

# 'A desire for the National Good': Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks and the curatorship of Renaissance decorative art in Britain, 1840-1900

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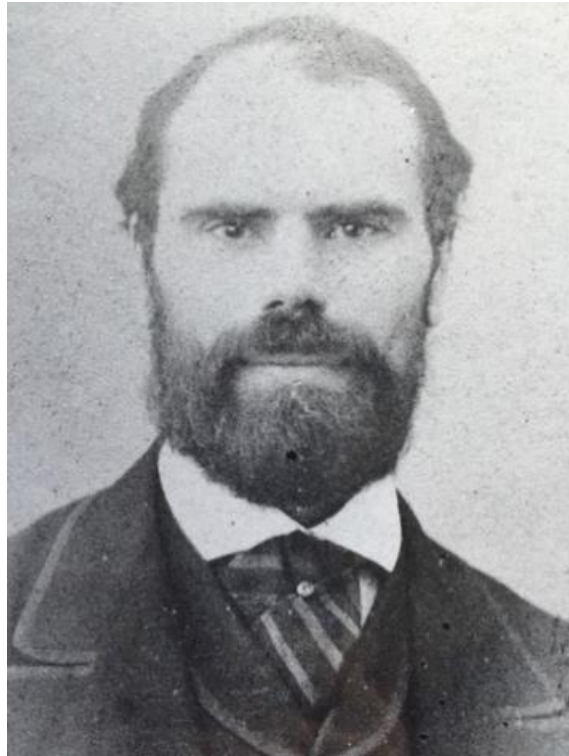


Figure 1 Augustus Wollaston Franks, c.1870, British Museum BEP Archive. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

In 1847, while still an undergraduate at Trinity College Cambridge, Augustus Wollaston Franks wrote to the trustees of the British Museum requesting permission to publish an account of the impressions from the monumental brasses preserved in the Museum Print Room.<sup>1</sup> The letter marks the beginnings of a career spent devoted to the study and enhancement of the Museum collections. Spanning the second half of the nineteenth century, the period between Franks's appointment as a museum officer in 1851 and his death in 1897 witnessed a burgeoning culture of exhibition and display, the establishment of new local, regional and national museum collections and the reshaping of the decorative art trade from the individual

<sup>1</sup> British Museum (BM) Trustees' Minutes, 11 December 1847.

curiosity shop towards a systematised international art market.<sup>2</sup> As a scholar, advisor and curator on the one hand, and an insatiable collector, donor and lender on the other, Franks provides a fascinating point of intersection within the intricate networks of private and public art collecting that occupied this emerging cultural realm. While Franks's biographical history, and the role he played within the British Museum's institutional history have been the subject of recent studies, the following discussion seeks to focus in on Franks's influence on the concept of curatorship, and to consider how his relationships and associations with fellow curators, collectors and connoisseurs helped define and reinforce the idea of the modern museum professional.<sup>3</sup> Firstly by examining Franks's approach to curating at the British Museum, and secondly by investigating his place within the contemporary antiquarian milieu, this article will argue that Franks's appointment in 1851 marks a shift away from the culture of the amateur collector towards a more distinct and systematic approach to curatorship.

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Born into a wealthy, privileged family in Geneva in 1826, Franks occupied both the aristocratic and plutocratic social spheres that were to shape the art market in the second half of the nineteenth century. His mother was the daughter of Sir John Seabright, a Baronet with estates in Worcestershire and Hertfordshire, while his father descended from a family of bankers. He was also heir to a long line of collectors, and Franks was already displaying symptoms of what he termed 'the collecting disease' by the time he went up to Cambridge in 1845.<sup>4</sup> His engagement with medieval art, spurred on by participation in the Cambridge Architectural Society, the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, and the Cambridge Camden Society, manifested in his early accumulations of brass rubbings, a subject leading to his precocious interest in the Museum's impressions of monumental brasses.

At the time of Franks's letter to the trustees in 1847, however, the collections of European medieval and Renaissance objects at the British Museum were still in their infancy. Two years later, Edward Hawkins, the keeper of antiquities, declared 'our collection of medieval antiquities is very small indeed; that is to say, things later than the fourteenth century,'<sup>5</sup> and the department's acquisitions and displays concentrated on classical and Egyptian objects. Yet a growing interest in medieval

<sup>2</sup> For more on the public art sphere in the nineteenth century, see Giles Waterfield, *The People's Galleries: Art Museums and Exhibitions in Britain, 1800--1914*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2015; Brandon Taylor, *Art for the nation: exhibitions and the London public, 1747-2001*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999; Pamela M. Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, eds, *The rise of the modern art market in London 1850-1939*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> For Franks's biography and contribution to the British Museum collections, see Marjorie L Caygill and John Cherry, eds, *A.W. Franks : nineteenth-century collecting and the British Museum*, London, British Museum Press, 1997; For Franks's role within the broader institutional history of the British Museum, see David M. Wilson, *The British Museum: a history*, London, British Museum Press, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Augustus Wollaston Franks, 'The Apology of my Life', in Caygill and Cherry eds *A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, Appendix 1, 318.

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Constitution and Government of the British Museum; with minutes of evidence*, London, 1850, 20 March 1849, para. 8180.

and Renaissance decorative art amongst private collectors, antiquarians and ecclesiologists had led to calls for the Museum to move into this area of collecting, pressure compounded by an awareness of the expanding collections at the Louvre and Royal Museum in Berlin and fears of Britain being left behind in the race for objects.<sup>6</sup> In 1850 a gallery assigned for the adequate display of medieval and Renaissance works of art was finally completed, and Hawkins appealed to the trustees for an additional officer to oversee the collections.<sup>7</sup> Franks had graduated just a year earlier, but was already well established within the antiquarian community.<sup>8</sup> He was playing a central role in the Archaeological Institute, arranging its collections and organising events, and had served as secretary for the taste-making exhibition of *Works of Ancient and Mediaeval Art* at the Society of Arts in 1850, the first public exhibition of such material in Britain.<sup>9</sup> Franks was nevertheless intending to study for the bar, and hesitated in accepting the position at the Museum, in case it was considered '*infra dig*' for a gentleman of means,<sup>10</sup> a remark highlighting the significance of the appointment. While his superior, Hawkins, had been educated at grammar school, working in banks in Macclesfield and Swansea before joining the museum aged forty-five, Franks was a wealthy member of the aristocracy, attending Eton and Cambridge, and at ease in the company of the nobles and politicians active as trustees and within learned societies. This background equipped him with the social and financial confidence to mould the appointment, and concept of curatorship, according to his own understanding of the social and intellectual function of the Museum.

Franks's primary focus as a curator was on expanding the collections. In 1885 he reflected that careful collecting was essential to the very existence of a museum, 'to avoid the possibility of the institution becoming a fossil, as has been the case, for instance, at the Soane Museum.'<sup>11</sup> As a collector himself, Franks arrived at the Museum with an acute understanding of the market, and an awareness not only that Britain had been slow to develop its Renaissance collections in comparison with its European counterparts; but, moreover, that it had squandered opportunities to

<sup>6</sup> *Commission Report*, 1850, 38–9.

<sup>7</sup> BM Trustees' Minutes, 12 June 1850.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, at the same Board Meeting Hawkins requested leave to attend the annual Archaeological Institute annual gathering in Oxford later that month, where Franks delivered a paper asserting the historic significance of enamels. A. W. Franks, 'On Certain Ancient Enamels', *Archaeological Journal*, 8: 1, January 1851, 51–64.

<sup>9</sup> Augustus Wollaston Franks, *Catalogue of Works of Ancient and Mediaeval Art, exhibited at the House of the Society of Arts, London, 1850.*, Chiswick, C. Whittingham, 1850.

<sup>10</sup> In his memoir, undated but as Fiona Wright suggests written in February or March 1893, Franks followed this anecdote with the reflection that now 'Times are changed', suggesting that curatorship had become a more appealing career for the wealthy elites. Franks, 'The Apology of my Life', 319.

<sup>11</sup> BM Trustees' Minutes, 19 February 1885. The collections of the architect Sir John Soane (1753-1837) were bequeathed to the Nation via an Act of Parliament on the condition that the collection was preserved and kept intact, thereby prohibiting any future acquisitions or deaccessions.

secure importance pieces.<sup>12</sup> His commitment to collecting manifested in a succession of early acquisitions. He bought the collection of maiolica assembled by James Hamilton within just a few months of his appointment,<sup>13</sup> the first maiolica purchase since Sir Hans Sloane's founding bequest in 1753,<sup>14</sup> and made the Museum's first foreign buying trip to acquire Renaissance objects in 1854.<sup>15</sup> This proactive acquisition strategy was a marked departure from the prevailing climate at the Museum, where the role of the curator was viewed primarily as an office of custodianship.<sup>16</sup> Two years prior to Franks's appointment, the Royal Commission on the British Museum had reported that it considered the institution to be 'essentially a repository for the conservation and arrangement of a vast variety of material objects', housing collections that resulted from 'casual acquisition by gift, or by purchase not regulated with a view to systematic illustration of historical periods.'<sup>17</sup> Frank's strategic, targeted buying of Renaissance art fundamentally altered the character of the Museum. As he reflected forty years later:

When I was appointed to the Museum in 1851 the scanty collections out of which the department has grown occupied a length of 154 feet of wall cases, and 3 or 4 table cases. The collections now occupy 2250 feet in length of wall cases, 90 table cases and 31 upright cases, to say nothing of the numerous objects placed over the cases or on walls.<sup>18</sup>

His initiative is all the more remarkable given the limited purchase grant assigned to his department, which underlined the inferior status of medieval and Renaissance art within the Museum collections, as well as the wider antipathy towards such objects amongst the trustees.<sup>19</sup> Shortly before Franks's arrival at the Museum in 1851, Hawkins had declined the purchase of a 'beautiful gold reliquary' on the grounds that it would 'frighten the ultra protestants out of their senses. Some of

<sup>12</sup> For example, in 1832 an important silver gilt salver attributed to Cellini had been refused by the Trustees. Edward John Miller, *That noble cabinet. A history of the British Museum*, London, André Deutsch, 1973, 210.

<sup>13</sup> See Paul Finney, 'Abbé James Hamilton: antiquary, patron of the arts, Victorian Anglo-Catholic', *Through a Glass Brightly: Studies in Byzantine and Medieval Art and Archaeology Presented to David Buckton*, Oxford, Oxbow Books, 2015, 190–198; Timothy Wilson and Dora Thornton, *Italian Renaissance ceramics: a catalogue of the British Museum collection*, London, British Museum Press, 2009, 8–9.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson and Thornton, *Italian Renaissance ceramics*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Franks travelled to France, buying objects from the Bouvier Collection in Amiens and from dealers in Paris. BM Officers' Reports, 7 June 1855.

<sup>16</sup> See also Charles Newton's letter to Antony Panizzi, 9 November 1856: 'The Keepership of the Department of Antiquities is pre-eminently an Office of Custody.'

<sup>17</sup> *Commission Report*, 35, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Franks, 'The Apology of my Life', 324.

<sup>19</sup> While the Board of Trustees at the time of Franks's appointment included a handful of scientists and antiquarians such as William Rowan Hamilton (1805-1865) and Henry Hallam (1777-1859), the majority were titled, Conservative politicians and landowners; one of the most active was the Ultra-Tory Sir Robert Harry Inglis (1786-1855).

them already begin to fancy they perceive Popery lurking in the intricacies of medieval art.'<sup>20</sup>

That the subsequent growth and rise in status of the Museum's collections of medieval and Renaissance art can be attributed almost entirely to Franks's individual activities is underlined by comments made to Henry Cole by Antony Panizzi, director of the Museum 1856-66, that the Museum was 'only for Books & Antiquities', and that the collections, together with Franks himself, should be transferred to South Kensington.<sup>21</sup> With limited funds and little institutional support, the networks Franks developed with art dealers, private collectors and museum colleagues both in Britain and on the continent were therefore critical to his success as a curator. Privileged access to sale schedules, price estimates and quality assessments enabled him to capitalise on opportunities to swell the Museum's holdings by pinpointing the most valuable acquisitions early and allowing time to secure the necessary funds. The sale of the Soltykoff Collection in 1861 provides an illuminating example.<sup>22</sup> Franks managed to get hold of the catalogue three weeks ahead of the auction, writing:

I was fortunate enough to obtain a copy of it Tuesday evening, which I think it but right (in Mr. Birch's absence) to forward to you that it may be submitted to the Trustees. I have seen Mr Webb this morning who returned last night from Paris and who has informed me that he believes that the sale will be conducted bona fide. I need hardly mention to you how important is this collection, the history of which is well known. It is now the property of Baron de Seillières who gave I believe 80,000 £ for it. He has ceded the European armour to the Emperor of the French and the Oriental to the Emperor of Russia but with those exceptions I believe that the rest of the collection is included in the Sale.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Hawkins to Abbé James Hamilton, 13 January 1851, Scots College Archive, Rome, quoted in Finney, 'Abbé James Hamilton: antiquary, patron of the arts, Victorian Anglo-Catholic', 192.

<sup>21</sup> Following the acquisition of objects from the celebrated Bernal Collection in July 1856 Cole records a meeting with Panizzi in which his counterpart 'was quite willing that we shd have the Bernal objects, & wd assist: "Indeed the whole shd be handed over & even Franks with them.' 18 July 1856, Cole Diaries, NAL

<sup>22</sup> The celebrated collection of medieval and Renaissance art treasures belonging to Prince Peter Soltykoff was sold at the Hotel Drouot, Paris between 8 April and 1 May 1861, achieving a total of £72,000. Gerald Reitlinger, *The economics of taste: The rise and fall of objets d'art prices since 1750*, London, Barrie and Rockliff, 1963, 110-1.

<sup>23</sup> BM Original Papers, 23 March 1861. John Webb (1799-1880) was a London dealer and agent who enjoyed close relationships with the British Museum and South Kensington Museum. See Clive Wainwright and Charlotte Gere, 'The making of the South Kensington Museum IV Relationships with the trade: Webb and Bardini', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 14: 1, May 2002, 63-78.

Initially unable to travel to Paris himself, Franks drew on the advice and information of his colleagues in order to make assessments, acknowledging that 'Mr. Robinson, the Curator of the South Kensington Museum has been kind enough to place his notes at my disposal so that I am now prepared to state to you more in detail which are objects which appear to be most important for the British Museum.'<sup>24</sup> As well as using Robinson as a reference point Franks cites scholars from his network of colleagues, such as Comte Laborde, to support his proposals.<sup>25</sup> With potential acquisitions identified, Franks visited Paris himself before the sale to examine it carefully prior to commissioning the dealer John Webb to bid on lots at the auction on the Museum's behalf.<sup>26</sup>

The Soltikoff Sale provides a key illustration of how Franks effected a shift both in terms of the type and styles of objects collected, but also in terms of how the value of those objects was perceived. His purchases are targeted and specific, restricted to those that fill a gap in an existing series or of particular interest to academics, scholars and researchers, rather than those garnering most public attention.<sup>27</sup> Proposing Lot 238, an ivory carving, he writes, 'sculptures in this material are of great value to the student of the History of Art. They furnish him with the means of tracing successive changes of style more completely than even illuminated manuscripts.'<sup>28</sup> (Fig. 2) Similarly, Lot 19, 'a very curious book cover of German enamel' is recommended because 'it is covered with curious subjects and inscriptions of the 12<sup>th</sup> century which render it an important specimen for students of hagiography.' Acquisitions were guided by a concern with representing styles, signatures or art historical developments, and completing existing series of specimens, in an analytical, taxonomic approach to objects that took influence from the sciences.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> BM Original Papers, 30 March 1861. For more on John Charles Robinson (1824-1913) see Charlotte Drew, below.

<sup>25</sup> BM Original Papers, 12 April 1861. Count Léon de Laborde (1807-69) was responsible for the collections of medieval and Renaissance objects at the Louvre and his catalogues of the collections were repeatedly cited by Franks and his peers.

<sup>26</sup> BM Trustees' Minutes, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1861. In fact, the Museum only ended up acquiring one object, Lot 238, the ivory triptych (Inv.1861,0416.1), as other purchases were assigned to the South Kensington Museum.

<sup>27</sup> BM Original Papers 30 March 1861. Perhaps the most celebrated item in the sale, the Gloucester Candlestick, was acquired by the South Kensington Museum (now V&A inv. 7649:1 to 3-1861).

<sup>28</sup> The comment carries particular weight given the accepted pre-eminence of printed materials in the Museum collections at the time.

<sup>29</sup> Franks's purchases at the Bernal Sale, for example, sought 'objects as are not only good of their kind, but which have on them a date, the name of an artist or some interesting historical association' and were 'principally valuable when kept together in Public Collections as the Historical Evidence of Art.' They were also restricted to 'only those portions of it which would enable us to improve our existing collections'. BM Officers' Reports, 8 February 1855. At the Fontaine Sale, Franks noted that 'the British Museum possesses but six specimens of Palissy ware, none of them of great importance, and in order to represent fairly this branch of ceramic art, it would be desirable to acquire a few of the specimens.' BM Officers' Reports, 7 May 1884.



Figure 2 Triptych, 1330-40, ivory, 23.8cm x 20.6cm x 0.35cm, British Museum 1861,0416.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Acquired by Franks via the dealer John Webb at the Soltykoff Sale, 1861, Lot 238.

This approach clearly challenged the prevailing ethos at the Museum. In 1849 the Royal Commission cited the opinion of William Hamilton, a trustee, that 'with respect to this department, the value of objects as works of art should be kept in view rather than their curiosity as illustrations of national or other history', as the function of the collection was 'rather for the improvement of the fine arts than merely as a historical collection of objects.'<sup>30</sup> Having spent his formative years within the archaeological community, Franks's approach to objects derived exactly from this understanding of material culture as evidence of the past, necessitating a scientific analysis of date and material and taxonomic arrangement by style and period. Moreover, he would have had a heightened awareness of calls from the archaeological community for the Museum to adopt a more systematic approach towards its collections, and a desire to establish modern curatorial practice in line with continental institutions.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the Department of Science and Art's remit to collect medieval and Renaissance objects primarily for their artistic merit made Franks even more keen to assert their historical significance at the Museum and assemble a collection fit for purposes of archaeological study.

His drive to expand the collections is vividly demonstrated in his dogged pursuit of key objects that had passed him by at auction, and the *Book of Acquisitions* testifies to his effectiveness as a negotiator. Having missed out on a ceramic ewer at auction, Franks found that the buyer Henry Wallis 'was good enough to cede it to the Museum at the price he had paid', and in 1892 he persuaded the wine merchant Henry Pfungst to relinquish a Flemish silver gilt fifteenth century casket at cost price to the Museum (Fig.3).<sup>32</sup> Even when objects were not

<sup>30</sup> *Commission Report*, Para. 10564.

<sup>31</sup> The *Commission Report*, for example, had cited a letter from John Yonge Ackerman, and the Committee of the Archaeological Association, calling for the Museum to develop a systematic collection of objects for study.

<sup>32</sup> The painter and collector Henry Wallis (1813-1916) gave and sold a large number of objects to the Museum; this reference possibly relates to Inv.1885,0711.1.a, a thirteenth century silver and brass jug from Herat. *BM Officers' Reports*, 27 July 1885. The wine merchant and

secured by a collector within Franks's circle of acquaintances he would continue to pursue items; a Trustees' Report of the Spitzer Sale in Paris records that, despite finding 'M. Dus-, the agent of the Spitzer family, very unwell...Mr. Franks was able to obtain the names of the purchasers of the desired lots.'<sup>33</sup> A comment from Charles Hercules Read, Franks's assistant and protégé, that 'Altar candlesticks of this style and period are of very rare occurrence, so much so that Sir Wollaston Franks has never had an opportunity of securing an example at a moderate price during his keepership' suggests that it was almost an anomaly to find a significant type or class of object that had passed Franks by.<sup>34</sup>



Figure 3. Shrine, fifteenth century, Switzerland, silver parcel-gilt and gold, 1.24cm, British Museum, 1892,1013.1.  
© The Trustees of the British Museum.

Indeed, Franks's success at attracting private donations and gifts in the absence of official support marks him out as an exceptional networker, fundraiser and developer, and much of the breadth and depth of the collections of European antiquities is due directly to his powers of persuasion. At a board meeting in 1885, the trustees recognised that 'the history of the Department of Antiquities will show

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collector Henry Pfungst (1844-1917) developed a close relationship with Franks through membership of the Society of Antiquaries. Inv.1892,1105.1; BM Officers' Reports 3 October 1892.

<sup>33</sup> BM Trustees' Reports, 10 January 1894.

<sup>34</sup> BM Trustees' Reports, 27 August 1896. For competitors Franks's determination must have been frustrating. The politician and armour collector Robert Curzon ruefully complained about Franks's determination to secure objects for the nation, describing him as 'horrid' for refusing to sell a recently acquired helmet and wanting it to go to a museum 'where it will never be seen no more'. Letter from Robert Curzon to Albert Way, 20 May 1867, BM BEP Archives.



that their collections have been largely formed by donations',<sup>35</sup> and Franks himself drew their attention to

the fact that since 1866 no special grant for purchase has been made to his department; and that the total amount of the purchase grants since 1866 amounts only to £8,020, whereas the collection has been enriched by gift or bequest to the value of £50,000.<sup>36</sup>

Part of Franks's success lay in his ability to capitalise on individual gifts, using them to provide the justification to invest in complimentary objects or to expand the museum's own purchases in a new direction. The bequest of the Morgan Collection of horological instruments in 1888 offers one of many such examples, which precipitated a succession of purchases of clocks, watches and astrolabes, justified 'as the British Museum possesses already so large and valuable a collection of watches and dials, and chiefly derived from bequests, it is well to fill up gaps in the series.'<sup>37</sup> Franks was sensitive to the fact that showing a commitment to collecting particular types of object often provoked collectors into donating similar objects. Lady Charlotte Schreiber gave ceramic specimens to the Museum 'such as helped to complete the collection formed by Mr. Franks', while pottery acquisitions that complemented those in the collection of Frederick Du Cane Godman were justified as 'Mr. Franks thinks it will be judicious to acquire them for that reason, as tending to encourage Mr. Godman in his generous intentions towards the museum.'<sup>38</sup> Other collectors presented objects that Franks had specifically identified as pertaining to the existing collections, or gave the Museum the option of first right of refusal on their death.<sup>39</sup> While the bulk of the connoisseur Charles D.E. Fortnum's collection was presented to the Ashmolean Museum, he donated several pieces to the British

<sup>35</sup> BM Trustees' Reports, 13 June 1885.

<sup>36</sup> BM Trustees' Reports, 28 June 1884.

<sup>37</sup> BM Trustees' Reports, 10 December 1890. The antiquarian and M.P. Octavius Morgan (1803-88) Franks's 'old and intimate friend of nearly forty years' bequeathed his collection of clocks, dials and papal rings to the Museum via Franks in 1888, prompting Franks to acquire a number of similar objects from German dealers in 1890, including 'a watch of curious contribution and a sundial of novel form' bought for £42 from the Goldschmidt Brothers (Inv. 1890,1215.1, 1890,1215.2), and another sundial 'in the form of a tower, quite unlike any objects in the collection' for £30 from the Bourgeois Brothers of Cologne (Inv.1890,1216.1), as well as 'An ancient French table clock', also from the Goldschmidt brothers, as 'there is only one in the Morgan Collection, and one other purchased by the Museum' (Inv. 1891,0309.1).

<sup>38</sup> Reg. 1889,0702.5. BM Trustees' Reports, 3 July 1889; 11 June 1891. Franks advised Lady Charlotte Schreiber (1812-1895) on the formation and cataloguing of her collections of ceramics, playing cards, fans and other objects, and facilitated the bequest of her collections to the South Kensington Museum. Frederick du Cane Godman (1834-1919), ornithologist, ceramics collector and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries left a collection of over 600 specimens of Hispano-Moresco and Islamic pottery to the Museum through his daughter in 1982.

<sup>39</sup> When the residue of Morgan's collection was sold, for example, 'the executors had requested that Mr. Franks might have the first choice.' BM Trustees' Reports, 10 November 1888



Figures 4 and 5: Dish, workshop of Girolamo dalle Gabicce, Pesaro, 1544, tin-glazed earthenware, 27cm x 5cm, British Museum, 1888,0905.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Donated to the Museum by Charles Drury Edward Fortnum, 1888.

Museum, including an important maiolica dish bearing an inscription on the base (Figs.4-5), because 'at Mr. Franks's request Mr. Fortnum brought this dish to the Museum, to compare it with one in the collection, which proved to be by the same hand.'<sup>40</sup>

Franks's network-building within the art trade further facilitated his expansion of the collections. John Warren, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Baron de Tabley, even suggested that rival buyers would concede to Franks in the sale room, commenting in a letter 'your pull is so strong that you have no other purchasers to fear.'<sup>41</sup> Certainly dealers were keen to assist Franks in his collecting; whether through offering favourable terms for payment, forgoing higher rewards from private collectors, or negating commission on purchases so as to encourage Franks's acquisitions. These dealers also acted as intermediaries between curators and collectors. The diary of the merchant banker and celebrated collector Hollingworth Magniac (1786-1867) for 8<sup>th</sup> February 1860 records, 'Fine day. Saw Franks, Robinson and Hawkins at Webbs', suggesting that John Webb's shop acted as a social space where introductions between public and private collectors could be made.<sup>42</sup> The relationship was mutually beneficial. Everard Green, of the College of Arms, recommended a particular dealer to the 15<sup>th</sup> Duke of Norfolk on the grounds that 'Mr. Harding buys for the British Museum, & for Sir Wollaston Franks, & is most trustworthy', suggesting that a link with Franks conferred a stamp of status and authenticity on dealers. Indeed, the fact that Franks's name was recognised over and above his professional responsibilities here underlines his personal influence on the collecting environment and shows that the British Museum is not in and of itself the authority

<sup>40</sup> Maiolica dish, Workshop of Girolamo dalle Gabicce, Pesaro, 1544. Reg. no: 1888,0905.1. BM Trustees' Reports, 10 November 1888.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from John Warren to Franks, 31 October 1889, BM BEP Archive.

<sup>42</sup> Diary of Hollingworth Magniac, 1860, Mss Eur F197/620, British Library.

or mark of status.<sup>43</sup> These collecting networks gave Franks unrivalled insight into the circulation of art objects on the market. 'I saw Wood yesterday & he told me that all the Marquise's things will be sold, excepting a silver casket or shrine which cannot be found: so the ewer will be there. It is said to be the finest piece of Henry Deux ware known and will fetch a huge price', he writes to Fortnum in 1892, adding that 'Wertheimer's stock is to be sold next month.'<sup>44</sup> This knowledge gave him an advantage when it came to negotiating purchases, enabling him to bide his time if necessary until the circumstances were more favourable. The acquisition of the Meyrick Collection of arms, armour, and medieval and Renaissance objects in 1878 offers a revealing example. Franks wrote to Henry Cole, the first director of the South Kensington Museum, in April 1872 informing him that the collection was in the hands of the dealer S. Pratt:

I saw Pratt who talked big & of an offer of £1000 made in Manchester for the Witham Shield. I told him that such a price was absurd & ended in saying I would give 250 for the shield and helmet...as Pratt is in Paris I wrote to the Colonel to say that it would not suit me to have my offer indefinitely left open & that I would give £310 if the two bronze shields were included (valued by Pratt at £40 each)...I have consulted several friends as to the value of objects & some of them exceed the sums we talked about.<sup>45</sup>

Although the government declined the purchase, Franks continued to monitor the collection's traffic, writing again to Cole in October 1872 with the news that 'Goldsmith at Frankfort told me that most of the Meyrick works of art were sold by him to a private gentleman in England.'<sup>46</sup> Six years later, however, the relationship he had cultivated with the Meyrick family was to bear fruit when the remaining collection of 1554 objects were presented to the British Museum by Augustus Meyrick.<sup>47</sup> (Fig.6).

In this way Franks successfully leveraged his personal and professional networks to fund his ambitious acquisition programme in spite of governmental cuts to his purchase grant. He established syndicates of wealthy private collectors and connoisseurs to underwrite the cost of important purchases, most famously in the cases of the Fontaine Sale of 1884 and the acquisition of the Royal Gold Cup from Baron Pichon in 1893, and further capitalised on the political influence at his

<sup>43</sup> Letter from Everard Green, Herald's College, to the 15<sup>th</sup> Duke of Norfolk, 17 January 1896, MD 1681, Arundel Castle Archive.

<sup>44</sup> 27 February 1892, F2/iii/5, Fortnum Archive, Ashmolean Museum.

<sup>45</sup> 5 April 1873, Henry Cole Correspondence Archive, NAL

<sup>46</sup> 30 October 1872, Henry Cole Correspondence Archive, NAL.

<sup>47</sup> The letter from Meyrick dated August 14<sup>th</sup> 1878 offers further information about the offer: 'Some armour, chiefly Oriental, Ivories, & other curiosities, and my object in addressing you is to know if the "British Museum" would allow us to present them to it. It would bring pride & pleasure on my part to know that they were there.'

disposal to influence key decision makers.<sup>48</sup> (Fig. 7) Franks combined this approach with appeals to the appetite for medieval and Renaissance objects amongst the general public by putting syndicate purchases on display at the museum, to generate interest and add pressure to calls to secure them permanently for the national collections.



Figure 6 Salt-cellar, attributed to Leonard Limousin, Limoges, c.1550, enamel on copper, 7.9cm x 7.2cm, British Museum 1878,1101.19. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Part of Lt-Gen. Augustus W. H. Meyrick's donation to the Museum in 1878.



Figure 7 The Royal Gold Cup, 1370-80, France, pearl, gold, enamel, h.23.6cm. British Museum, 1892,0501.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Acquired for £8000 from Samson Wertheimer with funds raised via subscriptions.

Carefully considered, astute collecting was, for Franks, the hallmark of the effective curator. It was thus a highly skilled occupation, and Franks's concerns about the staffing of his department underlines the increasing professionalisation of curatorial roles during his tenure. He employed Charles Hercules Read, then a secretary at the South Kensington Museum, 'to assist in the arranging, cataloguing,

<sup>48</sup> The Royal Gold Cup, 1370-80, France, pearl, gold, enamel, h.23.6cm. British Museum, 1892,0501.1. In advance of the Fountaine Sale, Franks received an invitation to dinner from the banker Bertram Wodehouse Currie, one of the subscribers, inviting Franks to dinner as 'Mr. Gladstone has promised to come and there will be an opportunity for you to urge the purchase of the Fountaine treasury.' Letter from Currie to Franks, 12 July 1884, BM BEP Archives.

and generally keeping the department in good order', paying him out of his own pocket for six years before he was formally employed by the Museum in 1880. Read's qualifications were described by Franks to the trustees:

Mr. Read possesses a peculiar knowledge of form (shared by very few persons in England) is an excellent draughtsman, has described and sketched more than 400 specimens for the registration catalogue of the Christy collection, and has assisted in the preparation of a catalogue of Japanese pottery in the South Kensington Museum. He has sketched and described the British Museum collection of finger rings, has registered the whole of the Henderson collection, and has a great knowledge of porcelain and pottery.<sup>49</sup>

With its emphasis on form and draughtsmanship, the description suggests that deep powers of observation, coupled with knowledge gleaned from study, were seen as the essential qualities for the museum curator. This again marked a new departure from earlier conceptions of curatorship. Prior to Franks's appointment, museum officers were not required to have a background in history or archaeology, as Hawkins described:

The principle upon which we have gone in the Department of Antiquities, has been to get young men who are well educated, and of good character and attainments, and to educate them for the specific purposes of the department after they come here, but we have not thought it necessary to look out for persons who are already antiquaries; and if we had been so disposed, until very lately the study of archaeology has been so little attended to in the country that we could not have found them.<sup>50</sup>

The role was seen as more of an apprenticeship, where men could be, according to Hawkins, 'brought up to the business' rather than arriving with special knowledge or skills, similar to any other administrative civil service position. Franks, in contrast, sought to assert the specialised, skilled nature of curatorial duties, stressing that 'the officers and assistants in the Museum are not ordinary Government clerks, doing routine work which ceases then they leave the office. They are gentlemen who have devoted themselves to literary and scientific research, which they are carrying out at very moderate salaries' and saw fit

to remind the Trustees that these gentlemen have become recognised authorities on the special sections with which they are connected; so much so that, as may be remembered, the Department of Science and Art some years since wished the officers of this Museum to become referees for their purchases. In the Departments of Antiquities and

<sup>49</sup> Officers' Report, 24 July 1880, BM BEP Archives.

<sup>50</sup> *Commission Report*, Para. 3238.

Coins, with which Mr. Franks is best acquainted, these varied attainments can only be acquired by private study in non-official hours, as the constant interruption which takes place in these department during the official day prevents any continuous study.<sup>51</sup>

He also emphasised the necessity of participation and collaboration with the learned societies in order to further this expertise. Franks himself was the president of the Society of Antiquaries between 1892 and 1897, and a highly active contributor to meetings and subsequent publications in the Society's journal.<sup>52</sup> As he informed the trustees:

Many of the officers are members of Committees of various learned societies dealing with subjects connected with their work in the Museum...it is desirable that the officials should take part in them, so that they may know what is going on among those who are occupied in similar subjects.<sup>53</sup>

Franks showed new acquisitions at Society meetings prior to their display at the Museum, and organised private viewings at the Museum for fellows, forging a close overlap between the two organisations, enabling new approaches to material culture to be developed and reinforced. Indeed, the fact that Franks was so much more strikingly active in the Antiquaries than the Burlington Fine Arts Club, despite being a founding member, underlines his view of collecting as an activity related to scholarship and expertise, as opposed to a social endeavour.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps this factor marks him out again as drawing a distinct line between museum curators and amateur collectors and dilettanti.<sup>55</sup>

Despite his focus on research, Franks chose not to focus his attention on publication. Although he contributed to the journals and proceedings of the learned societies, the responsibility of accessioning, labelling and arranging the steady stream of new acquisitions took precedence over spending time producing comprehensive catalogues of the Museum's collections. Franks repeatedly spoke of his hopes to publish a catalogue of the enamels in the collection, informing the trustees in October 1890 that:

<sup>51</sup> BM Trustees' Reports, 8 November 1887

<sup>52</sup> Clearly he was a was popular figurehead; an undated letter from C. Knight Wales discussing the Society exclaims 'Oh! That you were Director again!! What a difference!' BM Departmental Correspondence files, BEP Archive.

<sup>53</sup> BM Trustees' Reports, 9 November 1887

<sup>54</sup> For more on the BFAC see Stacey Pierson, *Private collecting, exhibitions and the shaping of art history in London: the Burlington Fine Arts Club*, New York, Routledge, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Franks also used the Society to further collecting opportunities. Discussing the acquisition of the Royal Gold Cup in a letter to Fortnum Franks writes 'I exhibited the cup at the Soc: Antiqs. and read a paper theron which was well received, only they did not fork out.' F/2/iii/6, Fortnum Archive.

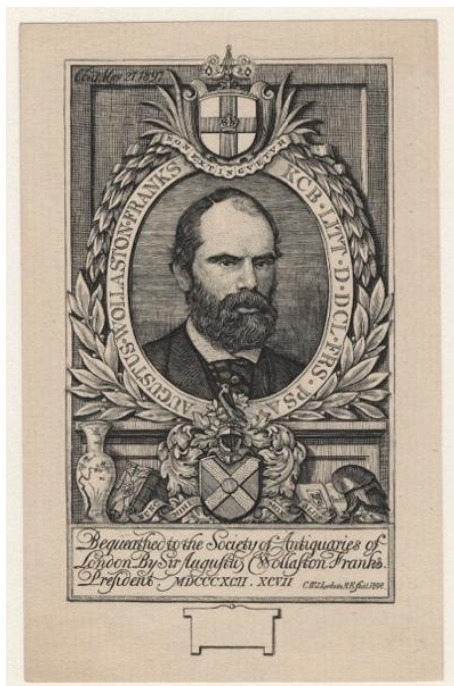


Figure 8 Charles William Sherborn, Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, line engraving, 1898, 13.6cm x 8.5cm, National Portrait Gallery D21211. © National Portrait Gallery, London. An engraving for bookplates used to mark Franks's donations to the Society of Antiquaries.

he has for some years taken much interest in the art of enamelling on metal, upon which he has written on three occasions, viz. In the "Archaeological Journal, vol. viii, in the "Art Treasures of the United Kingdom", Manchester 1857, and in the "Catalogue of the Loan Exhibition at S. Kensington in 1862. He has thus collected a good many materials on the subject, and it has occurred to him that a useful book might be published by the Trustees, giving a description of all the enamels on metal in the Museum, without respect to Departments, and with proper introductory matter. As a preparation for this Mr. Franks has commenced a catalogue of enamels, of which about 500 numbers have been described. About 100 more would probably complete the catalogue. If the Trustees should approve of such a publication, Mr. Franks would set to work with the introductory matter.<sup>56</sup>

Five years later, however, the introductory essays for the volume were yet to be prepared 'as it had had so frequently to be put aside for more pressing work', and Franks postponed the task for his retirement.<sup>57</sup> Such publications were not designed with aim of making collections more accessible to the general public, but rather to contribute to scholarship and assist collecting. 'It has to be done with care and precision,' he stressed to the trustees, 'as upon the description depends the future identification of the objects in the department.'<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> BM BEP Officers' Reports, 7 October 1890. While Franks advocates a cross-departmental approach to the publication, he goes on to note that 'except a few bookbindings, all the important specimens of enamels are in Mr. Franks's department.'

<sup>57</sup> BM BEP Officers' Reports, 25 October 1895.

<sup>58</sup> Franks also contributed to the publication and catalogues of private collectors, as another means of strengthening relationships with potential benefactors, such as his assistance in the

Instead, it was through his contribution to exhibition catalogues that his new appreciation of Renaissance material was disseminated, not only to fellow museum colleagues and connoisseurs, but also to the wider public through reprinting in newspapers and popular periodicals.<sup>59</sup> Franks contributed in this way to the catalogues of the Society of Arts exhibition of 1850, the *Art Treasures of the United Kingdom* exhibition in Manchester in 1857, and the *Special Exhibition* at South Kensington in 1862, with later exhibitions using Franks's text and discussion of style and oeuvre as a blueprint. These texts served to generate a new focus on researching and proving attribution and provenance, as the *Saturday Review's* comments on his essay on Limoges enamels in 1862 shows:

We may safely recommend all possessors of objects of Limoges ware to compare their specimens with the lucid descriptions given by Mr. Franks in this catalogue. There is little doubt that they will thus be able to identify their treasures with the handiwork of one or other of the craftsmen whose peculiarities of style and treatment are here so admirably portrayed.<sup>60</sup>

The recommendation suggests that Franks's catalogue essays operated as a means by which his brand of connoisseurial curatorship could be transmitted to a wider collecting audience.

This shift towards a more systematic approach to museum work under Franks is also discernible in his approach to the displays, which he required to be 'intelligently arranged' to draw out relationships between objects and demonstrate evolution of style and technique.<sup>61</sup> His description of the new ceramics room illustrates this new approach:

In the new glass and majolica room the cases on one side have been papered and painted the fittings completed and painted, and the specimens cleaned and arranged. This includes the English, Dutch, and German delft, German stoneware, Italian majolica and other pottery, and the Spanish Rhodiean, Damascus and Persian wares. On the other side of the room two sections only have been completed, viz., the French pottery and the Wedgwood ware.<sup>62</sup>

It is worth stressing the extent to which Franks differed from his predecessors in his approach. In 1849 the archaeologist Sir Charles Fellows had stated that 'There is no scientific arrangement' in the collection displays, and 'a want of classification either

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preparation of the collection of playing card belonging to Lady Charlotte Schreiber, which Franks undertook despite the fact that 'he has not derived any pecuniary benefit from the work, which he was glad to take in hand for so old a friend as Lady Charlotte, especially in view of her intentions towards the Museum.' 24 April 1895.

<sup>59</sup> Franks, 'The Apology of My Life', 319.

<sup>60</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 13 December 1862.

<sup>61</sup> BM Officers' Reports, 25 October 1895

<sup>62</sup> BM Officers' Reports, 7 October 1887



chronologically or geographically.'<sup>63</sup> Austin Henry Layard, the archaeologist and politician, provided a scathing description of the displays to parliament in 1856, as reported in *The Times*:

Everything was higgledy-piggledy...there was no series...They took the specimens of a good age, and then that of a bad one. Centuries were mingled. This the learned could understand and appreciate, but the populace could not. If they saw a good and a bad object in juxtaposition, they conceived them to be both alike. He hoped that some change would take place in the arrangement of the Museum....He regards the present subject and an important part connected with the question of national education.<sup>64</sup>

Thus while there had been recognition both from the archaeological community and the education movement that the British Museum's approach to display required modernisation, Franks, as a point of intersection between the museological, scientific and archaeological communities, was the first to effect this change and assert the importance of taxonomic displays. He also advocated more space and light in the galleries to enhance close observation, rectifying the accommodation described in 1849 as 'inconveniently situated and badly lighted' by lobbying for more space and buying display cases himself, bringing them to the Museum on loan.<sup>65</sup>

Security and the environmental conditions of display space similarly emerge as a concern in Franks's statements to the Board of Trustees. Medieval and Renaissance objects such as the glass, ceramic and textile collections were deemed to be particularly at risk from fire and theft, being small, fragile and increasingly sought after on the art market, and thus required additional wardens.<sup>66</sup> One report laments that

The wall cases in the Medieval Rooms and the Asiatic saloon are the oldest in the Museum, and are not only unfit for the collections in the department, but are of bad construction, very wasteful of space, and in

<sup>63</sup> *Commission Report*, Paras. 1690; 1714.

<sup>64</sup> *The Times*, 22 April 1856, 6.

<sup>65</sup> Hawkins, *Commission Report*, para. 8047. Franks campaigned for more display space of medieval and Renaissance objects when the new quarters were being designed in 1884, writing that 'he always understood [room 3] had been destined for his department for the exhibition of the collection of glass and majolica.' A Board Minute dated 24 July 1869 reveals Franks lending 'two glazed oak cabinets' in order to increase the exhibition space for objects in his care.

<sup>66</sup> For example, his concern that 'the objects in the Christian Rooms at one end of the Gallery are of considerable interest and antiquarian value' and require no less than two wardens. Such concerns were, of course, related to potential loans and bequests. In June 1873 Franks expressed his sorrow at the fire that destroyed the Alexander Palace in a letter to Henry Cole, writing 'What a lamentable thing is the destruction of the Alexandra Palace! I fear it will deter many people from lending things.' 11 June 1873, Henry Cole Correspondence, NAL.

many parts they freely admit air and dust. The result is that the collections in these two rooms are always dirty, and it is necessary to clean the objects and the fittings of the cases much more often than is possible with the limited staff of the department. It is obvious that such ill-made exhibition cases lead to the deterioration of the specimens...the cases in the department of this defective construction should be gradually replaced by new ones of approved pattern, similar, for instance, to those in the Ceramic gallery.<sup>67</sup>

The interdisciplinary nature of Franks's intellectual milieu must have heightened his awareness of the science that underlay concerns over environmental conditions and conservation. As a member of the Royal Society, Franks's personal and social networks included scientists as well as art curators and dealers. Francesca Orlebar, a friend of the Magniac family, underlines Franks's place within the scientific community in her diary, describing a dinner hosted by George Bentham, as 'a highly scientific party, consisting of Sir Charles Lyell, Professor Thomson, Augustus Franks &c &c.'<sup>68</sup> Perhaps the influence of his godfather and namesake, the eminent scientist William Hyde Wollaston, also encouraged his scientific mind. Franks's comment 'I am sick of "Augustus" & prefer my illustrious god father, Dr. Wollaston's name' in a letter to Layard demonstrates his own assertion of this connection.<sup>69</sup>

Marrying the worlds of archaeology, history, science and art in this way, Franks operates as a node of intellectual overlap that no doubt encouraged both his concern with conservation and his scientific, taxonomic approach to the acquisition and arrangement of Renaissance objects. His pursuit of these strategies thus marked a new era in curatorship at the British Museum, distinct from the approaches of colleagues such as Hawkins and Panizzi as well as attitudes amongst the trustees. The extent to which this was particular to Franks or part of wider intellectual and cultural trends can be established by considering Franks in relation to the wider community of museum professionals. How did Franks differ in his approach, and what impact did he have on his peers?

The South Kensington Museum is clearly the institution whose collections overlapped most significantly with those under Franks's care. The two institutions were expanding their collections of medieval and Renaissance art objects at the same time, and frequently bought objects at the same sales or were bequeathed

<sup>67</sup> BM Officers' Report, 29 September 1893. Franks's concern with conservation can be gleaned in his requirements for a new assistant to the department in 1888: 'A classics scholar with experience on excavations in Egypt, who was able to translate French and German and decode Arabic inscriptions, as well as the physical quality of being tall; this being especially important in the new ceramics gallery, where it is absolutely necessary that the top locks should be secured to exclude the dust.' BM Officers' Reports, 28 February 1888

<sup>68</sup> Volume III Detailed Diary of Frederica Orlebar, 26 October 1863, OR2244/7a, Bedfordshire County Archives. George Bentham (1800-1884) was a British Botanist, elected fellow of the Royal Society in 1862; the Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875) was a geologist elected in 1826; Professor Thomson may refer to the physicist William Thomson, (1824-1907), elected in 1851.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from Franks to Layard, 28 May 1894, Layard papers, British Library, Add MS 58168.

elements from the same collections. Franks helped to shape the collections at South Kensington as an advisor to the Museum, leading Philip Cunliffe Owen, director 1874-93, to remark upon Franks's 'desire for the National Good' in 1881, and demonstrated by the offer of the directorship of the Museum to Franks on two occasions.<sup>70</sup> He certainly seems to have been considered an authority. Following the Fountaine Sale in 1884, it was reported that 'The Department of Science and Art decided to purchase all the objects which Mr. Franks had suggested to them as appropriate to their Museum', and, moreover, that 'Mr. Franks suggested that four lots would be useful to the Edinburgh Museum, amounting to £1249.10, and this further expenditure has been sanctioned by the Department of Science and Art', signifying Franks's legacy for branch museums as well as those in the metropolis.<sup>71</sup> Although Franks sometimes declined formal requests to advise the Museum, perhaps due to his burdensome workload, the diaries and correspondence of Henry Cole reveal that he sought Franks's advice, opinion and company on an informal basis on regular occasions.<sup>72</sup> Their acquaintance is documented as early as 1854, when Franks was still a relatively junior addition to the British Museum staff.<sup>73</sup> As well as for one-off purchases or prospective trips, Cole sought Franks's advice for major acquisitions. The Meyrick Collection, discussed above, is one such example. In May 1868 Cole records in his diary that 'Franks came to dinner & he thought the purchase of the Meyrick Collection worth entertaining.'<sup>74</sup> Franks and Cole subsequently visited the Meyrick Collections at Goodrich Court together, with Franks then staying on with Colonel Meyrick after Cole's departure to negotiate the purchase.<sup>75</sup> The two also worked closely together as fellow committee members at the International Exhibition in Paris in 1867, at which Franks advised Cole on

<sup>70</sup> Board Memo 28 June 1881, Castellani Nominal File, V&A Archive; Franks, *Apology of my life*, 321

<sup>71</sup> BM Officers' Report, 9 November 1884. Indeed, Franks's correspondence records demonstrate close relationships with regional collections, while his support of the branch museum at Bethnal Green extended to providing advice on acquisitions to the lending of his own collection of ceramics to the Museum in 1895. Franks Nominal File, V&A Archives, 25 July 1895

<sup>72</sup> For example, Franks declined the Department of Science and Art's request that he join the committee advising on the acquisition of the Pitt Rivers collection, BM Officers' Reports, 12 June 1880.

<sup>73</sup> At Cole's request, Franks valued objects he had purchased in Rome, and his diaries reveal frequent meetings at the British Museum to discuss objects or selections for forthcoming exhibitions. A typical visit recorded on 19 December 1871 described a visit to the British Museum with his son Alan in which they 'Looked at Slade Glass and Castellani jewellery with Franks.' Henry Cole Diaries, NAL.

<sup>74</sup> 27 May 1868. Henry Cole Diaries, National Art Library. Cole's annotation that 'He cd not go to Moscow this year, but wished to do so some time', suggests he was asked to undertake another purchasing or advisory trip abroad for the Department the same evening.

<sup>75</sup> Cole's diary entry for 3 June 1868 records examining Colonel Meyrick's 'Ivories &c' in Park Street with Franks; the following day they travel to Goodrich Court to view the armour. Cole returns home two days later, while Franks remained. It is the report that Franks submits to the Treasury the following month that provides the case for acquiring objects from the collection, although the Treasury declined to fund the purchase.

objects to be purchased at the exhibition and spent evenings together visiting dealers, writing reports and drawing up lists of acquisitions.<sup>76</sup> Franks even accompanied Cole on family trips to the exhibition, suggesting a close personal association.<sup>77</sup>

In contrast to Franks's targeted approach to collecting, curators at South Kensington seem to have been less concerned with a strict adherence to collecting policy. Franks seemed bewildered by Cole's suggestion of buying a group of paintings in 1867, which Cole had identified either for the British Museum or a new branch of the South Kensington Museum to be established at Alexandra Park, writing 'I have neither money nor inclination to buy them for the museum & from what you told me of the scope of the Collections to be established at the Alexandra Park I do not see that they would be of any use there.'<sup>78</sup> He himself seemed to feel that the South Kensington Museum was lacking in the curatorial expertise that enabled astute acquisitions to be made. Following Arthur Banks Skinner's appointment as director of the Art Museum, Franks informed Fortnum that 'Skinner was one of the assistants in the Art Museum SKM and a protégé of Armstrong and Donnelly. He knows a trifle more than most of the others, which is not saying much.'<sup>79</sup> The concern for privileging the historical significance and provenance of objects shown in his exhibition catalogue essays and entries is also borne out in his scepticism about the usefulness of reproductions, a further contrast with his colleagues in South Kensington, and indeed, to contemporary collectors acquiring composite or Renaissance-style objects. As he expressed to the trustees, he 'doubts whether any advantage would be derived from the display of reproductions' a practice he felt not only inadequate but also dangerous in fuelling the market for fakes and forgeries:

it must be remembered that complaints have often been made by private collectors, of the facilities given by public institutions for making copies, which have, on more than one occasion, been palmed off as originals, and instances have occurred where an electrotype copy has been returned to the owner in the place of the original.<sup>80</sup>

His reaction to Henry Cole's suggestion of acquiring reproductions of the regalia in the Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen underlines this point, remarking that 'these

<sup>76</sup> See for example entries 23-24 August. 'Discussed Classified Inventory with Franks. He recommended no tight line, but generally to take material or Process as the Class.'

<sup>77</sup> 4 November 1867, Cole Diaries, NAL.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Franks to Cole, 3 November 1867, Cole Correspondence, NAL

<sup>79</sup> Letter to Fortnum, 15 February 1892, F2/iii/iv.

<sup>80</sup> BM BEP Trustees' Reports, 12th February 1886. Indeed, the comment calls to mind the history of the Holy Thorn Reliquary, of which a copy was made when the original had been sent for repair; the copy being returned to the Ecclesiastical Treasury of the Hapsburgs in Vienna, and the original released to the market to be acquired by Anselm Rothschild and subsequently by the British Museum as part of the Waddesdon Bequest in 1898. Dora Thornton, *A Rothschild Renaissance: Treasures from the Waddesdon Bequest*, London, British Museum Press, 2015, 82-87.

are of very delicate goldsmiths' work with a good deal of enamelling. I doubt whether it would be possible to make casts of these, nor would the result be satisfactory, as the enamelling would make the metalwork look coarse.'<sup>81</sup> Such an approach, together with his expertise in identifying fake and forgeries, his dismissal of composite pieces and his new focus on researching attributions and provenance can only have increased the aura of the original in the public mind. Franks became the leading authority on the production of counterfeit objects, having given a paper at the Society of Antiquaries in 1858 calling his peers' attention to the prevalence of fakes and highlighting the presence of forged Limoges enamels on display at the Manchester *Art Treasures* exhibition.<sup>82</sup> The paper was reprinted in regional journals to serve as a warning to archaeologists and collectors.<sup>83</sup>

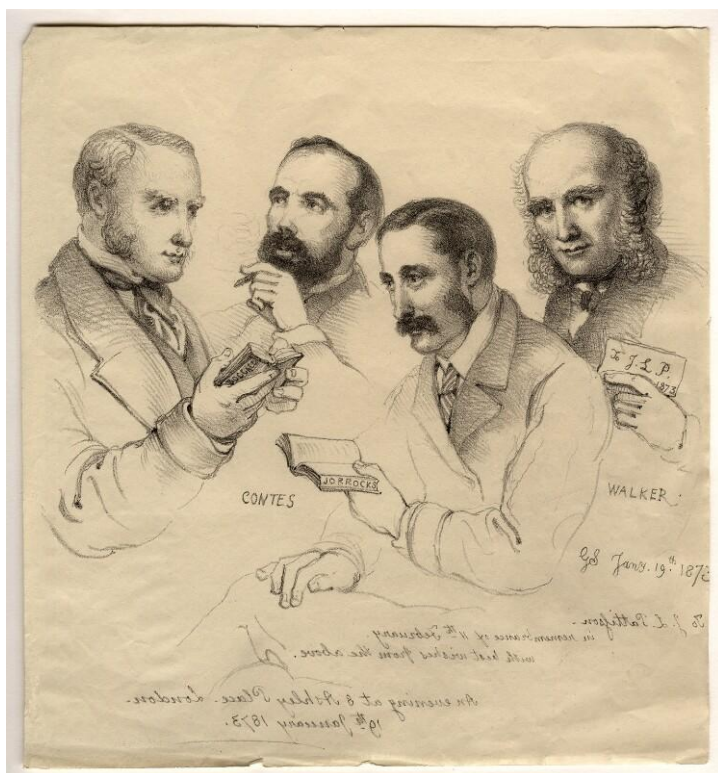


Figure 9 Sir George Scharf, Sir George Scharf and friends, lithograph, 1873, 28.6cm x 26.7cm, National Portrait Gallery, NPG D6712. © National Portrait Gallery, London. This informal depiction of Franks and Scharf, together with William Beauford (1842-1923) and Richard Worsley (b. 1836) gives an insight into Franks's intellectual milieu and the close friendships that enhanced his approach to objects and their histories.

In addition to influencing his peers, Franks also relied on the expertise of his colleagues, and it is appropriate for this edition to consider the significance of Franks's relationship with George Scharf. Correspondence between the two curators testifies to an intimate friendship, corroborated by Scharf's charming sketches.<sup>84</sup> (Fig.9) The relationship seems to have arisen out of a mutual fascination with researching the history and provenance of art objects, of which their shared appreciation of Renaissance Limoges enamels offers a prime example. Franks's interest, as we have seen, can be traced back to his activities at the Archaeological

<sup>81</sup> 8 December 1872, Henry Cole Correspondence, NAL.

<sup>82</sup> Augustus Wollaston Franks, 'Frauds and Forgeries of "Antiques"', *Society of Antiquaries Proceedings*, 4, November 1856, 246-249.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 6, 1860, 183-186.

<sup>84</sup> Trustees' Sketchbook 30, 1882-4, NPG7/1/3/1/2/26

Institute in the 1840s, at which point the British Museum held just two examples. Over the course of his career Franks purchased forty-two Renaissance enamels using Museum funds, adding a further eighteen with his own money. As portraits of distinguished royals and nobles of the French Renaissance court were a prime subject matter, it is unsurprising that these objects offered such a rich area of overlap between Franks and Scharf's spheres of expertise. Scharf's sketchbooks testify to his personal appreciation of enamels, containing a number of highly detailed sketches and notes on enamels in private collections.<sup>85</sup> His notes cross-reference Franks's essays on the subject, but his letters to Franks demonstrate the extent to which he was furnishing Franks with information about the enamels in private collections. In 1862, Scharf writes to Franks with information relating to the Duke of Hamilton's enamel collections, informing him that 'the composition of the Duke of Hamilton's P.R. enamels dated 1538, centrepiece is taken from Raphael's fine drawing in the Louvre a smaller and earlier design is in the Oxford Gallery. Engraved in Laudon vol 5 No. 36.'<sup>86</sup> Later that year he writes again during an extended visit to Blenheim Palace with information about the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough's collections: (Fig.10)

Your Enamels of Spes<sup>87</sup> corresponds exactly in dimensions, composition and execution with the Charitas and others at this place. The Duke and Duchess were both much interested in what I told them of your British Museum example. I will bring you tracings of the four here. The backs of the three plates having numbers in [diamond shape] are very richly and finely painted. Each has a coat of arms in the centre.<sup>88</sup> Two bear the left hand coat here sketched & one the other coat below. I hope to make a good many notes of the enamels that are here. I have leisure now and can have them as long out of the case as I like...The plates of the Mouilles with the Zodiacal signs above and a shield below are marked at the back of each P.R. in gold with a fleur de lis in the surrounding compartments. The one bearing the word SEPTENBRE [sic] in lieu of the shield is signed P.R. in front and not in any of the compartments at the back.<sup>89</sup>

Scharf's comment that 'The curious china jars will be rather difficult to trace as they are large and stand in a public passage or anteroom. I shall however do my best' suggests that he was responding to particular queries from Franks or requests for

<sup>85</sup> Scharf Sketchbook 58, 1860 NPG/7/3/4/2/69

<sup>86</sup> BM BEP, Letter from Scharf to Franks, 5 July 1862.

<sup>87</sup> Plaque, workshop of Jean Pénicaud II, Limoges, 1541, Enamel on copper, 27.7cm x 21.5cm, British Museum, Inv. 1855,1201.27. Acquired at the Bernal Sale in 1855.

<sup>88</sup> The sketch depicts the coat of arms of the Mesmes family. Dish, Pierre Reymond, Limoges, 1567-8, Enamel on copper, d.20.4cm, Musée municipal de l'Evêché, inv. 93.500.

<sup>89</sup> BM BEP Letter from Scharf to Franks, 3 September 1862. This information was especially valuable considering that Duke of Marlborough did not lend his enamel collections to the loan exhibition at South Kensington earlier that year, which provided an important opportunity to inspect other collections in private hands.

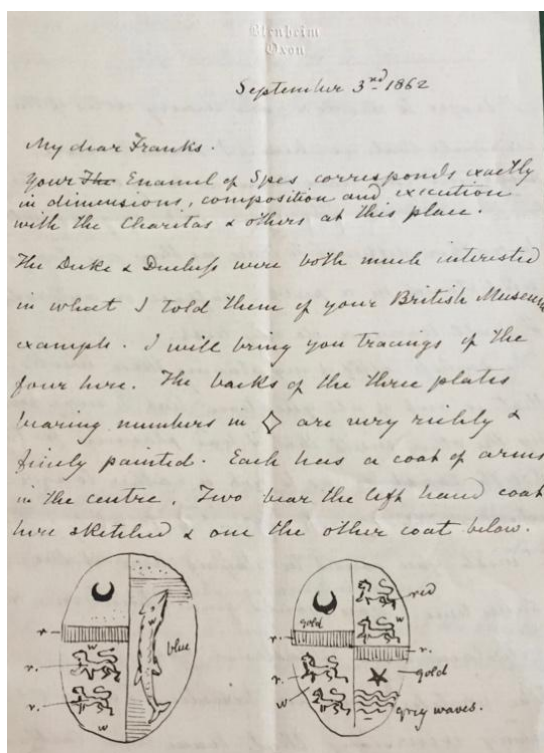


Figure 10 Extract of Letter from Scharf to Franks from Blenheim Palace, 3 September 1862, Franks File, BEP Archive, British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

illustrations. Perhaps Scharf's knowledge of portraiture was especially important in enabling Franks to propagate a new intellectual appreciation for Limoges enamels by linking them directly with illustrious men and women of history. Scharf seems to have played a similar role in Franks's work on the British Museum's collections of coins and medals.<sup>90</sup>

Franks's sphere of influence extended beyond his colleagues in Britain, and his extensive network of contacts on the continent facilitated the propagation of modern curatorial practice.<sup>91</sup> A report of 1890 gives a flavour of these research trips.<sup>92</sup> He started in Paris to discuss enamel in the Louvre, recording his 'considerable doubt as to whether it is really an enamel, an opinion which he found to be shared by M. Darcel (one of his colleagues in Switzerland) who wrote a special work on the enamels in the Louvre.' He went on to Neuchatel, Berne, Lucerne, Zurich and Basel, inspecting various public and private collections. In Zurich, he studied the maiolica collections of the British consul, Sir Henry Angst, recording his hope 'to obtain one or two specimens for the museum through Consul Angst.' After viewing Baron von Lochner's collection in Lindau, he went on to Munich, where, 'through friends Franks managed to have the collection of the Reiche Kapelle opened' before examining original metalwork designs of Hans Mielich of Munich

<sup>90</sup> Scharf was also a collaborator for the research of the numismatics collections in Franks's care, as Franks informed the trustees Scharf 'has been much consulted respecting the portraits on the medals.' BM BEP Officers' Reports, 11 March 1885,

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, the letter sent to M. Bourdery, Limoges, 28 May 1890: 'Liste des Emaux peints de Limoges dans la collection du British Museum', which consists of an inventory of enamels in Museum collection with descriptions, dimensions, and drawings of insignia, grouped by artist. BM, BEP Letter Book.

<sup>92</sup> BM BEP Officers' Reports, 1 December 1890.

with the art historian Jakob von Hener-Alteneck. Although study trips had been identified by Hawkins as essential in order to 'keep pace with the state of knowledge existing on the Continent,' prior to Franks's appointment there had been scant opportunities for Museum officers to do so; Franks's private means and extensive contacts gave him unprecedented access to foreign collections.<sup>93</sup> The fluidity with which Franks and Read moved around Europe is indicated in a letter to Fortnum shortly before Franks's death in 1897:

I met at the Louvre (by appointment) Heron de Villegosse who placed in my hands the famous tiara, which seems to me as genuine as it can be. Charlie saw false objects from Olin, & showed me photographs, but they are as different as possible...Charles & Angst went to the Hotel Voltaire where I had been before with him, & who should turn up but Brinckmann of Hamburg. The people at the hotel were curious to know why there was such a congress of Museum directors.<sup>94</sup>

Letters arriving at the Museum from European, Japanese and American academics, collectors and curators testify to Franks's place within these international museum networks. A letter from Francis Pulney, of the Budapest Museum, for example, invites Franks to his forthcoming exhibition on goldsmiths' work, as 'an opportunity not to be lost for study' and asks him to extend the invitation to both Fortnum and Scharf, underlining the reputation of the three collector-curators on the international stage.<sup>95</sup> Franks's role on the Committee of the International Congress of Archaeology and Anthropology consolidated his status abroad, proving particularly important in spreading awareness of faked and forged objects amongst his colleagues on the continent.

The legacy of Franks's approach to the acquisition, study and exhibition of objects can be traced through the work of his successor, Charles Hercules Read. In his obituary of Read, Henry Balfour observed that Franks's 'stimulating example, enthusiasm and wide knowledge were powerful factors in developing the potentialities and in shaping the destiny of his very capable young assistant.'<sup>96</sup> Franks's lineage can be traced further in the work of Ormonde Dalton, an assistant under Franks from 1889 who inherited the keepership from Read in 1925; the stamp of authority gleaned from his training indicated by the request for him to catalogue the Frank McClean collection of medieval and Renaissance objects for the

<sup>93</sup> Hawkins, Report on the Royal Commission, para. 8041.

<sup>94</sup> Letter from Franks to Fortnum, 5 February 1897, Fortnum Archive, F2/iii/10

<sup>95</sup> Letter from Pulney to Franks, 8 February 1890, BEP Letter Book. Indeed, Franks's reputation abroad was so strong that later that year he was offered a post by the Swiss government, as a letter from Warren acknowledges. 4 October 1890 'Your offer from the Swiss government is a very flattering one and I wish you could see your way towards accepting it.'

<sup>96</sup> Balfour, H., 'Sir Charles Hercules Read, July 6, 1857-February 11, 1929'. *Man*, 29, pp. 61-62.



Fitzwilliam Museum in 1912.<sup>97</sup> In this way, Franks's approach to curatorship continued to shape public collections in Britain and beyond well into the twentieth century. Combined with the role he played in establishing the Slade professorships at Oxford, Cambridge and London universities, Franks spearheaded a fundamental shift in the way in which material culture was understood.<sup>98</sup>

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Writing to Fortnum in 1896, the British Museum director Edward Maunde Thompson discussed recent challenges at the Museum, including lack of funds and Trustee vacancies, as well as the fact that 'We shall soon, also, lose our good old friend Franks. His time is up on 20 March.'<sup>99</sup> The following month a Treasury letter awarded him an annual pension of £583.6.8, acknowledging 'the valuable service rendered by him to learning in general and the British Museum in particular.' Right up until the final months of his life Franks continued to play an active role in international collecting and curating networks.<sup>100</sup> In December 1896 he planned a trip to France, going first to Marseille as 'I believe there is a museum there & I do not doubt crockery shops where I may find some of the obscure factories of which I am hunting up specimens,'<sup>101</sup> and then on to Paris to meet Read, who was travelling on the Continent with his daughter. He sent Fortnum an update from Paris the following month:

Read will probably be accompanied by Mr. Angst whom I particularly wish to see. There is a very important negotiation going on, in which I am particularly taken up & which I may have to take a leading part...I have better remain here a few days longer & return to London in time for the Trustee Meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> & the Council of the Antiquaries the following week.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Ormonde Maddock Dalton, *Fitzwilliam Museum Catalogue of the Mediaeval Ivories, Enamels, Jewellery, Gems and miscellaneous objects bequeathed to the Museum by Frank McClean*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1912.

<sup>98</sup> Letter to Franks from Henry Liddell, Christ Church Oxford, 25 February 1869, BM, BEP Correspondence Archive.

<sup>99</sup> Letter from E Maunde Thompson to Fortnum, 9 February 1896, F/2/vii/2, Fortnum Archive. A letter later dated 3<sup>rd</sup> April, however, acknowledges that 'Franks is still with us – I mean that he is still on the premises and it is as unthinkable for us to regard him as no longer one of us as it is for him to imagine himself a retired officer.'

<sup>100</sup> Franks's commitment to his curatorial duties was indeed a source of concern to his Museum colleagues. A worried Edmund Maunde Thompson wrote to Fortnum explaining that 'I have written a sharp letter to Franks and ordered him to go South. There he is in Paris, pottering about after cups & saucers and of course going about in his usual careless fashion – and catching cold and generally disgusting his anxious friends. I dare say he will persist in turning up here at the meeting on Saturday...' 11 February 1887, F/2/vii/3, Fortnum Archive.

<sup>101</sup> 25 December 1896; 20 January 1897. Fortnum Archive.

<sup>102</sup> 20 January 1897, F/2/iii/9, Fortnum Archive.

He died in May 1897, leaving his remaining collections to the Museum. Yet even posthumously his impact on the Museum community continued to be felt. His friend and colleague, Charles Fortnum bequeathed the residue of his estate to the Museum in 1899 for the building of a room 'for the adequate display of the franks collection of rings and gold and silver &c work.'<sup>103</sup> The Waddesdon Bequest in 1898 and the Barwell Bequest of 1913 are further examples whereupon the Museum has been enriched by donations secured by Franks during his lifetime.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the Godman Bequest in 1982 is perhaps the ultimate expression of Franks's long term planning; Franks secured the bequest of the collection during Godman's lifetime on the understanding that it would pass to the museum on the death of his younger daughter. Having the foresight to consider the Museum's collections almost a century after his own retirement is surely the mark of a superlative curator.

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<sup>103</sup> BM Trustees' Minutes, 15 April 1899.

<sup>104</sup> Canon A.H.S. Barwell (1834-1913) bequeathed ninety-five Limoges enamels and a number of other medieval and Renaissance objects to the British Museum in 1913.