natural History Museum consider that the Marbles, viewed purely as stone, are unimpaired.

The Daily Telegraph letter from DW Stather Hunt 11 May 1939**The Elgin Marbles**

The remarks on the Elgin Marbles in 'London Day by Day' of May 1 last have attracted widespread attention among lovers of ancient Greek art but so far the story appears to be one-sided. Surely some statement from the Museum authorities is called for? It is, perhaps not generally realised that the Elgin Marbles are public property, bought with taxpayers' money in 1816, and that the British Museum itself is entirely supported out of national revenue. It is to be hoped that any statement made will be in specific, not in general terms. D W Stather Hunt
Magdalen College, Oxford

Sunday Times letter from Robert Byron 14 May 1939**Elgin Marbles in British Museum**

Need for an Official Statement

To the Editor, *Sunday Times*

Sir, – It is now two months since tales began to circulate of a mishap to the Elgin Marbles. Hints of irregularity in the treatment of the marbles have appeared in the Press, and more than hints in private conversation. Yet still the Museum has not been able to issue a statement. Is it to be assumed, or do the Museum authorities assume, that the public has no interest in what happens to the national art treasures? We have waited in patience.. I suggest that the time has now come when either a statement must be forthcoming or the

question raised in Parliament.

The Elgin Marbles have a more universal importance than any other works of art in the keeping of this country. If a Chinese, for example, said he had come to England to penetrate the spirit of the West, a wise man might answer: 'You have started at the wrong end; you ought to have gone to the Mediterranean first. But now you are here, it happens that we do possess in London a set of sculptures from the Parthenon at Athens which will show you the spirit of the West in its early freshness. From these you may discover in visible form that conception of human dignity, that power of observation and that habit of measured statement which makes us prize liberty, pursue knowledge and exercise reason; for this is the way of thinking – so different from your own more antique and laborious accumulation of common sense and aesthetic emotion – which has given us power and wealth and which the Greeks laid down for us. The Piccadilly tube will take you to the British Museum. Once you have grasped the meaning of these mutilated stones, you can begin to study the British Constitution or the mass production of aircraft or anything else that strikes you as typical of our civilisation.'

'Was it a British conqueror,' the Chinese might reply, 'who brought these sculptures from a subject land?'

'No, it was a noble ambassador, who paid £35,000 out of his own pocket to fetch them.'

The Cleaning Process

A hundred years have passed since London first acclaimed

...the modern Pict's ignoble boast
To rive what Goth, and Turk, and Time hath spared.

And for a hundred years the London atmosphere has been encrusting those once sun-kissed figures with a sheath of corrosive soot; so that until the last few months, it might have been necessary to warn the Chinese that these murky shapes, lost in the twilit caverns of a hyperborean metropolis, demanded a certain effort of imagination.

This has been accentuated in recent years by the contrasting splendour of such galleries as the Pergamum Museum in Berlin and many others in America, erected to house far less important objects. But at length a champion has emerged, as munificent as Elgin himself, in the person of Lord Duveen. He has built a gallery of unequalled magnificence, Doric in idea and so big that the figures can be seen from the distance the sculptor intended. 'To be worthy of such an edifice it was decided that the marbles must be cleaned. Many of them have already been installed in their new state, and though the gallery is not yet open to the public the courtesy of the Museum officials has enabled certain visitors to examine them there.

It is not necessary to be an authority on Greek sculpture to see that the cleaning process, however much it may have improved on the previous state of the marbles, has not restored them to their original appearance. Anyone who knows the patina of Pentelic marble, who has run his hands over the knife-like edges of the Parthenon or the objects in the Acropolis Museum and felt those innumerable tiny asperities and translucencies which make that stone the most vivid material that ever rewarded a carver's skill, can see at once that the marbles in Lord Duveen's new gallery

have lost this patina. The lustre and the gentleness have vanished. The lumps of stone remain, robbed of life, dead as casts.

Right to Information

The Museum authorities may argue, possibly with absolute truth, that the armour of grime with which the marble was coated had already devoured the patina beyond hope of recovery. But they do not argue this. They argue nothing at all.

The public has a right to be informed, not only on account of its concern for the national collections, but for the sake of our relations with Greece. Greece has never relinquished her claim to the marbles’ return. So far this claim has been met by two rather doubtful arguments; first, that Lord Elgin saved the marbles from destruction by removing them; secondly, that if they were returned, they would not be properly shown or cared for. If the marbles can now be shown, as I think they can, to have been irrevocably damaged by their sojourn here, the first argument collapses. If that damage was due to negligence, the second collapses also. It is unlikely that Greece is any more anxious to pick a quarrel with us at this moment than we are with her. But mysteries rankle. Let us clear the situation and let in the light, even if we have to apologise in doing so.

London, sw3

The Times 18 May 1939

Cleaning the Elgin Marbles

For a good many weeks past it has been impossible to move among people of artistic or antiquarian interests in London without hearing alarming rumours about the Elgin Marbles; and some references to the matter have appeared in print. The statement published this morning from the Trustees of the British Museum (even though it is phrased with an extreme official caution) should finally dispel the foolish stories that have been told of damage done during cleaning. In fact, so far as the lay eye can detect, no harm of any kind has been done to the Marbles; and whether any change (other than the removal of dirt) will be detected in them by the experts after close and prolonged examination not even the experts can yet say.

The relevant points of the story are soon told. LORD DUVEEN has built a gallery (not yet open to the public) specially to house the Elgin Marbles, and the opportunity was taken to clean them. When the cleaning had gone a certain way it was discovered that, unknown to the officials in charge of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, a method of cleaning was being used of which the Trustees disapproved because it was held to be dangerous. The object of this unauthorized method was, it seems, to remove certain spots of discoloration on the statues, but whether any such spots were in fact removed is not known. Certainly no one can tell by ordinary methods of inspection which of the statues were so cleaned, and which (and these are the bulk of the series) were cleaned by the accepted methods. The Elgin marbles show many differences of colour, many varying degrees of preservation of the surface which ill-informed or malicious criticism

might misinterpret. These differences have nothing to do with the recent cleaning or with any other, but are due to the varying disposition of the Marbles on the outside of the Temple of which, facing the sea winds, they formed part for more than 2,000 years, or to the different positions in which some of them lay on the ground between their fall from the Parthenon and their removal by LORD ELGIN To base upon the recent incident any argument that the Elgin Marbles are not properly cared for in their present home is to exaggerate it out of all proportion. If the Museum authorities themselves had not chosen, quite rightly, to take a grave view of the matter, it would probably never have been suspected that there had been the slightest irregularity.

Parthenon Enquiry

Director’s Note on ‘The Policy of the Trustees in Regard to Publication of the Facts’

However full the announcement may be which the Trustees send officially to the Press, it will be amplified by the representatives of newspapers in London from their own enquiries and observations. I would therefore advise that the official announcement be as brief and bare as possible, and that I be authorised to add details within certain limits in answer to personal enquiries by accredited representatives of the Press.

To be appended to the Report:

The Trustees of the British Museum regret to announce that in the process of (cleaning) preparing...for removal the Parthenon sculptures preparatory to their being placed in the new galleries, which have been built by Lord Duveen, improper and unauthorised methods have been employed in some instances through the negligence of the responsible officers.

Information to be given orally in answer to specific questions:-

- ‘What were the improper methods?’
- ‘What damage has been done?’ (This question to be referred to the enquirers’ own powers of observation).
- ‘Who wanted to improve the colour?’
- ‘Who made the unauthorised efforts?’
- ‘Why were the efforts made?’
- ‘Why were they not stopped?’
- ‘Who are the responsible officers’
- ‘What has been done about them?’

The Times 18 May 1939

Elgin Marbles

Trustees Policy on Cleaning
Use of New Method is Stopped

The following official statement has been received by *The Times* regarding the recent cleaning of the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum:-

The Trustees of the British Museum have had under consideration the recent cleaning of the Elgin Marbles in connexion with their rearrangement in the new galleries which have been built by Lord Duveen. They found that unauthorized methods were being introduced in some instances, with the intention evidently of improving the appearance of the marble by removing spots of discolouration from its surface. Since this was done without the knowledge of the officers of the Museum

who were responsible for the cleaning it has not yet been possible to determine precisely the extent to which these methods were applied. To anyone but an expert their effect is imperceptible. The Trustees do not allow any departure from their approved methods, and at once took the necessary steps to ensure that no such innovations should be adopted in the Museum.

The Elgin Marbles are those portions of the sculpture from the Parthenon at Athens which were brought to England by the seventh Earl of Elgin in 1806, and bought by the British Government in 1816. They have long been considered among the chief treasures of the British Museum. During recent weeks there have been rumours, happily dispelled by the above announcement, that they had suffered more or less serious damage during cleaning before their removal to the gallery which Lord Duveen has built for their display.

Daily Express 19 May 1939, front page and page 2

‘I am the man who cleaned the Elgin Marbles’

The Great Elgin Marbles mystery was partially solved last night
Rubbed off Dirty Spots
Daily Express Staff Reporter
The Great Elgin Marbles mystery was partially solved last night.

Arthur Holcombe, 115.-a-week pensioner of the British Museum told me that, while in charge of six masons cleaning the treasures – valued at £1,000,000 at least – he used a blunt copper tool ‘to get off some of the dirtier spots.’

Mr Holcombe, seventy-three years old, lives in North London. He worked at the British Museum thirty-four years earned £3.17s. a week, and was always amazed at the beauty of the Marbles.

They are sculptures from the Parthenon in Athens, bear figures of Greek youths and maidens, some on horseback, some afoot. Their cleaning was ordered before their transference to the £80,000 gallery Lord Duveen has presented for their housing.

Asked in Vain

When it was alleged they had been damaged in the process famous figures in the art world pressed – in vain – for a statement from the Museum authorities.

Mr Holcombe said:-

‘I was told to begin cleaning them two years ago. As head man, I was put in charge of six Museum labourers.

‘We were given a solution of soap and water and ammonia. First we brushed the dirt off the marbles with a soft brush. Then we applied the solution with the same brush. After that we sponged them dry, then wiped them over with distilled water.

‘That was all we were told to do. To get off some of the dirtier spots I rubbed the Marbles with a blunt copper tool. Some of them were as black with dirt as that grate’ said Mr Holcombe pointing to his hearth.

‘As far as I know, all that had been done for years to clean them was to blow them with bellows.

‘The other men borrowed my copper tools and rubbed the Marbles with them as I did. I knew it would not do them any harm, because the copper is softer than the stone. I have

used the same tools for cleaning marble at the Museum under four directors.

‘One or two of the slabs of the frieze came up rather white, and I am afraid they caused the trouble. But anybody who knows anything about marble knows that if you treat two slabs in exactly the same way it is possible they will come up a different colour.

‘All the time we were working officials of the Museum were passing through the room. We had been at it fifteen months when I was told there was a complaint.

‘The six men and I were called before a committee of trustees and the director of the Museum. We went in separately and they asked us all kinds of questions about how we had been cleaning the Marbles.

3 Weeks’ Notice

‘I told them about the copper tool. I went before the committee three times, but I never heard what their decision was.

‘Three months after the last committee meeting the director of works called me to his office, and told me that as I was over age I would have to retire. He gave me three weeks’ notice, and I got a pension.

‘The retiring age at the Museum is sixty-five. When I left I was seventy-two.

‘I am sure the work we did on the Marbles did them no harm. I wanted to be a sculptor when I was a boy, but when my father died I could not continue my studies, so I became a mason.

‘Before I went to the Museum I did some work on Westminster Abbey.’

Yesterday the Trustees of the British Museum issued a statement that they found unauthorised methods were being introduced in some instances, and that this was done without the knowledge of the officers of the Museum who were responsible for the cleaning.

The statement added that the effects of the methods used were imperceptible to any one but an expert, and concluded:-

‘The Trustees do not allow any departure from their approved methods, and at once took the necessary steps to ensure that no such innovations should be adopted in the Museum.’

The Elgin Marbles are so called because they were brought to England by the seventh Earl of Elgin. The Government bought them in 1816.

The Times letter from Jacob Epstein 19 May

Cleaning of Marbles

To the Editor of *The Times*

Sir

In your issue of May 2, 1921, I protested against the ‘cleaning’ and restoring of the Greek marbles at the British Museum, particularly the Demeter of Cnidus. My protest went unheeded and I was jeered at for concerning myself with what I was told was no business of mine. Eighteen years have passed, and now the cleaning and restoration of the

Elgin marbles are causing uneasiness, and questions are asked as to whether the famous marbles have been damaged in the process. The British Museum authorities have admitted that any change in the marbles is only to be distinguished by the practised eye ‘of an expert,’ wherever that resides! An interview published in the Press with the head cleaner of the marbles has elicited the information that a copper tool ‘softer than marble’ (how incredible) was used. Why a cleaner and six hefty men should be allowed for 15 months to tamper with the Elgin marbles as revealed by the head cleaner passes the comprehension of a sculptor. When will the British Museum authorities understand that they are only the custodians and never the creators of these masterpieces? Faithfully yours, Jacob Epstein 18 Hyde Park Gate, sw7

The Daily Telegraph 19 May 1939

Cleaned Elgin Marbles

Now that a Parliamentary question has been put on the Order Paper regarding the Elgin Marbles, to the condition of which I have more than once referred. I see that the Trustees of the British Museum have issued a statement on the question.

In this they declare that unauthorised methods of proceeding have been introduced with an effect on the sculptures ‘imperceptible to anyone but an expert,’ and that they have taken the necessary steps to see that no such innovation should be adopted by the Museum.

The statement also declares that this cleaning process was used without the knowledge of the officers responsible for the cleaning.

British Museum and the Press

It seems odd that this cleaning, which must have occupied a considerable time, escaped the observation of the Director, Sir John Forsdyke.

Incidentally, the Trustees’ statement was not made to the Press as a whole. Recently I called attention to the fact that Sir Philip Sassoon had given details of the work of his Department to a single paper.

The official announcement of the Trustees is also clearly a public matter which should have been issued in the normal manner.

The Evening News 20 May 1939

Epstein is Very Angry about the Way British Museum Treated The Elgin Marbles

“‘Experts” are Ignorant’, he says ‘Damage is Done now to Priceless Art’ Hint to Trustees ‘Let Working Sculptors Advise You’

His hands white with the dust of the stone he had just been carving, Mr Jacob Epstein had a few unkind words to say about the methods of the British Museum’s custodians of sculpture to-day.

‘Eighteen years ago I protested against the cleaning and ‘restoring’ of Greek marbles there,’ Mr Epstein said to me (writes an Evening News representative).

‘The only result was that I was ridiculed and abused by everybody, and especially by the people who had never in their lives worked on a piece of marble, though, artists all over the world were shocked by the news that the Museum authorities had added a false nose to the Demeter of Cnidus.

How Did It Happen?

‘Now comes the revelation that for 15 months some workman has been scraping the Elgin Marbles with a copper tool. It is admitted that this method is unauthorised: what needs explaining is how it came to be used for all that time without action being taken.

‘I hear that two officials have resigned, but in the meantime the damage has been done.

‘I have had some dealings with these museum authorities, and have found them ignorant and opinionated almost beyond belief. Once, for instance, I was urged to show a piece of Sumerian sculpture to one of these experts.

‘He promptly declared that the attitude of the hands and feet proved that it was not genuine.

‘A Fake,’ He Said ‘I then satisfied him that the hands and feet were exactly in accordance with the Sumerian style. Then almost without looking at it, he coolly said: ‘Anyway, the statue is a fake, a very clever fake.’

‘The Elgin Marbles are utterly beyond price, supreme works of art, and I think I know them as well as any of the curators, if not better.

‘The obvious and only sensible thing for the Trustees to do is to have an advisory panel of working sculptors whom they can consult on these matters, instead of leaving them to a group of archaeologists and chemists.

‘The kind of thing which has just been revealed makes Britain the laughing-stock of the whole civilised world.’

The Times 22 May 1939

Cleaning of the Marbles

To the Editor of *The Times* Sir,

In his letter to you of to-day’s date Mr Jacob Epstein refers to his letter of May 2, 1921, in which he complained of the ‘cleaning’ and restoring of Greek marbles at the British Museum, particularly the Demeter of Cnidus. He now complains that his protest went unheeded; but he must have missed the statement in your issue of May 3 and Professor Percy Gardner’s letter of May 4. Had he read these he would have understood that the Demeter had not been cleaned in the drastic way which he alleged. The ‘restoration’ was confined to the experimental addition of the nose in plaster which could be easily, and was indeed immediately afterwards, removed.

A point that was not made in those communications, however, may be mentioned here. The Demeter has never had a ‘mellow golden patine’ within living memory. (My own memory of her goes back to the eighties). But the plaster cast which, for safety’s sake, filled her place during

the War was of a nice yellow colour. Mr Epstein must have become accustomed to the cast, which less expert critics than himself may well have taken for an original.

I may be allowed to add that no such thing as ‘restoration’ of the Parthenon marbles has been or will be undertaken as long as the authorities of the British Museum have them in their keeping: and no ‘cleaning’ other than simple washing with neutral soap and distilled water is authorized in the Museum. I am. Sir, your obedient servant, George Hill 12 Sussex Place, Regent’s Park, NW1 May 20

The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post 22 May 1939, front page

Elgin Marbles suffer through Renovation

Certain Pieces Not Yet Replaced Museum Trustees’ Report Unauthorised Methods Introduced by T W Earp, *Daily Telegraph* Art Critic

The Elgin Marbles in the British Museum are now open to the public again after the rearrangement and cleaning which have been carried out in recent months, and I visited them during the week-end to investigate reports that they had suffered in the process.

As a result I must record the unpleasant fact that the reports are true and that, to say the least, the beauty of the world’s most renowned group of sculptures has been diminished.

The glory that was Greece, so complete and harmonious, has disappeared in the brand-new aspect of most of the work.

This is especially the case in the procession of Athenian cavalry on the north side of the frieze. Removal of the patina has left the incongruity of stone as bright as though it had been freshly quarried, yet indented with the usage of time.

The large figures on the pediment, of Cecrops and his daughter, now seem little better than withered stone, while the excoriations on that of Theseus are plainly revealed. In unfortunate contrast the Three Fates still retain their discolourations.

Unity of Tone Destroyed

Thus, the sculptures’ previous unity of tone and of surface-effect has been destroyed, the cleaning having either been checked at some stage or unequally carried out. In addition, some of the casts of missing portions preserve their dark hue and clash violently with the rewhitened marble.

What is original material and what is plaster is neither clearly shown nor satisfactorily concealed.

The metopes of Centaurs and Lapiths are not yet replaced. If this arouses misgivings as to their condition, the persistent reticence of the Museum officials does nothing to dispel them. To what extent some of the scars may even be the result of the recent drastic handling cannot be estimated.

The Museum trustees say that ‘They found that unauthorised methods of cleaning were introduced in some

instances’ and that ‘since this was done without the knowledge of the officers of the Museum who were responsible for the cleaning, it has not yet been possible to determine precisely the extent to which these methods were applied.’

The rearrangement and the cleaning of the sculptures was made possible by the generosity of Lord Duveen.

The Elgin Marbles were brought to England from Greece by the seventh Earl of Elgin. They were bought by the British Government in 1816.

The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post 23 May 1939

Elgin Marbles

Beauty Lost in Cleaning by T W Earp

I understand that the cleaning of the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum is nearing completion. In the process it is widely rumoured certain damage has been sustained by these famous sculptures.

The damaged pieces are in the new gallery presented to the Museum by Lord Duveen.

This has not yet been opened to the public, and my request for admission to view them was met by a categorical refusal.

With regard to the Marbles that have undergone cleaning, in the Elgin room, it is my opinion that a change has not been made for the better by this refurbishing.

In their new-found brightness the precious relics of Greek art have lost much of their former aspect of mellow antiquity.

It is the surface mellowness, the patine which is time’s gradual imprint, which for many was so important an element in the beauty of the sculptures as a whole. It knit them in a single unity, and made less obvious the hurt sustained in rough usage at some past period.

Now the defacements and marks of old accidents stand out with a startling and confused effect in the lightened line of the stone.

The presence of such blemishes contradicts the argument of those who favour the drastic renovation on the ground that it brings closer the work’s appearance when it left the sculptor’s hand.

The ancient artists had the accretion of patine in view as part of their marble’s ultimate beauty. Wounds, and not the original finish, are accentuated by severe cleaning.

The Times letter from Jacob Epstein 25 May 1939

Cleaning of Marbles

To the Editor of *The Times* Sir,

With regard to the Elgin Marbles and the Demeter of Cnidus, Sir George Hill in his letter in your issue of to-day imagines that I took no cognizance of the letters and statements following my letter of May 2, 1921. He mentions Professor Percy Gardner’s letter of May 4, 1921, in which as I recall the professor indulged himself in what was to my mind merely a scholastic discussion and ignored the vital issues at stake.

All these letters and statements, as I pointed out in my letter of your last issue, were directed towards one purpose, which was to point out how wrong I was in criticizing the British Museum authorities, and I summed them all up there by saying simply, ‘My protest went unheeded.’ The proof of this statement is that there is now a very grave question about the cleaning of the Elgin Marbles.

Sir George Hill was a keeper at the British Museum during the years 1921-30, he will doubtless be able to recall that far from the Demeter’s restorations being removed immediately, they were only removed in February, 1923, about two years later, when Dr Bernard Smith, exasperated beyond endurance by the obduracy of the museum authorities, had squirted coloured juice on to the head of the Demeter, thereby forcing the museum to take action.

Sir George is at circumstantial pains to prove that I was unacquainted with the original marble and that, as he disingenuously suggests, I may have mistaken a plaster cast shown during the War for the Demeter. My memory of the Demeter goes back to 1904, not very much later than that of Sir George’s. I am not mistaken when I assert that the head of the Demeter of Cnidus was drastically treated in 1921.

It is not a question of only ‘a mellow golden patine’ but of what is far more important the scraping of the surfaces, and the effect of that scraping on the planes of the marble.

I have myself seen the workmen at the museum at work on the marbles and have been horrified by the methods employed.

Sir George ignores the statement of the chief cleaner, Mr Arthur Holcombe, three days ago, in the Press, that he had been in the habit at the museum, under all of the last four directors, of cleaning all the marbles with ‘a blunt copper tool’ and that he started on the Elgin marbles about two years ago and used this tool. ‘Copper is softer than stone’ he says. The absurdity of ‘the softer than marble theory’ is manifest. Has Sir George never heard of the bronze toe of the statue of St Peter in Rome kissed away by the worshippers’ soft lips?

‘Putting me in my place’ seems to be of greater importance to the museum officials than the proper care and protection of the Greek marbles. The whole thing boils down not to an academic discussion on cleaning and patination, but to the grave question as to whether the Elgin marbles and the other Greek marbles are to be kept intact, or to be in the jeopardy of being periodically treated, and perhaps, in the end, being permanently ruined by the museum officials through their lack of sculptural science.

The public is dissatisfied with the present state of affairs, and clearly uneasy about the present condition of the Elgin marbles, and must consider the answer for the Treasury in Parliament by Captain Crookshank to a question about them, as both equivocal and misleading. It was an admission of damage with an attempt to minimise the responsibility of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Faithfully yours,
Jacob Epstein
18 Hyde Park Gate, sw7
May 22

***TheTimes* letter from George Hill 26 May 1939**

The Cleaning of Marbles

Method Authorized by Museum Trustees

To the Editor of *The Times*

Sir,
I have no wish to continue with Mr Epstein a correspondence which appears to be taking a personal turn, and I should be the last to wish to ‘put him in his place,’ as to which we have all of us made up our minds by this time.

But I repeat that the only method of cleaning the marbles authorized by the Trustees was and is washing with soap and water. It would be valuable to know what exactly were the methods which Mr Epstein says he saw used to his horror, and whether they were being applied to marble or to plaster.

I must admit Mr Epstein’s correction as to the length of the period during which Demeter wore her false nose; I will not therefore quarrel with his assumption that there is not much difference in the length of our familiarity with the marbles (to be exact it is a matter of 20 years). We must, I fear, agree to differ on his statement that the head was ‘scraped’ in 1921.

The public may well feel uneasy, owing to the agitation which, as Mr Epstein’s own experience will remind him, can be only too easily worked up artificially; but how far they can trust those who seek to instruct them in the public Press may be inferred from the fact that they have been asked (though not, of course, by Mr Epstein) to believe that the group of ‘Cecrops and his Daughter’ has been a victim of such drastic ‘cleaning’ that it now seems ‘little better than withered stone.’ Since the original is still in its place on the Parthenon and is represented in the British Museum only by a plaster cast, it is hardly reasonable to hold the Trustees responsible for its present condition.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
George Hill
12 Sussex Place, Regent’s Park, NW1
May 25

***TheDailyTelegraph* and *Morning Post* 26 May 1939**

Worried over Elgin Marbles

Lord Duveen had been worried over the Elgin Marbles controversy during the past two or three months. He had hoped to be present when the new Elgin Gallery to house them, of which he was the donor, was opened by the King later this year. Unfortunately he was so ill when he arrived in London from New York at the end of April that he was unable even to see the now practically completed gallery.

I hear that he took very much to heart the suggestion that the cleaning which the Marbles have lately undergone was in some way his responsibility. As I pointed out a few days ago, he had absolutely nothing to do with this. I see that Lt-Comdr Fletcher is putting a question on the cleaning of the Marbles to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury to-day.

***TheManchester Guardian* letter to the Editor, signed N of London, 9 June 1939**

The ultimate question at the bottom of the Elgin marbles controversy is what is meant by the magic word ‘patina.’ No one denies that some of the marbles have been pretty drastically cleaned, in certain cases by methods of which no expert could possibly approve. Nor is it denied that this method of cleaning had been going on unsuspected at intervals during the last fifteen months. The authorities discovered what had been happening, were very properly scandalised, and ordered a return to the harmless soap-and-water method. Folk who like to think that they have scented out a first-rate scandal have not been slow to move and a good deal has been said about it, including the suggestion that the Marbles have been ‘ruined.’ The same kind of thing invariably happens when any dear Old Master (Velasquez’ ‘Silver Philip’ was a case in point) has its face washed.

But what, in fact, has happened? The sculptures are about to be housed in the new Duveen Gallery in the British Museum, and, doubtless, the cleaners were anxious that they should look spick and span before moving in. For over twenty centuries before Lord Elgin brought them to London, they have stood up to the weather on the Acropolis. On their way to England they spent some weeks at the bottom of the sea. None of them were unscathed. Few if any portions of

them have retained their original surface. Some of them are wrecks of their former selves. What has now been done to them is negligible by comparison with what is happening to the portions still on the Parthenon. Casts of these latter taken in 1802 and again in 1872 reveal the lamentable results of open-air weathering.

The removal of a layer of London soot from the British Museum sculptures – especially from the metopes – has certainly altered their colour; uniformity of colour they never had. Indeed, slight variation of colour is a characteristic of weathered Pentelic marble. But the fact that the Museum authorities themselves are not quite certain which of them have been subjected to the unconventional methods of cleaning and which have not (some of them certainly have not) is proof that the aesthetic damage is unimportant. Subtleties of modelling, like the veins on the horses’ bellies and the sharp chiselling of their manes are still unimpaired. Only a microscopic comparison between the Marbles in their present state and a set of full-sized photographic enlargements of their old surfaces could reveal the damage. That is a question for the expert. I doubt if the average visitor or even the average art-lover would notice any change beyond that of colour. But then, how many average visitors ever gave them more than a passing glance? If the controversy does nothing else it will teach us to look at them a little more closely in future.

