Matthew Maty MD, FRS (1718–76) and science at the foundation of the British Museum, 1753–80

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Part I

Introduction

Among those who were concerned in its early years with the foundation of the British Museum in Montagu House, Matthew Maty probably had a wider circle of acquaintances than almost any of the other officers. As a physician he was a member of a medical club with wide contacts in the scientific world. As the editor and largely the author of the *Journal Britannique* he was the centre of a large intellectual circle in England, Holland and France. He also belonged to a club which included the leading literary figures of the day. Through his father he became known to the ministers of the Huguenot Church and having been both Foreign Secretary and Secretary of the Royal Society he was informed of the current opinions of the scientific world.

Maty's life was chosen for study because of the ubiquity of his contacts and because it illustrates the social background against which the British Museum came into being. The valuable study of the *Journal Britannique* made by a Dutch scholar, Dr U. Janssens-Knorsch (1975), complements this work. Dr Janssens-Knorsch's approach is from a literary viewpoint and throws light on Maty's influence through the *Journal*; the present study focuses on Maty's work at the British Museum against the background of its eighteenth century science.

The period 1720–80 which spanned almost exactly the life of Matthew Maty was exceptional in English history. It derived from a unique set of historical conditions unlike any that could have existed before, or that could exist again. It lay between the religious turmoils of the seventeenth century and the troubles attendant upon industrial growth extending into the nineteenth. By the start of the eighteenth century the constitutional disorders of the period of the Stuarts had run their course, to be followed by 20 years of adjustment under the leadership of Robert Walpole, the so-called Walpole's peace of 1721–42.

There was also a time lag of about half a century from the acceptance of scientific thought, seen in the foundation of the Royal Society in 1662, and in the philosophy of Newton and Locke, before the reasoning of the natural philosophers seeped into the minds of thinking men, politicians, writers and men of wealth. The implications of the new science certainly altered the way men thought about the world, but it did not immediately affect their everyday lives. Mid-eighteenth century society saw itself as a classical age which had 'arrived', as it envisaged the Greek and Roman worlds it admired as having 'arrived'. It was seen as an age of permanence, the outcome of reason and experience, not merely as a passing phase in the course of history. Progress, of course, there was, but it related to the details of everyday life, to the improvement of the existing system and to the completion of knowledge. In a sense, men were unaware of the significance of the advances they were themselves making; they did not conceive themselves as the agents of the social and political upheavals of the last quarter of the century: in America in 1776 (the year of Maty's death), in France in 1789 and in the throes of the industrial revolution that emerged out of the Napoleonic wars.

It was Maty's achievement, in the six years of the authorship of his remarkable *Journal Britannique* to give us an insight, during the mid-century period from 1750 to 1755, of what people thought and of the period's changes and advances. By means of a review of the country's publications and literature hardly a facet escaped him of its activities, in religion as much as in science and society. Religion, for instance, had ceased to inflame men's passions, but the controversies between the deists and those who held to a natural religion continued to simmer among a handful of theologians. The writings of David Hume showed men the way they reasoned and led to their questioning and modifying their religious beliefs, in medicine, experience and medieval tradition. In natural philosophy the Linnaeuan system was bringing the appearance of order into nature. The view of the world, enlarged by conquest, was being made known by voyages of discovery which stimulated the whole field of science.

It was against this background that a group of eminent gentlemen, charged as Trustees under the will of the wealthy physician, Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), were inspired to support

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1Abbreviated to J.B. in text references.
the founding of a British Museum as a repository for the national collections of books and manuscripts and for the preservation of objects and specimens with which to provide a basis for knowledge. That it was their privilege to create an institution destined to give an active lead in the advancement of science would scarcely have entered their minds.

The first two decades of the Museum’s life, to the end of the 1770s, when it came of age, may be termed its formative period. It was a period of trial and error, and, all things considered, very little error. Such of the original Trustees, still living at that time, could reflect on having participated in an outstanding national achievement. However, it was an achievement shared by a group of very able men, the Museum’s officers, of whom Matthew Maty (1718–76) was one. As a medical and literary man, he had prepared himself for the role as author and editor of an outstanding monthly journal, the Journal Britannique (1750–55), and, as a member of the Museum’s staff, became Keeper of two departments and, in his last years, Principal Librarian.

Ancestry and education

Matthew Maty (christened Matthieu) was born at Montfoort, a little town near Utrecht, on 17 May 1718. He was descended both on his father’s and on his mother’s sides from distinguished French Huguenot stock which counted many protestant ministers (Mencheé, 1915). In 1685, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which opened the flood gates of persecution for the French Protestant minorities, Matthew’s grandparents had fled from France to Holland, settling in the Province of Utrecht. There, their son Paul (1681–1773) proceeded to a doctorate at the University of Utrecht, later adding the study of medicine and mathematics at Leyden.

In 1709 Paul Maty succeeded his uncle as minister of the Walloon Church at Montfoort and subsequently became catechist at the Hague. There the unsettling influence on an independent mind in a centre of government with an international, especially English, atmosphere, persuaded him to emigrate to England to join the Anglican church. Being unable to secure a footing in London, he returned to the Hague, where in 1729, he wrote a letter, in effect a tract of a hundred pages, which was to set the seal of his future: Lettre d’un théologien à un autre théologien sur la mystère de la Trinité (Maty, P. 1729) – maintaining that the ‘Son and the Holy Spirit were two finite beings, created by God, who at a certain time became united to God’. This was at a time before the Dutch Reformed Church had moved from the rigidity of Cartesian philosophy and when it was held that every departure from orthodoxy was sinful and deserved the severest penalty (Mosheim, 1765). For this letter, therefore, Paul was dismissed his benefices and excommunicated by the synod of Campen and the Hague. When his appeals against the decisions failed, and he found no refuge in England, he moved in 1730 to Leyden where his brother Charles lived, a compiler of a greatly esteemed Dictionnaire géographique universel, Amsterdam, 1701 and 1723. Joining the Remonstrant Church, Paul Maty remained in Leyden, it is assumed, for the eight years of his son’s education.

Matthew Maty entered the University of Leyden on 31 March 1732 at the age of 14, receiving an MD degree on 11 February 1740 and simultaneously a PhD for a philosophical thesis, Dissertatio de consuetudinis efficacia in corpus humam (Maty, 1740). This was a dissertation on custom in society, later published as Essai sur l’usage (Maty, 1741). The intellectual environment of his family circle during the impressionable years of adolescence and his ability to master whatever was put before him, would account as much for Matthew’s philosophical attitudes as for the uncommon range of his interests. It was certainly no purely theological or medical environment in which he was brought up.

In the 1730s, a foreigner looking across from Holland at the English scene found much to wonder at. After 20 years of Walpole’s peace (1721–42) and freedom from external war, the condition of the country was as favourable to attracting a dissenting minister and a young doctor as any country in Europe. While catholics, non-conformists, Jews and Quakers were denied certain elementary rights, religious freedom had become an unquestioned English principle. Even writers and pamphleteers could say what they liked without fear of persecution, and both father and son were by inclination writers.
After his visits to London, Matthew’s father was determined, following his excommunication, to shake the dust of Holland from his feet at the first opportunity. So with the completion of his son’s education he made a permanent home in England. Matthew Maty arrived in London with his parents towards the end of 1740, and they settled in their first residence in Holler Street, Soho.

**Medicine in London**

A young physician like Matthew Maty, with an education acknowledged superior to any he could have got at the time in England, would have been aware of the move in medicine away from the scholastic traditionalism of previous centuries into the application of ideas derived from practice which was being widely supported by large scale philanthropy. By 1741, four of London’s hospitals had already been built (Westminster 1719, Guys 1724, St George’s 1733 and the London Hospital in 1740), and another three were planned (Foundling Hospital 1743, Middlesex 1745 and the Small-pox Hospital in 1747). The first lying-in hospital opened in 1739, and by 1741 William Smellie (1720–95) had started teaching midwifery (George, 1925: 60). In the reign of George I, the medical profession, from the influence of Thomas Sydenham (1624–89), Sloane’s mentor, had acquired a greater esteem and enjoyed a greater affluence than it had ever done, benefits it was not to lose that century. Leading physicians could earn the not uncommon remuneration of £10000 a year, an immense sum in those days; Sir Hans Sloane was the first physician to receive a knighthood.

That Maty held a medical degree from the University of Leyden was something to be proud of as well as of some consequence for his future. At that time the conditions of medical teaching in England, Scotland and Ireland was such that many students went to study at Continental universities. Some went there because, not being of the Church of England – Non-Conformists, Catholics, Jews – they were excluded from Oxford or Cambridge; others because of the reputations of Paris, Leyden, Rheims, Montpellier, or Padua; and others still for financial reasons.

From about 1700, however, British students gave preference to Leyden on account of the teaching there of Professor Herman Boerhaave (1668–1738), and in the next 38 years, until Boerhaave’s death, no less than 746 English speaking students, mainly ‘Angli, Scoti and Hiberni’, but also students from the British colonies, New England and the West Indies, either matriculated, studied, took their degrees, or pursued post-graduate study at Leyden (Underwood, 1977). The influence of Boerhaave’s pupils, for instance, was such that the Edinburgh School was founded by them; and Boerhaave’s reputation today is that he was the greatest teacher of medicine the world has known. Therefore, a Dutch physician, newly qualified, who had studied under Boerhaave, could not only claim the value of the master’s personal inspiration, but would have found in England many doctors, also his pupils, who were amicably disposed towards a young Leyden graduate.

Given the necessary introductions, an attractive and intelligent young man from Leyden would have had little difficulty in building up a private practice. Of this, however, we know very little and virtually nothing until the 1760s. As a foreigner with a diploma from the University of Leyden, Maty could work under a ‘bishop’s license’, given by a bishop on the recommendation of four physicians and without resort to the licentiate of the College of Physicians (not yet the Royal College). Nominally that excluded him from an area with a radius of seven miles from London (Clark, 1964). But the shortage of qualified doctors then was such that the College could not have improved the situation by seeking powers to make graduates qualify for its licentiate, even if they breached the seven-mile rule as Maty did.

The position at that time was that only the well-to-do could afford a doctor at all. Most people called in an apothecary as a first step, and a doctor only as a second. The average apothecary had no other training than in the composition of drugs, so quacks abounded and made a good living. To judge by his later practice, the impression is that Maty worked among the well-to-do. There was, of course, a sizeable French speaking colony in London, including Huguenots who were settled in Soho, then a fashionable parish. There was probably work at
the French Hospital to which, at the end of his life in 1774, Maty was elected an honorary physician. For the rest we must depend on what we can gather from his practice in the 1760s which will be mentioned later.

The Medical Club

It must be assumed that Maty came to London with the express purpose of earning his living as a physician, and therefore it is unfortunate that his first ten years as a doctor should have been so completely overshadowed by the literary period that followed. However, a young doctor in new surroundings would naturally be drawn to any circle that shared something of his experience. On his arrival in London Maty was introduced to what came to be called the 'Medical Club', but we do not know by whom. In it he found a group of doctors not much older than himself who were to become eminent in various ways and even internationally distinguished. The Club met on every other Thursday at the Queen's Arms of St Paul's Church Yard (Nichols, 1812–15, 3: 258) and there drank coffee and exchanged medical and other gossip. Since several of its members did much to help establish the British Museum in Montagu House, a brief introduction to each is required.

It seems likely that the Club's existence was due to Dr John Fothergill (1712–80), an Edinburgh graduate who had just arrived in London and who was to succeed Hans Sloane and Richard Mead as one of the great figures in British medicine. However, when it comes to natural history in the British Museum or elsewhere, with Fothergill one must always associate Peter Collinson (1694–1768) (Hunt, 1887), an older man who, although not a physician and not at that time a member of the Club, was a great influence in natural history circles, and a pillar of support in Museum affairs.

Both Collinson and Fothergill were of Quaker stock and both maintained the Quaker habit in their lives. Both had ancestral roots in the English hill country; Collinson in the Fells of Cumberland; Fothergill in the farm lands of Wensleydale, Yorkshire. Although Collinson was a trader, having inherited a wholesale business in men's mercery, botany was his passion. Trade with New England and Carolina brought wealth and enabled him to receive collections of plants by the American naturalist, John Bartram (1699–1777), who also enjoyed Fothergill's patronage.

By this means many new kinds of trees and shrubs were brought over to grace the estates of the English landed gentry. As a young man Collinson's knowledge of botany enabled him to help Sloane arrange his collections and in later years he was one of the few who could call on Sir Hans familiarly at any time. As one of the trustees of Sloane's will he would have welcomed an appointment as curator of the botanical collections at Montagu House, and although disappointed in this, he never ceased to support the Museum through interest and with many gifts over the years.

John Fothergill (Hird, 1781; Lettson, 1786) founded his first club among the medical students at Edinburgh, and, graduating in 1736, assisted Professor Alexander Munro edit a work on osteology (Munro, 1746). Being too late to join Boerhaave at Leyden, Fothergill worked under Sir E. Wilmot (1693–1786), Mead's son-in-law at St Thomas's Hospital. Before engaging in practice in the city, he spent two years in clinical practice among the poor, for it was the poor, he said, who taught him medicine. He was one of the pioneers who helped free English medicine from the hold of the scholastic tradition by encouraging nature herself to effect the cure (Payne, 1889), and made an international reputation through the treatment of angina maligna of which an epidemic swept the country in 1747.

A friendly and generous man, Fothergill attracted others to himself. Apart from his students' club and the Medical Club of 1741, he started a Medical Society (of Physicians) in London in the 1750s, and helped found the Society of (Licentiate) Physicians in 1767. Wealth brought him into collecting, his cabinet of shells being outstanding; he supported his naturalist friends in assuring the publication of their work. With Collinson's help he established a garden of 30 acres at Upton, Stratford, to the east of London, which Joseph Banks rated as the best in the country after Kew, and without an equal in Europe (Fox, 1919: 184n). To the Museum he
was liberal in his gifts; and when Dr Gowin Knight, the Principal Librarian, suffered from an unwise investment Fothergill relieved his anxieties to the tune of £1000, a debt never repaid. Although Fothergill did not himself lend a hand at Montagu House he was a power in the medical and naturalist worlds.

William Watson (1715–87) (Hartog, 1899) was one of the brilliant scientific men of that century. Son of a tradesman of Smithfield, East London, he went to Merchant Taylors' School and was then apprenticed to an apothecary. He won a prize awarded by the Apothecaries Company and may first have met Sloane there. Elected to the Royal Society at the age of 26 he had charge of the Society's classical experiments into the nature and conductivity of 'electric fluid'. Later, in 1751, he introduced the results of Franklin's electrical experiments to the Society. In the field of natural history he showed that coral was of animal and not of vegetable origin and his review of Linnaeus's Species plantarum, Holmiae, 1753 in the Gentleman's Magazine of 1754 did much to make the Linnaean system acceptable in England (Watson, 1754).

In the meantime Watson advanced his qualifications as physician and surgeon. He became a public authority on poisoning by non-edible plants. In 1757 he was awarded a doctorate in physic at the universities of Halle and Wittenberg. The licentiate of the College of Physicians followed in 1759, when he moved from Aldersgate to practise from Lincoln's Inn Fields. In 1762 he was appointed physician at the Foundling Hospital. In 1768, in a paper read before the Royal Society, he advocated the method of inoculation against small-pox he had applied for 20 years.

Numbered among Sloane's executors, Watson's election as one of the first Trustees of the British Museum was an enormous benefit to the new institution. With the exception, perhaps, of Thomas Birch, few others gave as much time as he did, and he furnished the Montagu House garden with many plants. Knighted only a year before he died, he is held in respect by the surgeon's title of 'Mr'.

Peter Templeman (1711–69) (Thompson, 1898) came from a well-to-do family and so received, as did few others in this story, a formal education at Charterhouse, Cambridge and finally Leyden under Boerhaave, for an MD. At Leyden Templeman struck up a friendship with Maty whom he may have brought into the Medical Club. As a gentleman of means, Templeman decided on life of literary leisure on the fringe of medicine (Templeman, 1753). It may have been Maty's influence that led to Templeman's appointment, in 1758, as the first Keeper of the Reading Room at Montagu House, but neither his inclinations or his health survived the conditions of employment for more than a year. From 1760, as Secretary of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (later the Royal Society of Arts), having close ties with the Museum's staff, he found scope for his talents. The respect with which he was held is confirmed by the portrait in the Society's house.

Another of the physicians in the Medical Club was James Parsons (1705–70), an obstetrician of ability and versatility, who moved among the intellectual elite of his day, numbering bishops among his friends. A strong mystical element in his nature, derived, perhaps from years of adolescence in Ireland, led to unusual philosophical conclusions on such subjects as hermaphrodites, the differences between plants and animals, and the origin of languages. Less would be known about him were it not for an eloge Maty wrote for Nichols's Literary anecdotes on his death (Maty, 1812). Maty succeeded Parsons as foreign secretary of the Royal Society. However, there is no record of Parsons's interest in the Museum's foundation or that he was in any sense a benefactor.

In receipt of patronage

In the eighteenth century any young man without social connections who aspired to a position in society depended on patronage, and Maty was no exception. The opinion has always been that Maty was the recipient of favours from Lord Chesterfield (1694–1773), politician, diplomat and the author of the famous Letters to his son but what it was that inspired the patronage or what form it took has never been revealed. If, however, the evidence put forward
here remains circumstantial, it fits both Chesterfield’s temperament and not only Maty’s desire for reticence, but also his wish indirectly to acknowledge Chesterfield’s friendship.

In 1728 Lord Chesterfield was appointed ambassador to the Hague, then incidentally, the most important post on the Continent, and he remained there until 1731. While there, it is likely that he would have heard of the prevailing ecclesiastical cause célèbre involving Paul Maty’s excommunication by the Synod. With Maty going to and fro between the Hague and London, it is probable that the two met, and a meeting may have included Matthew Maty, then a boy of 12. There could hardly have been another circumstance to account for the warmth of Chesterfield’s welcome to Matthew and his parents when the family arrived in London in 1740:

... il reçu un accueil distingué de célèbre Chesterfield qui ne néglige rien pour lui rendre agréable séjour de Londres. (Michaud, Biographie universelle, 1810–28

The impact on his lordship of an intelligent and agile minded young doctor with all the social graces could very well have prompted Chesterfield to intimate to his principal physician, Richard Mead, that here was a friend for whom something should be done. This would give meaning both to Maty’s phrase in his essay on Boerhaave (Maty, 1747: 39) and to the compliment he paid to Richard Mead in Authentic memoirs (Maty, 1755(a): i–ii)

... the friendly protection of some eminent brother of the faculty assisted him to force his way through the crowd. (Éloge Critique de H Boerhaave, p. 39)

... ingenious men ‘were sure to find’ the best help in all their undertakings. (Authentic memoirs of Richard Mead, p. i–ii)

The first of Maty’s bows to Lord Chesterfield is taken to be the dedication of his Ode sur la Rebellion de MDCCXLV en Écosse (Maty, 1746) to M.L.C.D.C. (Monsieur le Comte de Chesterfield). This is a long, rather heavy poem which tells us something of the author’s political and religious position at the time of the Rebellion of 1745 which Maty might have thought it good for his patron to know.

In the later stages of Maty’s career it was less Lord Chesterfield who provided the cloak of patronage to Maty’s ambitions, than Lord Hardwicke, the Lord Chancellor, doubtless prompted by Thomas Birch. But Maty was never neglectful of what Chesterfield had done at the start of his life in England or failed to take the occasion to make some indirect reference to it. The climax of Maty’s acknowledgement of Chesterfield’s patronage was, of course, his memoirs of Chesterfield and editing of his Miscellaneous works through which he has come to be principally known (Maty, 1777).

The social circle

At the time that Maty was first established in London the city contained a distinguished coterie of scholars and scientists. Of those in the Medical Club, Parsons and Watson had been newly elected to the Royal Society. One of the first calls any foreigner made on arriving in London was on Richard Mead, as celebrated as a collector of antiquities and for the patronage of scholars, as a physician. Sir Hans Sloane had just moved with his collections to Chelsea, another common port of call. Among the naturalists were several Maty was to work with while at the British Museum: George Edwards (1694–1773), ornithologist and Sloane’s confident in his last years John Hill (1716–75), apothecary and writer, Henry Baker (1698–1774), microscopist, Dru Drury (1725–1803), entomologist, John Ellis (1710–76), a close friend of Peter Collinson’s, who did much for the British Museum in its early years, and the impeccunious Emanuel Mendes da Costa (1717–91), another recipient among many of Fothergill’s charity (Whitehead, 1977: 9).

A mathematician to come into Maty’s circle through his father, was the Huguenot,
Abraham de Moivre (1667–1754) (Clerke, 1894), one time tutor to several distinguished men of the day, Lord Chesterfield, Lord Macclesfield and others who were concerned with the Calendar Act of 1750 (de Morgan, 1857). In 1712 it had been de Moivre’s privilege, as a friend of Newton’s, to be appointed by the Royal Society to arbitrate between Newton and Leibnitz on the claim to the priority of the invention of the infinite calculus. It was Maty’s privilege to write de Moivre’s Mémoire (Maty, 1755(c)).

Another of Maty’s early friends, neither physician nor scientist, but like himself with Huguenot roots, was John Jortin (1698–1770) who became eminent as an ecclesiastical historian. We do not hear about him until later, but it is likely that they met when Jortin, after Cambridge and with Anglican Orders (although a dissenter by temperament), was occupied as Reader and Preacher at the Chapel-of-Ease at St Giles-in-the-Fields, a stone’s throw from the Maty home. There he wrote Miscellaneous observations upon authors ancient and modern, 1731. In 1747, having been appointed to another Chapel-of-Ease, at Oxendon Street, he came under the jurisdiction of Archbishop Thomas Herring, whose friend he had been at Cambridge and while there he was, incidentally, offered a living in the City by Lord Hardwicke. But he remained at St Giles to issue the first three of five volumes of Remarks on ecclesiastical history, 1751–54, which, given five review articles by Maty in the Journal Britannique, (J.B. 8, 9, 14) also brought him a Lambeth degree, an honour given generally for services to the Church at Lambeth Palace. His Life of Erasmus, 1758–60, established his European reputation, but most of his later writing was on classical subjects, and he contributed several articles to Maty’s Journal Britannique. He also wrote on music and played the harpsichord. Twenty years older than Maty he was Maty’s most intimate, and certainly most interesting friend and probably the centre of Maty’s circle. His son Rogers, married Maty’s eldest daughter, Louise.

By joining Jortin’s ecclesiastical circles Maty met a bishop or two, such as William Warburton (1698–1779), Bishop of Gloucester, who, a ready debater, might have expressed views about pastors who quarrelled with their Synod. There were bishop-antiquarians like Charles Lyttleton (1714–68), Bishop of Exeter and Carlisle and President of the Society of Antiquaries, and the William Stukeley (1687–1765), knowledgeable on Druidism and with a reputation for archaeological misinterpretation, all of whose works Maty was later to review in the Journal Britannique. There was also Martin Folkes (1690–1754), the numismatist who had succeeded Sloane as President of the Royal Society and who was to support Matys election ten years later.

**The Maty family**

Coming with his family to London, Matthew Maty was fortunate in being able to enjoy the benefits of family life surrounded in Soho by many Huguenot friends (Janssens-Knorsch, 1975). Within that social circle he met Elizabeth de Boisragon who became his wife on 13 December 1743, at the Spring Garden Chapel in Soho. A year later, their son, Paul Henry (1744–87) was born; there were two daughters of the marriage. In 1767, the second, Anne Gilette (b. 1748) married John Obadiah Justmond, FRS (1723–86) who held an appointment in the British Museum. The elder daughter, Louise (1746–1809) married Rogers Jortin (1732–95) the son of Maty’s friend, in March 1776, four months before her father’s death.

In 1750, Elizabeth Maty died, but in 1752 Maty married the English gentlewoman of Huguenot descent, mentioned by John Jortin in his letter of 1756 to Lord Hardwicke, quoted later, namely Mary Dolon Deners by whom he had a daughter, Marthe, born in 1758. In 1752 the Matys moved from Holler Street to Frith Street, also in Soho, and into Montagu House in the summer of 1756.

It is assumed that the Maty family worshipped in one of the small chapels in Soho belonging to the Huguenot church of the Savoy, or in the chapel in Oxendon Street, near Leicester Square, where the memorial service for Matthew Maty was held on 11 August 1776. It is assumed that the Paul Maty, Matthew’s father, lived with his son up to the date of his death on 21 March 1773.
Part II

The Journal Britannique, 1750–55

After the best part of a decade as a practising physician in London, occupying his spare time in journalism, Maty evidently decided that literary life offered at least as much satisfaction as routine medicine. He may also have realized that it was not as a doctor that he would secure the niche in society his particular talents justified. It must also have been evident to him since his student years, especially since the completion of his doctoral thesis, that routine work was not really in his line even if it had the advantage of giving leisure for the scientific interests that occupied his medical friends. As far as his education was concerned his range of knowledge covered at least as wide a field as that enjoyed by any of his English contemporaries. The anonymous sketch of Maty’s life in Nichol’s Literary anecdotes made it clear that his incursion into a highly specialized form of literary journalism was aimed at securing him the place in society to which he felt himself entitled (Nichols, 1812–15: 3, 258). The means to this end was through the publication of a feuille volante called the Journal Britannique.

A study of the 18 volumes of this Journal issued in the six years between 1750 and 1755 – before he joined the British Museum in 1756 – is essential for understanding the man’s ability and what he sought to make of his career. Janssens-Knorsch’s work on the Journal Britannique (Janssens-Knorsch, 1975) although its approach differs from that of the author’s, has been available and of very considerable assistance.

The emergence of London as one of the centres of European culture, as well as of the constitutional, economic and literary developments in England, led to the posting there of literary journalists who reported back to their capitals, and particularly to Paris. Maty had not been long in London before he made contact with a group of French journalists who were engaged to supply news of a literary nature to French periodicals, published on occasion in Holland. He was invited to join them at their gatherings of what had grown into a sort of literary agency at the Rainbow in Marylebone, an eighteenth century coffee-house. It was not long before he was contributing pieces both to the Bibliothèque Britannique (1733–47) and to the Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des savants de l’Europe (1728–53) and especially to its Nouvelles de Londres.

In 1747, after 14 years, the Bibliothèque Britannique ceased publication, not from lack of demand but from lack of a competent editor. By that time Maty had become sufficiently involved in its affairs to realize that there was a future for a journal of that type. He must have wondered whether the editing it needed could be done in his spare time from medicine. It could be that pressure came from the Hague. An anglophile publisher there, Henri Scheurleer, whose father may have been an old friend of the Matys and who was eager to improve his trade in English books, may have made the first approach. The suggestion, by analogy with the arrangements of other journals, was that a successor to the Bibliothèque Britannique should be financed, printed and distributed by a publisher, and that Maty should provide the text as the London editor. It was an ideal arrangement for Maty, giving him an independent entrée into journalism and a fee of £12 a month.

In the year or so before the issue of the first number of his Journal Britannique in January 1750, Maty evidently gave much thought to its content and format. Its aim was defined in a Project in the first number, and later outlined elsewhere:

The design of the Journal hath been, to do justice to English writers, who make a considerable figure in the Republic of letters; to assist in spreading their reputation abroad; and to give a fair account of their work without censorousness or adulation . . . (Maty, 1755(a): i–ii)

Since its predecessor had failed because it was a group effort, Maty decided his must be an individual one if only ‘pour penser avec liberté il faut penser seul’ (J.B. I: iv). To control content, policy and style he would himself be the principal contributor, compiler, editor and
Translator, but not an anonymous one. Outside contributors were welcome, but whether they wrote in English or French he would himself translate and edit their texts to his pattern. He would avoid the tediousness of the current reviews, which generally comprised long transcripts of the authors’ text, by giving his own opinion. For his precedents, he would go back to the original thinkers of the previous generation, Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) and Jean de Clerc (1657-1736) who had inspired the encyclopaedists.

The format the Journal Britannique took was pocket size (12 mo. 13 × 7.5 cm), of between 120 and 140 pages, printed in largish type (180 words to a page) (Plate 1). At first it appeared monthly, but after two years (April 1752), every other month, which, although doubled in volume, it gave the author more time for reflection. The early numbers were divided into four to six sections (the later into a dozen or so), being articles or reviews of 20 to 30 pages each. In each number a final section, Nouvelles Littéraires, contained advance notices of books to be reviewed and notes from the universities: of Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin; also more general news from London, or any other stray bits and pieces, grave or gay, that took the editor’s fancy. In the six years of the Journal’s life 18 volumes of about 8000 pages were produced.
The volumes contain a total of about 320 articles. Although Maty was in principle both author and editor of the Journal, he sought collaborators, usually identified by initials. These appear to have contributed about 100 articles, leaving the balance of some 220 to Maty himself.

As an index of Maty's social circle in these years it is interesting to see who his collaborators were (Appendix 1a and b). There were first his medical colleagues and others, some of whom were Fellows of the Royal Society. Those closest to Maty in these years were members of two groups, so-called Clubs, each of a handful of members. The more important was a Society of Gentlemen, admirers of Thomas Birch (1705–66) who joined in a fortnightly Thursday teaparty, which Birch called his 'Bibeum Theum'. Among them was John Jortin whose articles on classical literature found a regular place in the Journal.

The other group was formed of a dozen or so Huguenot ministers (including Maty’s father) attached to the French Church of Savoy which also met on Thursdays every other week. For theological articles it was natural that Maty should turn to his friends in this private Soho ‘Synod’. For mathematics he leaned on his father, who could hold his own with any of the leading English mathematicians. The 65 contributions of this group, were signed by initials only, as were those of two others (J.J. and E.M.) not certainly identified.

To analyse the reviews and articles which comprise a large part of these 18 volumes, Janssens-Knorsch has found it necessary to make a modern re-classification of the eighteenth century subject matter, since in 200 years subjects change their status; earthquakes or the age of the earth, for instance, no longer belong to theology. An analysis of the 320 articles also showing Maty’s personal contribution to the Journal, would read:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of reviews/articles</th>
<th>Maty’s contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural history and science</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>c. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antiquities</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law, institutions and commerce</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>c. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography and travel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The arts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>323</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 50 Nouvelles littéraires, with notices of 600 titles, are not included in these figures.

A further general analysis of the whole range of Maty’s involvement with the Journal would duplicate that of Janssens-Knorsch. Instead, those aspects of science and medicine with which he was personally concerned are discussed in the following sections.

Science: medicine and natural history

The Journal Britannique did not seek to impose science on its readers beyond what the majority could understand, that is to say except for the complexities of mathematics, which drew protesters from correspondents. Could not the learned editor please consider their limitations? The Royal Society’s Philosophical Transactions provided the basis for most of what was included since there was little that was new in medicine, natural history or antiquarianism (even on occasions travel) that, at that time, was not first presented to the Society. In the first number of the Journal published in January 1750 the Philosophical Transactions, 1747–48, were given a full review, and in the second number a leading article appeared on the relation between the foul air from ships and scurvy in which Maty took the
opportunity of quoting medical opinion from Boerhaave, Mead, Watson and others. The names of his friends feature prominently in his texts. Thereafter there was scarcely a number that did not include something originating from the Philosophical Transactions, if only a snippet in the Nouvelles littéraires. The Journal included 15 full length review articles of the Transactions published between 1747 and 1754.

What strikes the reader of eighteenth century science today is the chasm separating it from what we take for granted in our every day lives. In mathematics Newton had done something to bridge the gap. In medicine and the natural sciences the middle of the eighteenth century stood as a watershed between the acceptance of classical and medieval lore and the advance to scientific method. The men whose work we read of in the Journal Britannique were feeling their way, often with an extraordinarily sure instinct, towards discoveries that came only in the next century. Maty's treatment of science against the background of the period must have done much therefore, to hold the interest of his readers at a time when revolutionary changes were taking place.

**Medicine**

In medicine the name to appear most commonly in the Journal is that of the physician Richard Mead (1673–1754). Maty's personal interest lay in Mead's friendship with Hermann Boerhaave (1668–1738) at Leyden when Boerhaave was still a student of theology; also in Mead's early acceptance of the value of inoculation against smallpox tested in 1721 on condemned prisoners in the Tower of London before being applied the next year to the daughters of the Prince of Wales, Amelia and Caroline. In 1751 Mead, as President of the Royal Society, supported Maty's election.

Volume one of the Journal was just in time to review Mead's Demoniacs in his Medica sacra, 1749 and his Monita et praecepta medica, 1751, the last of his writings (J.B. 5). The Medica sacra drew a riposte from Thomas Church (1707–56), vicar of Battersea and Prebendary of St Paul's, in a paper adorned with a title typical of the period and making further study superfluous:

A vindication of the miraculous powers which subsisted in the three first centuries of the Christian Church . . . With a preface containing some observations on Dr Mead's Account of the Demoniacs in his new piece intitled Medica sacra. (J.B. 1)

After Mead's death in 1754, Maty wrote an obituary, Éloge du Richard Mead based on material supplied by Thomas Birch, (Herring, 1777: 159–61) of which, much to the author's satisfaction, an English translation was called for. This was concluded with the long Latin inscription on Mead's tomb in Westminster Abbey (Maty, 1755(a)). The last number of the Journal was concerned with the sale of Mead's Musaeum Medicianum, a discourse on the Cabinet of Richard Mead, described in a catalogue of 262 pages (J.B. 17).

In medicine the Journal was largely concerned with the problems of the army and navy of a country intermittently at war, and losing more men from disease in peace-time than ever died fighting. The investigations of two Scotsmen, John Pringle (1707–82) and James Lind (1716–94) showed where the deficiencies lay. From 1742 to 1748 Pringle was attached to the army in Germany and Flanders (he was at Culloden in 1746), and his Observations on the diseases of the army in camp and garrison (sic), 1752, (J.B. 8) proved the benefit of antisepsis, sanitation and ventilation in saving life whether in hospitals or in camp. He was a remarkable man who could maintain contact with the commanders on both sides of the battle lines and persuade them that hospitals should be regarded as outside the area of conflict, as they have since remained. Pringle became President of the Royal Society, supported Maty's election, and in 1752 received the Copley Medal awarded by Sir Hans Sloane.

These and other medical topics summarized in the Journal from published works, generally without comment, can now be seen as revolutionary steps in military medicine. Lind's Treatise of the scurvy, 1753, (J.B. 13) a disease then associated with Samuel Sutton's Extracting foul air
from ships, 1749, (J.B. 1) was the outcome of service with the fleet under the worst possible conditions in the Channel, Mediterranean and the West Indies. He showed that scurvy could be prevented by taking orange and lemon juice, but it was 45 years, in 1795, before the Admiralty insisted on the addition of lemon juice to the rations. That lack of ventilation was also the cause of several of the fevers of the time, including 'jayl' fever, was shown by a most original investigator. Stephen Hales (1677–1761), in a study of Ventilation at Newgate Prison, 1752, (J.B. 10) later taken up by the Admiralty in the design of ships. The Journal also reviewed William Smellie's (d. 1795) fundamental Treatise on the theory and practice of midwifery, 1752, (J.B. 7).

That by the mid-century the study of physiology within medicine was gaining ground in the universities is evident from the writings of two Scottish physicians, both pupils of Boerhaave. One was Thomas Simpson (1696–1764) the first Chandos Professor of Medicine at St Andrews; the other Professor Whytt, FRS (1714–66) at Edinburgh, both of whom investigated the involuntary response of animals independent of the brain (J.B. 10, 11, 18).

Although the Journal was not usually concerned with current events it noted, in November 1752, that owing to illness Sir Hans Sloane had been unable personally to present John Pringle with his medal, and Lord Willoughby (d. 1755), the Vice-President stood in for him (J.B. 9). The January 1753 number records Sloane's death and mentions his 'Cabinet d'histoire naturelle et d'antiquités', but not yet its destination (J.B. 10).

Inoculation

In medicine Maty's record scarcely survives beyond his interest in the then not fully accepted practice of inoculation against smallpox. It was the one cause that brought all his talents together: a physician with literary gifts, a command of languages and socially conscious. These he applied in the Journal Britannique as a means of lifting a campaign for inoculation to an international level, a need greater in France than in England or Holland.

Maty seems to have contracted smallpox in 1740 shortly before he left Holland, and, treating it the 'natural way', survived – not the way, incidentally, Boerhaave advocated. Arriving in England he found that the leading physicians – Mead, Jurin, Sloane and others – accepted the practice even before 1721 when Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762) had her children inoculated after their return from Constantinople. However, the public credit for having given currency in the west to the Middle Eastern practice of inoculation should rightly have gone to John Woodward, FRS (1665–1728) (Woodward, 1900), Gresham Professor of Physic, who advocated the practice in a paper read before the Royal Society in 1714 (Woodward, 1714).

Before 1752 the practice of inoculation was mentioned in the Journal Britannique only as items in the Nouvelles littéraires (J.B. 7) but from then onwards reports about it came to exert a considerable influence, particularly in France, where the authorities had been unable to counteract public resistance. The pace was being set in England. On 5 March 1752, the Hospital for Smallpox was reopened on a new site at Cold Bathfields, and a sermon was preached by the Revd Isaac Maddox (1697–1759). Bishop of Worcester, at the Parish Church of St Andrew, Holborn before the President, his Grace, Charles Duke of Marlborough, the President of the hospital, the Vice-President and Governors. The acknowledgement of the work of the hospital by nobility attending the ceremony, the account of its work and the ample statistics provided impressed foreign observers (J.B. 8).

The next items in the Journal which exerted an even greater impact, were two full length articles reviewing James Kirkpatrick's (1696–1770) The analysis of inoculation, its history, theory and practice, 1754. This recounted the author's experience when he was concerned with epidemics in South Carolina in 1738, and later in Ireland and Scotland in which of 4257 cases only 10 died (J.B. 13, 14). This book roused the ire of the Rector of St Mildred and all the 'saints' in the City of Canterbury who, preaching on 'inoculation an indefensible practice' echoed the views of some medical men especially in France (J.B. 14).
At this time there was still some question as to whether, if smallpox were contracted a second time, either naturally or through inoculation, it could be fatal. To resolve this, for there were few cases authenticated, Maty decided, without the knowledge of his family, to experiment on himself. Being called to treat a girl of five years he re-inoculated himself with her matter, and although he contracted the disease in its mild form it ran its usual course of ten days and left no after effects (J.B. 15, 16).

By the Journal Britannique, Maty came into the forefront of the European campaign for the introduction of inoculation, through a lecture delivered on 24 April 1754 before the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris entitled Mémoire sur l'inoculation de la petite vérole by Charles de La Condamine (1701–74), the celebrated mathematician, geographer and surveyor. He traced the origins and development of the practice of inoculation amongst the Georgians and in the Middle East, a memoir which Maty translated and published adding preface and postscript (Maty, 1755(b)). Then, to resolve various questions, Maty wrote to James Porter, (1710–86), Ambassador at Constantinople, for information of current practice amongst the Greeks and others which he recounted in a paper to the Royal Society on 10 April 1755 (J.B. 17) (Maty & Porter, 1756).

La Condamine’s paper was strongly attacked by Andrew Cantwell (d. 1764), an Irishman, with a degree from Montpellier who was practising in Paris. Although he claimed to have practised inoculation, he had turned against it, and in a Dissertation sur l’inoculation, 1755, opposed the measure with such vehemence and untruth as to rouse people to anger (J.B. 18).

There were reactions to Cantwell’s attack in Holland, Switzerland and later even in France. In Holland Charles Chais, pastor of the French Protestant church, St Evangile, at the Hague, contributed an outstanding paper to the Science Society at Haarlem (Chais, 1754) which dealt with the medical and theological aspects of the problem. In Switzerland a paper by Simon-André Tissot (1728–97) on Inoculation justifiée, 1755, appeared in Lausanne.

In England the effect of Cantwell’s attack was to stir the College of Physicians to action. This was reported in a letter to Maty, as editor of the Journal Britannique, from the President of the College, William Heberden (1710–1801) and Edward Archer (1718–89), physician at the Smallpox Hospital. It informed him that on 22 December 1755 the College had, in a resolution passed unanimously, given unqualified support to the practice of inoculation, Archer’s individual contribution being the hospital’s most recent statistics. This resolution, published as an appendix to the Harveian Oration for that year filled three of the last pages of the final issue of the Journal (J.B. 18), a fitting climax to Maty’s efforts.

In France where in 1752, the publication of the Traité de la petite vérole, by the Geneva physician Jean-Antoine Butini, had been totally ignored, by 1755 the authorities caused an approach to be made to the College of Physicians in London. Ambrose Hosty, an Irish docteur-régent of the Paris Faculty made contact with Kirkpatrick and Maty for evidence which could be used to refute Cantwell’s statements (Maty, 1756). In 1756 Hosty spent three months in London in discussions with Kirkpatrick, Maty and Bishop Maddox and witnessed over 200 inoculations at the Smallpox and Foundling Hospitals and in private. In spite of the uncertainties of the Seven Years War (1756–63) La Condamine visited London in 1763 and Maty returned the visit in the following year (Miller, 1957).

On 26 October 1764 Maty was in Calais, and from there he addressed a Lettre de M. Maty ... aux auteurs de la Gazette Littéraire in which, to correct some impressions his correspondents held, he gave a historical review of the progress of inoculation in England since 1721 (Maty, 1764).

Although the close of the Journal Britannique deprived Maty of a medium of propaganda he continued to collect evidence in support of inoculation. As a result of enquiries by Charles Chais at the Hague, Maty gave a paper at the Royal Society on the ancient practice among the Arabs on the Coast of Barbary, in Bengal and in the East Indies (Maty, 1767). He also persuaded Angelo Gatti, Professor of Medicine in the University of Pisa, to publish in 1767 an essay, New observations on inoculation, including an account of the situation in France, which he translated and published in Dublin.
Natural history since David Hume

The writings of David Hume (1711–76), almost an exact contemporary of Maty’s, had a far greater impact on human thought and on the intellectual approach of his generation than any philosophical system credited to him. For him the problem of knowledge lay in the human way of knowing and feeling. His first mature work, *An inquiry concerning human understanding*, 1748, ante-dated the *Journal Britannique*, and the *Natural history of religion*, 1757, appeared too late for review, but in 1751 Maty drew attention to the *Political discourses* (J.B. 5) and to the *Enquiry concerning the principles of morals* the following year (J.B. 11). The writings of a philosopher of even Hume’s clarity and incisiveness could hardly be expected to turn the theologians immediately from their disquisitions – Hume had already disposed of miracles – but a man of Maty’s worldliness and journalist’s sense could see what lay ahead, and although religion continued to find a place in the *Journal* it figured less prominently than it had before.

Hume’s empiricism had probably as great an influence on naturalists as on theologians, the former probing one aspect of nature, the latter another such as the age of the earth; and both find a place. The theologians were questioning Archbishop James Ussher’s (1581–1656) biblical chronology between the Creation and Christ, of 4004 years, which had been inserted by an unknown authority in some editors of the Authorized Version 100 years previous, in 1654. The first of Maty’s reviews examined the findings of the Revd John Kennedy (1693–1782), Rector of All Saints, Bradley, in *New method of scripture chronology on Mosaic astronomical principles*, 1751 (J.B. 8) to be followed by the Revd. John Jackson’s (1686–1763) two volumes of *Chronological Antiquities of the most ancient kingdoms, from the Creation of the World for the space of 5000 years*, 1752 – with tables, receiving three full length articles (J.B. 9, 10, 17). Readers who enjoyed disputation by reverend gentlemen were not disappointed. Kennedy, in a letter pointing out the Jackson’s errors (J.B. 10) was joined by Baumgarten (1706–55), the German theologian (J.B. 14). Finally a lay approach was made by Blair in *Chronology and the history of the World from the Creation to the year of Christ 1753*, 1754 (J.B. 14). That Maty accepted a broad 6000 years since the Creation is suggested by a reflection in a review of the *Natural history of Barbados*, 1750, by G. Hughes:

Il ya six-mille ans que la terre est habitée et la Terre n’est point encore connue. Seroit elle trop vaste? Ceux qui l’occupent manquent-ils curiosité, d’industrie or de patience? Humiliant problème! Que notre Siècle renouvelle des découvertes, que les âges précédents auroient du lui enlever. (J.B. 3)

The *Journal* never failed to record eclipses and earthquakes, and if by then the astronomers had taken over eclipses from the church, earthquakes remained the church’s charge for quite some time. When discussed by the antiquarian William Stukeley, Rector of St George’s, Queen Square, his *Philosophy of earthquakes natural and religious*, 1750, showed them to be subject to cause and purpose (J.B. 2).

Can we deny then that [Hippocrates] here means a conscious and intelligent Nature, that presides over, and directs all things; moved the ethereal Spirit, or Fire, that moves all things; a divine Necessity, but a voluntary Agent, who gives the commanding Ñod to what we commonly call Nature . . . *(Phil. Trans. R. Soc. Lond. 46: 749, 1750)*

Until Maty took over the department of Natural and Artificial Productions in the British Museum in 1765, his concern with the subject appeared cultural rather than scientific. There is no evidence that he had practised the study of nature or had joined his naturalist friends in it. Natural history he described as ‘. . . la première et la plus universelle des Philosophes’ (J.B. 9) giving a longer definition in James Parsons’ obituary:
This amiable and interesting study, so congenial with human curiosity, so proportioned to human abilities, so necessary to human wants, is besides so intimately connected with physic, that it is almost impossible to cultivate the latter with any success, without at least having some tincture of the former (Maty, 1812).

However, Maty did not neglect the English works on natural history that did appear. The first to receive two full length reviews was George Edwards’ Natural history of British birds, 1750 (J.B. 2, 5) the author then being librarian of the College of Physicians. Less worthy than this was the Natural history of fossils, 1751, by Mendes da Costa (1717–91), which, treating a science scarcely in advance of geology, appeared the next year (J.B. 7). There was also an extension of a popular series in John Hill’s (1716–75) Natural history of animals, Vol. 3, published in 1752 (J.B. 9) the previous volumes on fossils and plants having appeared since 1748. Well in advance of these was the work of John Ellis who was to help in the British Museum later and also become a benefactor. His Essay towards a natural history of the corallines, 1755, which showed zoophytes to be animals and not plants, was accorded two full length reviews (J.B. 16, 17). The use of the microscope by naturalists was coming into fashion and was urged both by John Hill (J.B. 9) and especially by Henry Baker (1698–1774) in his Employment for the microscope, 1753, a work of over 400 pages with plates (J.B. 10).

The title of natural history was also given to the productions of amateur naturalists equally concerned with history, geography and sociology, such as Richard Barton’s A natural history of Loch Neagh, 1751, (J.B. 5, 6), and the Natural history of Barbados, 1750, by Griffith Hughes, the island being important at the time as the political centre of the West Indies (J.B. 3).

The Journal deals with more subjects than can possibly justify mention here: botany and the relations between plants and animals; the early discoveries of ‘electric fire’ (electricity); antiquarianism, mainly archaeology; geography and cartography; astronomy and navigation; and early economics through trade and commerce.

The Journal’s reception

After five years as editor and major author of the Journal Britannique the name of Maty had become a household word in intellectual circles. It is not always, however, that a journalist is accepted in society, and it is therefore of interest to know who his contacts, at various levels, were, whether literary, political, among the gentry and so on. That his work, as the means which secured him a position at the British Museum, was at least evidence of his acceptance on personal grounds by those whose opinion mattered.

The first considerable reward the Journal brought its editor was the friendship of Thomas Birch, DD, FRS (1705–66), the literary historian of the period (Courtney, 1886). Maty would have heard of Birch from the day of his arrival in London. But how long it took Birch to hear of Matthew Maty is uncertain. In 1749, the Dutch publisher of the Journal Britannique sent a brochure about it, which came to Birch. Writing to Philip Yorke, he referred to the

Project d’un nouveau Journal, qui paraitra tous les Mois sous le Titre de Journal Britannique par M. Maty, Docteur Philosphie et de Medicine.

Maty’s initial approach to Birch seems to have been an invitation to the first of his Thursday teas:

June 29 1751

Slaughter’s

Dear Sir, Having Mr Jortin’s promise to come and drink tea at my house next Thursday, I make bold to beg of you the same favour. Your generous and unmerited kindness to me has been so great that it must create in me the strongest desire of a particular acquaintance with you. I am with no less gratitude than esteem Dear Sir, Your most obdt. Humble Servant M Maty. (B.L. Add. MSS. 4313 f. 294)
This tea party was the first of a regular series every Thursday onwards until Birch’s death in 1766 (Nichols, 1812–15 3: 537). By this time it must have been clear to Maty how much the continued support of Birch and his friends, would mean to furthering the Journal, and indeed so significant was Birch’s role to become in Maty’s life that something must be said of Birch’s career and of the society of which he formed the centre.

Thomas Birch became known as one of the leading literary historians of the mid-eighteenth century. He was the son of a Clerkenwell coffee-mill maker, a Quaker, whose urge for knowledge urged him to forsake his father’s business for study. Endowed with a great power of work, he supported himself as an usher at the schools he had attended. At the age of about 25, as a tutor to the family of Lord Hardwicke, then Attorney General, he decided to enter the church. Then, in 1732, under his lordship’s patronage, he was granted a benefice, sine cura, at the Vicarage of Ulting in Essex. That same year his learning secured him a position as one of the three editors of a new edition, with biographies of Englishmen, of Pierre Bayle’s great General dictionary, historical and critical. By the time of its completion in 1740, he had become virtually its director.

In the meantime, he was responsible for the start of a series of biographies, supported by the works of English worthies, which he continued throughout his life: Milton, Boyle, Tillotson, Queen Elizabeth and many others. To this application for scholarship, he was blessed with a genius for companionship. His friends included a large circle of men of influence in the church, his profession, but equally in science, literature and the arts. As a consequence, from 1752 onwards honours came freely; an MA from the University of Aberdeen, a DD from Lambeth, an appointment as Chaplain to Princess Amelia, George II’s daughter, and so on.

In 1752, his accomplishments brought his election as Secretary to the Royal Society, and in 1753 as an Elected Trustee of the group of distinguished men selected to found the British Museum. His main contribution before the Museum opened in 1759, was the establishment of its joint library in Montagu House. Whatever Maty gained from associating with a scholar of Birch’s standing, he was also fortunate in himself possessing gifts that brought him into Birch’s social circle.

The Society of Gentlemen

Societies of Gentlemen were common enough in England at that time, usually named after the locality where they met. Such societies did not usually include members of any one profession since there were not the numbers to form single subject societies, but they provided the nucleus for the later literary and philosophical societies and so of the learned societies of the next century. The Society of Gentlemen at Edinburgh, for instance, may have been scientifically inclined, since it early made benefactions of natural history specimens to the British Museum.

Although the members of the Thursday’s tea club would appear to have given it an ecclesiastical flavour, its predominating interest was literary. The ‘regulars’ were Birch, Maty and John Jortin, the ecclesiastical historian, as great an attraction as was Birch himself. Others were César de Missy (1703–75) Huguenot minister; Caspar Wetstein FRS (d. 1760), Chaplain to HRH the Dowager Princess of Wales; John Brown (1715–66) preacher and essayist; Robert Young, surgeon; David Ravaud FRS; Ralph Heathcote, DD (1721–95), who edited Jortin’s work, and wrote an account of his life. He joined later, as did Samuel Clarke, son of the metaphysician, Dr Samuel Clarke DD (1675–1729).

To tap this fountain-head of literary, historical and ecclesiastical knowledge, others came from time to time, William Markham (1719–1807), Archbishop of York; William Warburton (1689–1779), Bishop of Gloucester; Thomas Hayter (1702–62), Bishop of Norwich and preceptor to George III when Prince of Wales; William Herberden (1710–1801), eminent physician and historical writer; Daniel Wray (1701–83), antiquary and later Trustee of the British Museum; Edward Mason, secretary both to the Duke of Cumberland and Walter Jeffreys.

The records of the meetings of the Thursday’s tea club are preserved in Birch’s Diary (B.L.
Add. MSS. 4478), a document of 425 folios covering the 40 years between c.1716 and 1764. Its value lies in the record, less of what he did than of those he met. Between 1750 and 1760, for example, in 10–20 entries a month, in seldom more than a line or two, written in an abbreviated Latin scrawl (almost a short-hand) and later in English we learn of his official or social contacts: which bishop came to see him; that there was a meeting of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel; that he dined at the Chaplain’s table at St James’s with the Archbishop, or attended a meeting of the Trustees of the British Museum. There is occasionally a note of some work completed or started. But most of the entries are lists of names in Latin, of those engaged in the social round, an almost unending kaleidoscope of the meetings of a relatively small circle of friends week after week. There is Thursday’s regular Bibebum Theum, for tea, with Maty and others, or the Prandebum, those with whom he dined.

The latter include Birch’s circle of intimate friends: Richard Mead, John Ward, Lord Willoughby, William Herberden, Robert Taylor, William Watson and, of course, the Hardwicke family including Philip Yorke (Lord Royston) son of Lord Hardwicke; but not at dinner, significantly, Matthew Maty. With this exception it may be said that the circle of Birch’s acquaintances includes the names of most of those of any distinction that appear in the Journal Britannique or who were influential at this time.

Birch’s closest friends would appear to have been Richard Mead and John Ward whose obituaries he wrote. Mead has been discussed already. John Ward started as a clerk in the Navy Office, and finding that ‘. . . to converse with boys upon the subject of literature was better than to transact the ordinary affairs of life among men . . . ’ (Birch, 1766) he opened, in 1710, a school in Moorfields, being appointed Professor of Rhetoric at Gresham College in 1720. From there, in demand as a literary critic, he achieved renown for his treatise upon rhetoric; for his dissertations on classical writers; his contributions to the Royal Society, and for his work for the Society of Antiquaries to which the President, Lord Willoughby, appointed him Vice-President. Long a friend of Sir Hans Sloane, in 1753, he became an elected Trustee of the British Museum where his antiquarian collections are preserved. He was not, however, a frequenter of Thursday’s tea club, nor do his relations with Maty appear to have been at a familiar level.

The Royal Society, 1751

In 1751, encouraged by the reception given the Journal Britannique and by Thomas Birch, who was then about to become Secretary of the Royal Society, Maty applied for its Fellowship, being elected in December. Birch’s signature was followed by those of two of the most eminent medical men of the day, Richard Mead and John Pringle, the latter already the authority in military medicine and later to become President of the Society. Both were admirers, and Pringle an ex-pupil, of Herman Boerhaave. Maty’s other supporters were Martin Folkes (1690–1754), venerable antiquarian, President of the Royal Society and of the Society of Antiquaries, and John van Rixtel (Royal Society Certificates 1751–66 f. 443).

It is worth noting that the certificate, although it mentions mathematics, emphasizes the Journal Britannique as designed ‘to do justice to the writers of our Country, and containing several original pieces of his own. . . . ’ Indeed, for Maty, taking his bow in the Journal, it is clear he saw it as the reason for his election rather than for any other contribution he may have made.

Advertisement

Au President et Aux Membres de la Societé Royale de Londres – Messieurs, J'ai tâché de me rendre utile; vous daignez m'en recompenser. Honoré d'un nouveau tire, je consacre à mes Juges Ouvrage qu'ils ont couronné. Si jusqu'ici le désir de mériter l'approbation des Sages me soutient, des efforts plus vigoureux

Londres le 4
Janvier 1752.
(J.B. I)

This was recognition indeed!

**Academy of Sciences of Berlin, 1755**

On 16 January 1755 there followed Maty’s election as a foreign member of the Académie Royale des Sciences et des Belles Lettres de Berlin through the agency of its president, Pierre L. M. de Maupertuis (1698–1759), the French mathematician and astronomer, and its secretary J. H. S. Formey (1711–97), the Prussian philosopher and theologian with both of whom he was in correspondence. Maupertuis had been invited to Berlin by the King of Prussia in 1740, and returning in 1744 was elected President of the Academy in 1746. He had become a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1728 and may have struck up a friendship with Maty during visits to London. Maupertuis’s *Essai de philosophie morale*, 1750 had been reviewed in the second volume of the *Journal Britannique*, and Maty’s letter of acknowledgement of the Berlin honour is printed in the 1755 volume (J.B. 16).

In 1759, Maty was made a foreign associate of the Royal Society of Haarlem, and in 1765, when his reputation came to be linked with his work for inoculation, he was elected a foreign member of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Sweden.

**William Duncombe, 1754**

The respect Maty was accorded in his social life was welcome as the formal acknowledgements of learned societies which, however humbly accepted in the style of the period, a man of Maty’s temperament would have considered his due. That his reputation reached the highest in the land is clear from a letter written by William Duncombe (1690–1769) (Wall, 1888) who lived, like Maty, in Frith Street, (Wheatley, 1891), and who for 25 years enjoyed the confidence of Thomas Herring (1693–1757), Archbishop of Canterbury (Hooper, 1891). This is revealed in a volume of the Archbishop’s letters edited by Duncombe’s son, John (1729–86), some 20 years after his father’s death. The following letter is, however, from Duncombe to the Archbishop, dated 16 November 1754:

I have lately commenced an acquaintance with a fellow of the Royal Society, Dr Maty, a man of learning and genius. He publishes every two months, at the Hague, *une feuille volant* (as the French phrase it) entitled, *Journal Britannique*. He has continued it five years. In his last number there is an ingenious elogium on Dr Mead. The Memoirs were communicated to him by Dr Birch. In his 12th and 13th tomes he has given an account of Mr Lowth’s (1710–87) (Hunt, 1893) lectures, *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum* and of Mr Browne’s Latin poem.

At the conclusion of his Journal for September and October, 1753, p. 239, where he gives a short account of the three volumes of Mr Jortin’s *Ecclesiastical History*, I find the following words:

Il suffira de copier ce que l’auteur en dit lui-même dans l’épitre dédicatoire pleine de force et de sentiment, qu’il adresse à ce prélat, aussi savant qu’aimable, qui, élevé à la première place et de l’église et de l’état, sont montre ami de tous deux qui sone de la paix, de lettre et de vertu.
One would imagine the doctor had been personally acquainted with this archbishop by his drawing so true a picture of him. After quoting the passage (which is indeed an excellent one) he concludes thus:

Le siècle où un ecclésiastique tient ce langage et où un archevêque l’autorise à le tenir, ne seroit il pas celui où la lumière doit se repandre, et la chartie unir de nouveau tous les hommes?

The doctor is in easy circumstances, and know nothing of my mentioning his name here. He is born in the province of Utrecht. I am etc. W Duncombe.

Whether Maty remained sufficiently close to William Duncombe in 1756 when the Archbishop, as one of the Principal Trustees of the Museum, was involved in the appointment of the staff, is a matter of conjecture, but Maty had no hesitation about writing personally to Herring to support Henry Rimius’s application as his assistant in the Department of Printed Books.

**Dr Samuel Johnson, 1755**

James Jortin wrote to Lord Hardwicke when Maty applied for a position in the British Museum describing how Maty had managed in the *Journal Britannique* to avoid most of the shoals of controversy (B.L. Add. MSS. 36269, f. 104–6). If Maty, in Gibbon’s words, had handled the rod of criticism with the tenderness and reluctance of a parent, (Gibbon, 1827, 1: 105), Johnson (1709–82) of Dictionary fame did not think so. The first of Johnson’s works to receive Maty’s attention was the monthly periodical *The Rambler* the aim of which was the instruction of the reader in wisdom and piety, and at the same time the refinement of the English language (Harvey, 1942). To this Maty devoted two articles in the *Journal* to which, although *The Rambler* had been coldly received by the public, Johnson took no exception (J.B. 4, 8) but it may not have been lost on the learned doctor that whereas his majestic and sonorous *Rambler* survived public opinion only two years (1749–51), Maty’s *Journal* was still going strong at five.

In his review of *A dictionary of the English language* in the final volume of the *Journal* Maty offended Johnson in no uncertain manner. At the start of his work Johnson had sent Lord Chesterfield a prospectus in the hope, even in the expectancy of patronage. But the meagre £10 Chesterfield sent in reply was not followed up until near the day of publication, seven years later, when anonymous articles, known to be by Chesterfield, appeared in the *World* (a successor to *The Rambler*) eulogizing Johnson and his work. So the Dictionary appeared without the expected dedication to Lord Chesterfield, and Johnson’s resentment, after so long a struggle, was not to be appeased. The letter of 7 February 1755 his Lordship received contained so noble and dignified a rebuke that it has passed into a classic of English literature (Boswell, 1950).

In his review of the achievement of the *Dictionary*, as fair and perceptive as the verdict of posterity, Maty commented on its author’s failure to make clear his position in politics and religion ‘...foiblesses de faire connaitre ses principes de politique et religion’ (J.B. 17). But Maty’s greater sin, as unnecessary as inexplicable, was the defence of his patron in an affected innocence, wilfully suppressing Johnson’s reasons for his letter (de Morgan, 1857). According to Boswell, in his *Life*, Johnson’s anger came to a head when he was looking round for an assistant for a projected magazine (Boswell, 1950). A friend of Johnson’s, William Adams (1706–89) (Stephen, 1885), Master of Pembroke College, Oxford, had put Maty’s name forward as being recently free of the demands of the *Journal Britannique*. ‘He’, said Johnson, ‘the little black dog! I’d throw him into the Thames’. 
Edward Gibbon, 1761

An interesting glimpse of another of those with whom Maty came into touch through the *Journal Britannique* followed in 1758, three years after it had ceased publication. Its quality had left such a mark on the mind of an impressionable young man that when he wanted advice about his own writing he came to Maty as one of the few people in London who could give him what he felt he needed. This was Edward Gibbon (1737–94), then 21, who had just returned from Lausanne with the draft of a partly completed *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*. His father was encouraging him to complete and publish it; but Gibbon had been told by a learned Jesuit friend, Father Sirmond, that a young writer should reach the mature age of 50 before he gave himself or his writings to the public (Gibbon, 1827, 1: 105–7). Instead, Gibbon sought that maturity from the experienced editor of the *Journal Britannique* and enjoyed what he described as several free and familiar conversations.

That was written after Gibbon had achieved fame, and mellowed, but in fact the confrontation strained relations, and the *Essai* lay dormant for two years while Gibbon was active with the militia or abroad. In April 1761, his father, becoming concerned for his son’s employment, asked Maty to see the *Essai* through the press. To it Maty, unknown to Gibbon, added a Preface which did not please, and which Gibbon described later as:

... an elegant and flattering epistle to the author, which is composed however with so much art, that, in case of defeat, his favourable report might have been ascribed to the indulgence of a friend for the rash attempt of a young English gentleman.

(Gibbon, 1827, 1: 107).

Copies of the *Essai*, with Maty’s signed preface, went principally to the friends of Gibbon sen. in the hope that it might inspire them to consider his son for preferment, including the Lords Bute, Chesterfield, Egremont, Bath, Lichfield, Hardwicke and his son Philip, Daniel Wray, a Trustee of the Museum and others.

This was not, however, the end of Maty’s association with Gibbon who took advantage of his friend’s wide circle of French acquaintances to get introductions. One of these was to the Duc de Nivernais, statesman and author (1716–98), who, in 1763, was in London as an emissary of peace. To deprive the present reader of at least one bon mot from the hostess of a Parisian salon would be a pity when Madame Goeffrin’s tongue described the Duke as acknowledged to have parts and wrote at the top of the mediocre, but

... il est manqué partout; guerrir manqué, ambassadeur manqué, homme d'affaires manqué et auteur manqué – non il n'est pas homme de naissance manqué. (Lewis, 1926 1: 175)

Maty’s association with Gibbon before he achieved fame may have given Gibbon more than it gave Maty, but at least it assured Maty a place in Gibbon’s Pantheon, the *Autobiography*:

By descent and education Dr Maty, though born in Holland, might be considered as a Frenchman; but he was fixed in London by the practice of physic, and an office in the British Museum. His reputation ‘Journal Britannique’, which he had supported, almost alone, with perseverance and success. This humble though useful labour, which had once been dignified by the genius of Bayle and the learning of Le Clerc, was not disgraced by the taste, the knowledge, and the judgement, of Maty: he exhibits a candid and pleasing view of the state of literature in England during a period of six years (January 1750–December 1755;) and, far different from his angry son, he handles the rod of criticism with the tenderness and reluctance of a parent. The author of the ‘Journal Britannique’ sometimes aspires to the character of a poet and philosopher: his style is pure and elegant; and in his virtues, or even in his defects, he may be ranked as one of the last disciples of the school of Fontenelle.

(Gibbon, 1827 1: 105)
Medical and other matters in the 1760s

Of Maty’s practice as a physician so little is known that there is not even a record of his involvement with his friends of the Medical Club of the 1740s and in the years which followed. Such evidence as emerges later, generally associates his name with the upper crust of society. In 1762–3, for instance, he appears to have attended the Duc de Nivernais who was in England to negotiate the First Treaty of Paris, ending the Seven Years War (Janssens-Knorsch, 1975: 27). Between 1763 and 1768 three of Lord Chesterfield’s letters refer to Maty’s successful treatment of his son. In December 1763 Chesterfield, at Bath, was writing to his son in London who had a cold:

... should it be anything more, pray consult Dr Maty, who did you so much good in your last illness, when the great medicinal Matadores did you so much harm.

In 1764, 10 November, Chesterfield was at Bath, and his son at Dresden:

... tell him too [physician at Dresden] that, in your last illness in England the physician mistook your case and treated it as gout, till Maty came, who treated it as rheumatism, and cured you.

In 1768, 12 March, Chesterfield was in London and his son at Montpellier:

... I am convinced that the Montpellier physicians have mistaken a material part of your case; as indeed all physicians here did, except Dr Maty. (Dobrée, 1932 6: 2572, 2631, 2840)

That Maty was successful in practice was implied by William Duncombe in the letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury already quoted. Maty had continued practising by leave of a bishop’s licence, allowing him only to practice outside a radius of seven miles from the centre of London. In 1765 the College of Physicians sought to restrain him. In April he received a summons from the College to appear before the Comitii Censoris Extraordinarius, to be examined in Physiology; followed on 3 May and 7 June for examinations in Pathology and Part Therapeutica. On 25 June he appeared with others before the Comitii Ordinarius Majoribus, and

... being Ballotted for were elected and having given their faith to the College were admitted and subscribed the faith to be given to eachLicentiate according to Statute.
(College of Physicians, Register Book 1765–1771)

In the course of 70 years (until 1835) many protests, legal and otherwise were made by licentiates of the College of Physicians (those without Oxford and Cambridge degrees), that, as members of the College they should be allowed to take part in the business of the College and in the election, for instance, of its officers. In one of these protests, by letter dated 30 September 1767 to the President of the College, Maty joined with 19 others (Plate 2). Most of these had taken their degrees at Scottish universities, or, like Maty, at Leyden or Rheims. Seven were Fellows of the Royal Society, and four appear in the Dictionary of national biography. One signature on this letter of protest is that of William Hunter (1718–83), teacher of his worthy brother, John (Fox, 1919: 146).

In the 1760s, Maty was still participating in a Medical Society (of Physicians) in London which Fothergill had founded in 1750 or 1752 and which met at the Mitre Tavern in Fleet Street on alternate Monday evenings. A quarter of the Society's Medical observations and enquiries (Fothergill, 1757–82) were contributed by Fothergill himself, who also financed the whole. Maty contributed two papers only, both in 1769 (Maty, 1769). The Society seems to have lapsed after the deaths of Fothergill in 1780, Daniel Solander in 1782 and William Hunter in 1783.
London 30 Sept. 1767,

To the President of the College of Physicians in London,

sir,

Being informed that the College are actually met in order to appoint the officers for the ensuing year we are now come to attend on the said meeting, as member of this Corporation, but being refused admittance we do hereby apply to you requesting that you will order the gates to be opened to us, that we may take our seats at the Board and join in doing the business of the College; and if we are not admitted we do hereby protest against the choice which may be made of officers, and all other business in which we are not permitted to vote.

Maty and others

Plate 2 College of Physicians: Letter of protest by 30 Licentiates, signed by Maty and others, September 1767. (Courtesy Royal Society of Medicine)
In 1760, Maty joined the Society of Arts (to which Peter Templeman had just been appointed Secretary), being proposed by Gowin Knight who was active in its affairs. He was soon appointed to several of the Society’s committees: Mineral, Correspondence, Manufacturers and Mechanics on which he found his medical friends, Watson, Parsons and Fothergill, and Collinson as well. There were also several other members of the Society whose work he had reviewed in the *Journal Britannique*, churchmen and travellers and others who would not ordinarily have crossed his path. Other calls on his time, however, received priority and although his subscription is recorded as having been paid in 1763, the 1768 List of Members does not include his name.

In 1765, at the Royal Society, Maty replaced Thomas Birch as joint Secretary, giving up the Foreign Secretarialship, assumed from James Parsons, in 1762. As Secretary he served first with Charles Morton, and from 1773 with Bishop Samuel Horsley (1733–1806), theologian and mathematician. Maty’s appointment coincided with the increased activity Lord Macclesfield’s tenure of the presidency had placed on the Society, seen in the expanding *Philosophical Transactions*. The duties involved editing and, if necessary, translating papers against which his name appears. However, his own contributions during the 24 years of his fellowship numbered only three (Maty 1752, 1756 and 1767).

**Portrait and character**

About the year 1753, when the *Journal Britannique* had brought honours to its author, Maty’s portrait was painted by Bartholomew Dupan (1712–63), a Swiss artist whose work was fashionable in England at the time (Gordon, 1891). Maty was then 35, but the portrait depicts a rather younger man in a somewhat affected pose (Plate 3). He is leaning on the back of a chair holding a book he had been reading. The light falls on a refined, good looking face suggesting a sensitive, contemplative personality. One may guess it was as he wished posterity to see him because the work was left to the British Museum where it hangs in the Board Room amongst those of other eminent Librarians.

If the volume Maty held was his choice it would have been a copy of his doctoral thesis: *Disertatio . . . de consuetudinibus officiaia in corpus humanum* (Maty, 1740) which, in an enlarged French version, became *Essai sur l’usage* or custom in society. In the 100 pages of this thesis there is as much to be learned of Maty’s character as in his later work in the *Journal Britannique*. The *Essai* suggests the work of a clear sighted young man intent on making his way in the world independently of his cantankerous father. So effusive is the dedication to the father that one suspects it reflects a subconscious expression of sympathy for a man who had given his son his talents but spared him his temperament.

Most of those who encountered Maty as physician, author or librarian recall him as a man of accomplished intellect and of exceptional charm. In the 1760s the impression given by Simon-André Tissot of Lausanne, who discussed inoculation with him, expressed what many others felt:

... cet habile Journaliste; Moraliste sensé, Philosophe judicieux, Médicin éclairé, Genie vaste, Esprit charmant. (Miller, 1957: 206)

By intellect Maty was essentially a humanist, also by self-discipline. In his writing he sets out to capture his readers by persuasion, ingratiating himself and coaxing them; and in Gibbon’s phrase ‘... he handles the rod of criticism with the tenderness and reluctance of a parent.’ A student mature enough to produce the *Essai sur l’usage* could see that a man of intelligence working through a natural charm could reap much to his advantage:

Ceux, qui cherchent à obtenir des graces, doivent s’attacher à plaire à ceux, de qui il depend de les leur accorder. (*Essai sur l’usage*, 1741: 49)

The author of Maty’s biography in the *Dictionary of national biography* perceived that he
Plate 3  Portrait of Matthew Maty, circa 1753, by Bartholomew Dupan (1713-63).
(Courtesy British Museum)
remained on good terms with those who could be of use to him (Seccombe, 1894). One has only to consider who were his principal patrons: Lord Chesterfield for a start; Thomas Birch who brought him under the umbrella of the Hardwicke family; John Jortin who had the ear of the bishops; James Parsons who introduced him to the Royal Society; and William Watson, like him of Huguenot stock, who provided a working link with the Trustees at the British Museum.

It must not be thought that the appearance this versatile Dutchman presented to the world was lawless. On occasion ambition was allowed to get the upper hand. The brush with Dr Johnson was a case in point. There were evidently temperamental differences that made Maty wish to show up the learned doctor as ‘refusing’ Chesterfield’s patronage. When Lord Chesterfield had ceased to be his patron the verses dedicated to his lordship were assigned to Lord Hardwicke; a strange faux pas for a man of Maty’s experience. In the matter of the Memorial to Birch, Lord Royston sensed Maty’s failure to match the expressed intention of writing one. Finally, had Gibbon then been other than an inexperienced young author intent on the publication of his first work, he would scarcely have been willing to allow Maty’s gratuitous intrusion in the form of a signed Preface.

A markedly unfavourable opinion comes from an unexpected quarter, from France. In 1764, perhaps following his contact with the Duc de Nivernais, Maty was in Paris and his portrait was painted by the engraver, Louis de Carmontelle (1717–1806) the fashionable artist of the day (Plate 4). In this, Maty is seen seated in a pose, and against a background, he must have approved of. He is dressed in a coat of blue with gilt buttons and black breeches; and he wears a yellow, flower-patterned waistcoat. Above the table at which he is seated stands a glass-fronted cabinet with jars containing a medical man’s needs: chemical products and anatomical preparations. Through an open casement one sees a garden of exotic and local plants and trees, suggesting a naturalist’s interest.

The portrait is one of many collected into a Catalogue by Richard de Lédans who devotes a page or two to each. Of Maty he has nothing but hard words. Mistaking him for an Englishman, he found in him a supercilious dislike of all things French. ‘On aurait de jeter sous le Pont Royal avec une pierre au cou, ce brutal échappé de la Tamise’. (Ms Musée Condé, Chantilly, f. 99)

This is the more surprising knowing how aware Maty was of the cultural influence of French literature and of French society. Maty was almost an exact contemporary of Diderot (1713–1784), the encyclopaedist; in the 1760s the salons of Madame du Defand and Madame Goeffrin were at their zenith. Can it be that Maty’s Journal Britannique had been ignored in Paris? His call for inoculation had certainly fallen on deaf ears in France. Had the French claim to enlightenment broken down his restraint?

In his early days at the British Museum, Maty was often around the sale rooms on the look out for objects of interest for the collections, and several of the busts he bought he presented to the Museum. He was evidently given to pondering the lives of great men. Of the three Maty retained until his death, one was of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527), not, one may be sure, because politics had any place in his heart, but success through hard work, ability and urbanity evidently had.
Plate 4  ‘Le Docteur Maty’, circa 1764, by Louis Carrogis de Carmontelle (1717-1806). (Courtesy Musée Condé, Chantilly)
The British Museum at Montagu House, 1753

When Maty launched the *Journal Britannique* he can have had little idea where such a venture would lead, his aim was to acquire a reputation justifying some public office. But the success which year after year attended the *Journal*, the honours it brought, including the coveted Fellowship of the Royal Society, and the enlargement of his social circle to include a group of eminent men, brought him to raise his sights. Moreover, the evidence suggests that his medical practice was bringing in enough to give him some freedom in what he did.

Early in 1753 Sir Hans Sloane died, and there followed the steps by which, under his will, the British Museum came to be established. The names of those who, in a series of codicils since 1749 had been appointed by Sir Hans as executors, was certainly common knowledge. The majority were men of eminence, public figures or professional men. Of the 56 names in the Codicil of 1751, over 38 were Fellows of the Royal Society. Maty knew most of them personally; but more important were his personal friends close to authority, principally John Jortin, the ecclesiastical scholar, Thomas Birch in literature and William Watson in science.

From 1755 nominations were being considered for staff to take charge of Sir Hans Sloane’s collections. A national museum on the scale envisaged would certainly need officials with at least as broad a cultural background as those who supervised the historical libraries and the royal cabinets on the Continent. For this a director with the title of Principal Librarian was to be appointed, assisted by three Under-Librarians for the Departments of Manuscripts, Printed Books, and Natural and Artificial Productions.

Appointment of Librarians

The first appointment made by the Trustees was that in June 1756 of Gowin Knight MD, FRS (1713–72) as Principal Librarian (Prosser, 1893). Knight, the son of a vicar, went to Magdalen College, Oxford, and being a natural philosopher or physicist by inclination devoted himself to the study of magnetism for which he received the Royal Society’s Copley Medal in 1747. From 1750 he turned his attention to the mariner’s compass, for the improvement of which he received neither the reward nor the credit due from a nation which depended upon safety in navigation for defence and commerce. Like many inventors he was unworldly and lived a secluded life. Against Birch he failed in election as Secretary of the Royal Society. When in the Museum he got into financial difficulties from an unwise speculation in mining, he was rescued by Fothergill with a loan of £1000 which was never repaid. His tenure of the Museum’s senior office was not without troubles for the Trustees and his colleagues alike.

There can be little doubt that Maty hoped to be appointed one of the Under-Librarians because in December 1755, in anticipation he brought the *Journal Britannique* to a close and bade his readers farewell. At about this time Maty submitted the following to Lord Hardwicke, the Lord Chancellor:

The Memorial of Matthew Maty M.D. [Undated; early 1756 presumed]

Humbly sheweth

That your Lordship’s memorialist being informed that the officers under the Head-keeper to the British Museum are very soon to be appointed, he most humbly begs leave to sollicit the favour of your Lordship’s nomination.

The Memorialist hopes that his character in life, and in the Republik of Letters is such as may not debar him of every claim to the honour he sollicits, and that his diligence and zeal in the discharge of his trust and in the pursuit of learning will in some measure supply the want of greater abilities, no where so completely attained as at this source of knowledge.

All of which with great respect is most humbly submitted to your Lordship’s consideration. (B.L. Add. MSS. 36269, f. 102)
This Memorial was supported by two letters of recommendation, the principal and most persuasive one coming from John Jortin. The other was a postscript in an unknown hand, possibly from Hardwicke's son, Philip Yorke, Lord Royston, an Elected Trustee. Jortin had, it seems, called on Lord Hardwicke, and finding his lordship out, left the following note, an untidy scrawl, presumably at the house:

[Undated, no address]

My Lord,
The reason for my waiting on you today was to mention an affair relating to my Friend Dr Maty. He is desirous of offering himself as a candidate for one of the places in Sir Hans Sloane's Museum; not for the highest, he thinks be invidious and impracticable; but for one of the Subalterns. And without any compliment to him I believe that there is not a man in England more fit for it. There should be one person amongst them who is by naturalization an English man by birth a Frenchman [both errors], who by correspondence at Paris, can talk to foreigners in their own tongue. If the Trustees should choose him for one, they would do a favour to him and an honour to themselves. And whom should he apply to but to yourself? I have said nothing of his qualifications of Natural Philosophy, etc. I hope it is no improper request to desire you to recommend him to the ArchBP., and if my name were to be worth a farthing, I should be proud to join it to yours upon such an occasion. I am now going to his house where our [Tea] Club [Society of Gentlemen] assembles tonight, and where every member is, what I am.
Your Lordships sincerely Humble Servant,
J Jortin
(B.L. Add. MSS. 36269, f. 104–6)

It would appear that Jortin saw Lord Hardwicke sometime later and was asked for a more formal statement of Maty's qualifications that could be passed to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The letter Jortin wrote, dated 12 February 1756, tells us more about Maty than we know from other sources and so is quoted in full. The mention of the censure by the Journal Britannique of the 'Learned and Loyal Dr Shebbeare' (Norgate, 1897), author of The Marriage act, 1754, was a subtle way of attracting the Archbishop's approval of the Journal. It had criticized the work of a political writer of idiosyncratic views who would certainly be known to, and disapproved of, by his Grace.

Letter to Lord Hardwicke, as Lord Chancellor, from Dr John Jortin, 12 February 1756:

My Lord,
When I had the pleasure of seeing you, you asked me some particulars concerning our friend Dr Maty, of which I will endeavour to give you an exact account.
He is of Holland, born near Utrecht, of French Protestant parents. His father went to Holland in his youth, and preached there several years in a French church. The Doctor was eight years at the University of Leiden, studied under Boerhaave, and took his degree in Physic there, in the year 1740. Soon after, he came over to settle here, with his father and mother, who now live with him. He is married and hath 3 or 4 children. Besides a knowledge of the learned languages, Latin, Greek and Hebrew, he speaks French and Dutch. English he understands and writes and speaks, as you know, very well. He hath indeed something of an accent (and yet very little) by which you may discern that he is a foreigner.
He can read Italian, and intends to learn to speak it, which I dare say he will accomplish in a few months. He hath studied Natural Philosophy; and was instructed in Mathematics by a very able master, by his own father.
He is Fellow of our Royal Society, and Member of the Academy at Berlin, into which he was elected by the recommendation of his friend Monsieur Maupertui; and he
holds correspondence with several members of the Academy of Paris, and other learned men abroad.

One thing there is upon which he and I have consulted together, and which I would not mention to any except friends, lest possibly it should be made an objection to him. He is not naturalized: but he is determined, if he should succeed in this affair, to get it done, as he is settled here for life, and his wife is an English Gentlewoman, though she speaks French very well. His children, being born here, are naturalized by birth.

In favour of his Journal Britannique, I can say very little, because some Remarks in it are mine, and because he hath his prejudices, as well as your Lordship and his Grace, and hath thought and spoken too favourably of your humble servant. I can therefore only say that our little society and all my learned Acquaintance have approved and commended that work; and that, as far as I could ever learn, it hath been censured only by two persons, one of whom is the Learned and Loyal Dr Shebbeare, author of the Marriage Act, a Novel, and of other Tracts equally useful and respectable.

In short, my Friend, as he hath maintained the character of a sensible, prudent, and civil writer, so hath he escaped extremely well — for an Author — and particularly for a Journalist. This leads me to think a little of my self, and to comfort my self with the consideration that I also have been assaulted by very few, and never by any writer whose censures I have any reason to regard.

Instead of soliciting your Lordships favour and interest on behalf of Dr Maty, I ought rather to take that for granted, and to return you thanks for your goodness to me and to my Friends, many of whom you have honoured so much as to make them yours also.

I am My Lord
Yr. Lordships most obliged humble Servant
J Jortin
Hatton Garden
February 12 1756.

(B.L. Add. MSS. 36269, f. 105–6)

The postscript which follows Jortin’s letter in the Hardwicke Papers and therefore presumably addressed to Lord Hardwicke, expresses the opinions one would expect of his son, Philip Yorke, or of Thomas Birch, both Elected Trustees:

[No date, no address]

PS. Our acting Trustees at the Museum are very solicitous to have the Officers appointed as soon as possible. They leave humbly to recommend Dr Maty’s Application to your Lordship He is extremely well qualified to be one of the Under-Librarians, as his knowledge of French will make him very useful, in attending upon Foreigners. He is certainly a good scholar and understands Books extremely well, of which he has given the strongest proofs in a very elegant and judicious Literary Journal. the Publication of which he has just dropt.

(B.L. Add. MSS. 36269, f. 107)

On 19 June 1756, on the strength of such recommendations as these and of the general opinion in which Maty was held, he received the appointment as one of the three Under-Librarians, in his case in charge of Printed Books (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1756: GM 106). His salary was to be £100 a year, to include unfurnished apartments, free coal and candles. The appointment was secured with a bond of £1500 deposited in the Iron Chest, which is still in use in the Museum. No sooner was he appointed than Maty made the plea, already mentioned, to the Archbishop of Canterbury for the assistance of Heinrich Rimius (d. 1756) (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1756: GM 121). Rimius, a student of German history, had acquired a unique qualification as historian of the Royal Library, through his Memoirs of the House of
Brunswick, 1750 and more recently by his stand against the Herrnhuters (Moravians or Unitas Fratrum). At Maty’s request Rimius was allotted apartments adjacent to his own in the north part of the east wing of Montagu House; but he died shortly after his appointment. Maty also requested the use of one or two of the garrets in the body of the house in which to deposit his own collection of books. ‘ . . . he promising not to make use of fire or candles in the said garrets at any time’ (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1756: GM 124–6).

Collections and catalogues

By the end of 1756 the various collections and libraries, Sloane’s from Chelsea, the Cottonian, Edwards and Harleian Libraries and manuscripts from the Old Dormitory at Westminster, had all found a place in Montagu House. To make sure that none of the natural productions had been left behind:

Dr Knight visited the Manor House, Chelsea on Wednesday, 22 December last and found everything belonging to the Trust removed to the British Museum. (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1756: C161, GM 124)

The Under-Librarians then turned their attention, if they had not already started, to the provision of catalogues, to

. . . the making of new Catalogues or Indexes to old Catalogues of the ‘several particulars’ contained in the said [three] Departments. (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1756: C163)

In July 1756, as their first task, Maty and Rimius had been ordered (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1756: GM 124) to compare the Cottonian and Edwards Libraries with their respective catalogues which were found very ill writ and confused (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1757: C168) requiring new ones as well as an alphabetical catalogue, Samuel Harper (d. 1803) taking over after Rimius’s decease. With the arrival, in October 1757, of the King’s Library from the Old Dormitory at Westminster, Maty with Samuel Harper worked out a scheme for its arrangement which was approved by the Trustees in November (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1757: C379–81, GM 199; B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738–84: 1 (30): 68).

Of the natural history collections it was recorded in the Trustees Minutes by Dr Gowin Knight that:

The Catalogues are for the most part well writ, but the Contents are in bad order; things of the same kind being frequently dispersed in different volumes; and different parts of the same volume. There is no complete Index; and the vegetable productions belonging to the department are joined with the Hortus siccus now placed in Dr Maty’s [care]; some volumes contain partly medals, and partly natural history. Mr Empson thinks it would contribute much to the more easy and speedy classing of the collection, to have the Catalogue transcribed on sheets of paper, with the writing only on one side, which may be done by a common writer and then to clip asunder the articles that are not of the same class, and arrange them properly.

If this method should be approved, I would recommend it to the consideration of this honourable Committee whether it will not be necessary to employ a writer.

Resolved, that the Catalogue of Sir Hans Sloane’s Collection, exclusive of the books and medals, and hortus siccus be forthwith transcribed by a person to be provided for that purpose by Dr Knight. (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1757: C168–71)

Natural Productions and Modern Curiosities

The custody of the collections at Chelsea had been left in the hands of James Empson who, as Sir Hans’s constant associate, had been appointed in June 1756 as one of the three Under-
Librarians. From the evidence of a report, *A plan for the general distribution of Sir Hans Sloane's collection*, dated 27 August 1756, (B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738–84 (I (16): 39–45) he had been given the task of moving the collections from Chelsea to Montagu House (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1757: C165). Although given apartments in the East Wing (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1756: GM 126) it becomes clear that his role was more that of a caretaker than a keeper with professional qualifications. It is not a matter of surprise, therefore, to find the initiative for the arrangement of the natural history collections being taken over by the Principal Librarian himself, Gowin Knight. This left Empson with a number of routine jobs recorded in the Trustees Minutes such as clipping asunder the sheets of the new catalogue, making a list of the books from the Sloane Library that had not been returned. He also helped Andrew Gifford (1700–84), (Cannan, 1890), the numismatist, arrange the Sloane medals, and took care of the insects (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1757: C306, 1760, C602). It was Knight who, at the General Meeting of Trustees on 14 January 1757, laid down the policy which was to be followed in the overall arrangements at Montagu House (B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738–84: I (21): 51–2). Knight’s plan (Appendix 4) was passed to the three Under-Librarians for comment who, in November 1757, were called before the Committee and signified their agreement, whereupon it was passed to the General Meeting of Trustees and there formally approved (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1757: C386, GM 200–8).

Work on the arrangement of the exhibition rooms in Montagu House had already started, and in this Knight and the Under-Librarians had the assistance of several of the Trustees on the Standing Committee. Then, as later, Birch was always ready to give the Under-Librarians a hand with the secretarial work if any of them had to be away. John Ward had made himself responsible for drawing up the first list of antiquities, and William Watson, one of the most active and conscientious of all the Trustees, took over the arrangements of the botanical collections. Already by March 1757, Knight had been empowered by the Trustees to place the fossils in Room K, and then to go on with the vegetables and animals in what space was left (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1757: GM 208). Sir Hans Sloane’s spirit collection was moved from the ‘base story’ (ground floor) to the ‘second state story’ (first floor). As the rooms filled up the most valuable of the ‘Artificial and Natural Productions’ requiring a strong light were placed in mahogany show cases, mounted on castors for movability, under the windows. The Museum was also beginning to receive benefactions and it had to be decided whether they should be shown separately or intermixed with the Sloane specimens to give the effect of completeness. Pressure of space also brought the problem of duplicates to the fore. In these early days, on all such questions, the Standing Committee would seek the sense of the General Meeting of the Trustees before itself passing a resolution (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1757–8: GM 207, 210, 211, 224, 235).

By the middle of 1758 it was anticipated that the exhibition rooms would be in a condition to allow the Museum to be opened to the public early in 1759. A *Benefactions Book* was designed as a record and as an earnest of gratitude (B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738–84: I: 27). A room in the south-west angle of the ‘base story’ was set aside as a Reading Room, but it later proved too damp. Peter Templeman was appointed Keeper of the Reading Room. The Trustees gave Knight leave to take over a small room on the ‘base story’ for his personal use and for the display of his philosophical apparatus (magnetical and other improvements). He presented the Museum with the Royal Society’s gold medal, the reward for his inventions (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1758: GM 227, 234–8, 245).

One of the last of the Trustees’ acts, requiring, as all staff appointments were, the sanction of the Principal Trustees: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Speaker of the House of Commons, and of the Lord Chancellor, was the appointment of a ‘Waiting Man to serve as Porter with Gown and Staff’. And by a final resolution the Trustees fixed the date of the Museum’s opening for 15 January 1759 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1758: GM 235).

It was hardly a cause for surprise that from the day the Museum was open, the staff were kept busy. Doubtless buoyed up by the unique opportunities the Museum offered, they enjoyed no sinecure. To their primary task as librarians of arranging and cataloguing books and collections they had to act as guides, secretaries and serve as watchmen in off-hours.
Maty’s principal occupation as Keeper of Printed Books was compiling the catalogue of the Royal Library with the help of Samuel Harper. The original report on the project – the sample catalogue page and the rules to guide its compilers – were submitted to the Trustees on 27 April 1759. Six years later, in February 1765, the alphabetical catalogue was ready for copying, and its completion may have contributed to Maty’s decision to leave Printed Books for the Department of Natural Productions (B.M. Trustees Reports, 1734–84: I (20, 30, 76, 77): 49, 68, 203–10).

The problem of visitors

While the rooms at Montagu House were being fitted out the staff suffered such inconvenience from even the few visitors who were admitted, that the Standing Committee decided that visits must be confined to Saturdays, and up to 3.00 p.m. (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1758: C451–2). The Museum’s Statutes and Rules, 1757, 1759, had from the first accepted the principle that, as a national institution, it should be accessible to the public with whatever safeguards proved to be necessary. The degree of accessibility was, however, very much a matter of opinion. John Ward, the elderly professor of rhetoric at Gresham College, represented those who would have severely restricted public access, but wiser counsels prevailed. At first, parties of ten divided between the Under-Librarian and his assistant were conducted through the rooms at hourly intervals, a total of 40 a day on a three hour tour. This started with the Sloane Collection of Curiosities, which is what most visitors came to see, and then, proceeding through the Sloane Library, finished up with the Manuscripts and the Major Edwards Library (B.L. Add. MSS. 6179: f. 19, 61).

After six months of this constant tramp of feet, with the staff unable to get on with the work they were engaged to do, they lodged a formal protest. Maty, acting for the others, submitted to the Trustees a Scheme for the more convenient showing of the Museum (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1759: GM 263–5). This suggested that the number of visitors should be reduced to 15 a day, the tour reduced from three to two hours (cutting down on Manuscripts and Books) which together would halve the officers’ attendance time; and because visitors would then be able to see more of what they wanted . . . fewer people will be tempted to see the House two or three times.

After a year’s trial Maty’s Scheme, as it came to be called, was signed by each of the officers (Gowirt Knight, Charles Morton, James Empson, Samuel Harper, Andrew Gifford and Andrew Planta); it was approved by the Standing Committee, and after another six months ordered by the General Meeting to be included in the Statutes and Rules of June 1761 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1761: GM 370); an order confirmed, after another year’s trial. It was unfortunate for Maty’s reputation that his name came to be associated with a scheme severely restricting visitors, although at that time there were good reasons for it. This was a period of continuous political trouble which included the French Revolution, the Gordon Riots and the Napoleonic wars. During the Gordon Riots the London mob broke open the prisons and burned down private houses including that of Lord Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice, in Bloomsbury Square, a stone’s throw from Montagu House, which, like it, contained irreplaceable treasures. There was no real solution to the admission of the public to Montagu House until the opening of the new British Museum in the 1830s, although Joseph Planta, Principal Librarian, son of Andrew who had also signed the scheme, initiated concessions to students and others from 1800.

Nevertheless, it must also be recorded that two years after his appointment as Principal Librarian, Maty earned a rebuke when he was alleged to have cancelled the 9.00 a.m. tour of the Museum on Wednesdays and Thursdays. He was asked by the Standing Committee whether he could ‘... point out any clause in the Act of Parliament on the Statute which empowered him to dispense with any order of the Trustees?’, and he ‘... promised to avoid anything of that kind in future’ (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1774: C1424).

It was not only in larger matters that the Trustees exercised their authority over the Keepers. On a previous occasion Maty had separated a case of Gustav Brander’s fossils from
his main collection without consulting Brander. The Trustees, not having been approached either, required to know the reason why (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1768: C1163–5).

**Extra-mural activities**

It must be abundantly clear that Maty’s mind was one of those that needed more than one job to contain it. After a year at Montagu House Maty was already looking round for something to fill his spare time and he considered applying to become editor of the *Bibliotheque des sciences et des beaux arts* which was to be printed in the Hague. In December 1757 he approached Lord Hardwicke, for whom he was doing some research in the Library, for support, and he could hardly have been surprised that his lordship failed to reply (B.L. Add. MSS. 35606: f. 246, 300). Early in 1760 a secretary was needed for the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce, founded in 1754 and usually called the Society of Arts. On 1 March 1760, by way of applying, Maty wrote identical letters: one to the Duke of Newcastle recently become Prime Minister and a known master of patronage; and the other to Lord Hardwicke. Both brief, formal letters had identical postscripts:

PS. Permit me to observe that my employment in the Museum is far from affording a reasonable objection against me. A Library of several hundred volumes of Prints, Drawings, dried plants, etc... enable me to furnish useful hints for the business of the Society... and the hours of attendance in both places are generally so different that there can be no necessity for my neglecting either. (B.L. Add. MSS. 32903: f. 29)

The letter to Lord Hardwicke, however, contained a second postscript with which was enclosed a copy of verses addressed to... Lord Chesterfield’s generous interposition in my favour... (probably Maty’s *Ode sur la Rebellion de 1745...*), to be followed by:

May I, in the same time, recommend myself in a particular manner, to your Lordship’s favour by representing that, as on the one hand my salary in the Museum is as little proportionate to the work to be done there, as it is to the education of a pretty large and growing family, so on the other the place I solicit is perhaps the only one, which a foreigner, excluded by birth from all the places of trust and profit might be encouraged to hope for by the Government which in all his writings he strove to defend. (B.L. Add. MSS. 35606: f. 317)

Before it was known that the position had gone to Peter Templeman, then Keeper of the Reading Room, Lord Royston, who had just been appointed to the Standing Committee of Trustees and perhaps feeling the weight of his new office, made his displeasure known. There is no record of Lord Royston’s reply, but Maty’s suggests what it was:

13 March 1760
My Lord
As no man has a higher sense of favours than myself, my obligation to your Lordship [Lord Royston] and to my Lord Hardwicke have always met with the warmest returns of gratitude. I have never scrupled to profess that it was to your kind and unmerited interposition that I owed my place in the Museum, and my conduct has, I hoped, proved my earnest desire of fulfilling my duty in all its branches. I am extremely concerned to find your Lordship’s sentiments on this occasion so different from mine, and those of several of the Trustees which I applied to on this occasion. Dr Watson, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr Burroughs [a Trustee] and one or two more declared that they were satisfied that my pursuit was so far from being improper or likely to become detrimental to the interests of the Museum, that on the contrary it would render the use of the Library more extensive and better
known. I intended to have consulted your Lordship upon the same subject, but had not the happiness to find you at home, and fondly flattered myself that your Lordship did not disapprove of the steps I had taken. As I now find myself mistaken, how difficult soever it may be to me, in point of honour if not of interest, to disappoint my friends, I think myself obliged out of deference to your Lordship's opinion, to submit it entirely to you – whether I ought to drop all further thoughts of a place, which I could never fill with pleasure, if I thought it was obtained without your approbation. Dr Birch, whom I have intreated to remit this letter into your hands, will after having stated the matter, inform me of your determination, which will immediately influence upon – my operations.
I am with the highest respect.
My Lord
Your Lordship's
Most obedient and obliged
Humble Servant
M. Maty
(B.L. Add. MSS. 35606: f. 319)

Department of Natural Productions

The year 1765 marked a significant point in Maty's progress. It was half way between his joining the British Museum and his elevation as Principal Librarian. That summer, James Empson, whose health had been failing for two years or more, died, leaving a vacancy in the Department of Natural Productions (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1765: C947, 997). This would normally have been filled by Samuel Harper, the next in line, who had been assisting Maty with the Catalogue of Printed Books; but since Maty desired to move into Natural Productions, and Harper desired to remain in Printed Books, the Trustees complied with their wishes in the following Minute:

... Mr [Andrew] Planta to succeed Mr Harper as assistant in the Department of Printed Books; and Dr Solander, appointed assistant in the Department of Natural Productions; and Mr Harper and Dr Maty, having likewise expressed their inclinations to exchange their respective departments, so that the former remain the Library, and the latter to be removed to the Department of Natural Productions.
(B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1765: GM 546)

From the practical point of view this was a logical move and one the Trustees welcomed. Maty was, after all, a doctor and as such had a basic knowledge of natural history such as Samuel Harper lacked. Moreover, when the three Under-Librarians were first appointed, albeit in charge of separate departments within the Museum, their functions were seen rather as those of administrative under-secretaries than as the specialists Keepers have since become. Indeed, the Under-Librarians were encouraged to become familiar with what went on in each other's departments and the transfer from one department to another was therefore considered beneficial.

In the seven years after the opening of the Museum in 1759, the natural history collections had nominally been in charge of James Empson, as Assistant Librarian. As has already been recounted the initiative, and much of the labour, had been assumed by two or three members of the Medical Club of the 1740s, namely: Peter Collinson, merchant and botanist; William Watson, apothecary, surgeon and now a trustee; John Ellis, trader and naturalist, and Matthew Maty busy in Printed Books.

The authority Collinson derived from intimacy with Sir Hans Sloane and as one of the trustees of his will gave him the initiative. It was Collinson who followed up the suggestion discussed with Linnaeus during his visit to England in 1736 that some of those who were familiar with the Linnaean system should come across and help introduce it. In about 1758,
Collinson and Ellis together prevailed upon Linnaeus for the loan of one of his pupils to help order the collections in Montagu House. William Watson was himself arranging the botanical collections as they came over from Chelsea. At the time Ellis was less involved and was not asked formally to give assistance until the Earl of Hillsborough’s benefaction arrived in 1766, he was already a Fellow of the Royal Society. Also in the background, there was Matthew Maty with an unrivalled range of knowledge, including the most recent advances in natural history, reviewed in the *Journal Britannique*. The extent to which the natural history collections benefited from this galaxy of talent in its early days has so far gone unrecorded.

**Daniel Solander and the catalogues**

From the day the collections arrived from Chelsea, it must have been clear to the others that Empson was not up to the scientific work of their arrangement. Daniel Solander (1736–82) (Rauschenberg, 1964) with the reputation as Linnaeus’ favourite pupil, was due to arrive in England in 1759, but illness delayed him until July 1760. In 1762, when Linnaeus suggested that Solander should apply for the chair of botany at the Academy of Sciences at St Petersburg (now Petrograd), Collinson urged him to remain at the British Museum to catalogue the collections which he already knew well. Accordingly, Solander wrote a formal letter to William Watson stating in detail what needed doing and how long it would take, perhaps two or three years. He estimated that the animals, with many shells and insects, would take about a year to catalogue; the fossils might not take quite so long; but the number of plants would certainly need at least a year to do. The aim would be a catalogue complete with names, synonyms, locality and use, if any. Since the job would be a full time one for four or five hours a day it could not be done for less than £100 a year. The programme would not interfere with Empson’s recording the history of and anecdotes about the specimens told him by Sir Hans; he would merely be relieved of the scientific work.

In February, some days after Solander’s letter was written, the Trustees received a letter from Peter Collinson bringing it to their attention that students were being

... deprived of the opportunity of making useful and proper researches into the several branches of Natural History. (B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738–84: 1 (58): 175–8)

This we know from Empson’s reply (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1763: C832–4; GM 444), the tone of which one would expect from a trusted servant who was not up to the work. Much of his time was, of course, consumed in showing parties round, but the collections were immense and he had done what he could in applying the Linnaean system to parts of it and in recording Sir Hans Sloane’s observations. He was, however, quite prepared to admit that a ‘Person of Superior Abilities’ could have done more, and he asked for the Trustees indulgence.

It did not take the Trustees long to make up their minds. On 4 March 1763 the Standing Committee approved Solander’s plan, and at a further meeting the draft of a page of a catalogue was approved. Also, since much of the work did not require an officer in attendance Solander would be granted the use of a key, but no work was to be done by candle-light (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1763: C837, GM 452).

From the start of his contract Solander kept a *Work Book* (hardly a diary) in which he recorded the reports submitted at the Trustees’ request. In September 1764 he reported that a ‘Systematical Catalogue’ had been completed for most of the animals; namely the Insects in the Insect and the Spirit Rooms; the Quadrupeds and some of the Birds and Amphibia; and a start had been made with the Fossils, among all of which were many unlabelled specimens. But what was hindering the work, as he begs leave to tell the Honourable Trustees, was the passage three times a day of parties of visitors through the rooms, and therefore asked if the work on plants, which he is about to start, could be done in the ‘base story’ because, apart from the specimens, he needed to refer to a number of books at the same time (B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738–84: 1 (67): f. 189). He would, however, continue work on the animals upstairs when the rooms were free of visitors. To this the Trustees consented (B.M. Trustees Minutes,
1764: GM 523). From then on most of Solander’s time was given to cataloguing the plant collections in the ‘base story’ returning upstairs to continue the animals as the rooms were clear.

Solander’s progress report of 22 February 1765 (two years after the work had started) should have been signed by himself and Empson jointly, but Empson was too ill to take any further part in affairs (B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738–84: 1 (74, 75) 200–2). A catalogue of some 3000 insects had, however, almost been written out; visitors continued to hinder the work on the Quadrupeds, Amphibia and Birds, but he would work overtime to complete them: the English fossils were described: after the African plants, he would start on the East Indian, as the American and European plants were better listed. However, for the first time one is left with the impression of a lack of accomplishment. By the summer of 1765 the Trustees were impatient for the completion of the catalogues, and informed Solander that he should hire an assistant at his own expense to make a fair copy of what had already been ‘writ’. Although one must assume that this was done, the fact that no catalogues of these years have come down to us needs some explanation (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1765: GM 534, 553; C 985).

The explanation must lie between what Solander, as a systematist accomplished, and what the Trustees as trustees required. The Trustees required an inventory of their collections as a record of their charge. They visualized a tidy row of buckram bound volumes forming an impressive row upon their shelves. To Solander a catalogue was a detailed description of every specimen that passed through his hands but which was flexible enough to accommodate the increase in the collections and of knowledge. For this purpose he devised what he called a Manuscript slip catalogue, comprising slips of cartridge paper of a uniform size of 4" × 6" (10 × 15 cm) (Marshall, 1978). Slips of groups of animals or plants were gathered loose-leaf as to be expandable. The result of this method is seen in the many thousands of slips in the libraries of the Botanical and Zoological Departments of the British Museum (Natural History). The zoological slips collected in 27 ‘volumes’ number some 5000 and were evidently designed to form a complete catalogue of the animals described (Kay, 1965). This, secured by Joseph Banks and passed to the Museum, remains as the author left it. All this, admirable as the Trustees may have thought it, was not what they wanted and they continued to chafe at the want of formal inventory catalogues.

To all this there was a solitary exception; namely a catalogue of the fossils, mainly mollusca, which the Trustee, Gustav Brander, had collected and presented to the Museum. This appeared in 1766 under Brander’s name. As a man of business, accustomed to efficiency, he required the record of his personal generosity (Brander, 1766).

By the spring of 1765 it was evident that Empson was failing. Maty reported in a letter (undated) to Lord Hardwicke that Empson was ‘hardly able to get out of his bed’ (B.L. Add. MSS. 35607: f. 175). With his death in the summer of 1765 the way was open to Solander’s appointment as an Assistant in the Department of Natural History (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1765: C1010, GM 546), and with that the immediate pressure on him to complete the formal catalogues seems to have lifted. From then onward the Work Book shows work to go steadily forward, mainly on plants, with interruptions from time to time, either for Sloane’s animals, or for collections coming in. There were those in 1766 from John Greg, the Secretary of HM Commissioners from the West Indian Islands (the gift of Lord Hillsborough (1718–93)) (Russell-Barker, 1893); from Commodore Byron’s voyage round the world, from West Florida and elsewhere (B.L. Add. MSS. 45874: f. 9–12). With these, as will be mentioned later, Solander received help from the naturalist, John Ellis (1710–73) (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1766: GM 548, 1767: GM 600).

On 3 August 1764 the Trustees Minutes record that Joseph Banks of Ormond Street (then aged 21) was given leave to use the Reading Room for six months (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1764: C956). From this one may conclude that the son of a wealthy father was in contact with the Museum’s staff, and probably with the Trustees, from then until his name again appears in the Minutes in June 1768. In the intervening years Banks’ interest in Botany took him to Newfoundland and Labrador. In 1768, on learning that the government was sending an expedition to the Pacific to observe the transit of Venus, Banks obtained permission to
accompany it and to provide personnel and equipment for scientific purposes at his own expense. The year before, at the first meeting of the Royal Society he attended as a Fellow, he met Daniel Solander for the first time, and a working partnership developed that lasted till Solander's death 15 years later. Banks's request that Solander should join him on the Pacific expedition was seen as a rare advantage to the Museum. Accordingly on 28 June 1768 Solander's request for leave of absence to accompany Joseph Banks on a collecting expedition with Capt. Cook on HMS Endeavour was granted by the Trustees (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1768: GM 622).

The previous February the Trustees had asked Solander to give an estimate of the time it would take him to complete the catalogues of the Natural Productions which had been occupying the previous five years (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1768: GM 615). The reply is not on record, but a month or so before leaving on the expedition the Trustees were informed that he:

...will leave all manuscripts and papers containing Catalogues and Descriptions of the Natural Curiosities in the Museum in fair and proper order for Dr Maty's use. The Dr [Solander] has advanced so far in the Catalogue that excepting the minerals very few articles remain undescribed. (B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738–84: I (88): 225)

Charged with finding a deputy during his absence, Solander recommended 'as no one more suitable', Dr John Obadiah Justamond, FRS (1723–86), the son-in-law of Dr Matthew Maty. A surgeon at Westminster Hospital, Justamond was particularly qualified to work over the anatomical specimens in the Sloane collection that had not then been touched. Justamond's writings on medical and surgical matters, including translations from the French, were further evidence of his competence, which Solander personally vouched for in a formal, and no less fulsome, testimonial to the Principal Trustees (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1768: C1181, GM 682). With this, Solander's role in the Department of Natural Productions ceased until he returned to the Museum's service in 1773. There is, however, no record of what it was that Solander handed over to Maty in June 1768.

The death of Thomas Birch, 1766

It happened that Maty's transfer to Natural Productions in 1765 coincided with the death of Thomas Birch, an event involving him as an executor for a year and more (Trustees Minutes, 1766: GM 579, 1767: GM 605). In January 1766, returning to Hampstead, Birch was thrown from his horse and died of an apoplexy. He bequeathed to the Museum a vast collection of books and manuscripts, the catalogue of which was not completed until 1771, and also a sum of £500 as a contribution to the stipends of three assistant librarians (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1772: GM 686). The minute balance from this bequest was still being paid to Keepers at the Natural History Museum in the 1930s.

Birch also left the manuscript of his Life of John Ward, F.R.S. (Birch, 1766), one of his intimate friends, which Maty had undertaken to see through the press. In view of Birch's never failing friendship, Maty's friends had anticipated, even urged him, to take the opportunity of adding a memorial to Thomas Birch as a preface to the Life of John Ward. But when in May 1766, the Life appeared, Maty's memorial took the form of an advertisement of 36 lines (some 160 words).

Writing to Lord Royston in July, it appeared that Maty still had some intention of composing a more adequate memorial, but in fact, never did:

26 July 1766
My Lord...

As for the letters and other papers more personally regarding Dr Birch, I shall be glad to keep them some time longer, in order to extract those particulars which may serve for the account of his life and writings which his friends and your Lordship in particular seem to expect from me. His diligence, industry and services to the public
as an Author, his amiable qualities as a man, and his unexceptional character as a member of society and as a Clergyman, it will be my particular care to represent.

But this will be a work of some difficulty, and will require time, especially as I am besides always involved in business of different nature. Your Lordship’s assistance I shall humbly crave, and shall hope for the favour of having my sheets inspected before they are published. Nobody can more sincerely both feel and share the great loss we have made than

Your Lordships Most Obedient and much obliged Humble Servant

M. Maty.

On this letter, Lord Royston penned the comment:

This account [memorial] has never been given, not much to Dr Maty’s credit who had obligations to poor Dr B. [Birch]. (B.L. Add. MSS. 35607, f. 284)

To conclude, for some 15 years Birch had done much for Maty. Apart from the contribution during the years of the Journal Britannique made by a man of immense erudition, verbal fluency and literary status, Birch also brought the aura of Hardwicke’s patronage to his younger friend in his application for work at the Museum (B.L. Add. MSS. 36269, f. 102). He also paved Maty’s way into the Royal Society and helped him to succeed Parsons as Foreign Secretary. However, for Lord Royston to imply dereliction of duty when Birch had acted, among other things, as his friend and literary agent for the previous 25 years, was going a little far. His lordship also claimed to be a writer. Nevertheless, Birch had been the key-stone to Maty’s ambitions, and one needs to account for this neglect. Was it, that in his later years Birch did not seem to justify his early reputation? A talented conversationalist, his historical work, so much of it transcribed manuscripts, betrayed an essentially pedestrian mind. Against it one must set Maty’s exceptional ability, as one of the great journalists of the period with an analytical grasp and power of expression that were outside Birch’s range. The years of Birch’s contribution to the Journal Britannique may have become overlain by the memory of an ageing man attending Court as a means to fill his time. However, Maty’s failure to write an adequate obituary was not only a sin of omission, it showed that he had misjudged the true worth of his friend.

Maty as Keeper of Natural History, 1765–72

Occupied with Dr Birch’s affairs, Maty escaped the confrontations between Solander and the Trustees on the lack of catalogues. At issue were more important questions concerning printed books as well as natural history specimens. Paramount was the problem of money. Although the Museum was successful in attracting gifts, there was still much the Keepers would have liked to buy. Fortunately the problems were complementary.

The Museum was embarrassed by a surplus of duplicates, mainly of printed books, which had come with different libraries and occupied badly needed space. Their sale could provide funds for purchase, but an Act of Parliament was needed to free the Trustees to do so. Accordingly, in February 1767, a petition was laid before Parliament which, passed in June:

...enabled the Trustees of the British Museum to exchange, sell or dispose of such parts of the collection ... as they may decide. (Act 47, Geo. III 1767) (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1767: GM 599–602)

For the first time, therefore, the Trustees had funds, albeit limited, under their control, which were shortly to be supplemented by those coming from the Major Edwards fund. In 1731, a Major Arthur Edwards of St George Street, Hanover Square bequeathed his library of about 2000 printed books and a sum of £7000 for the preservation and augmentation of the library of Sir John Cotton, which had been given to the nation in 1700 (Edwards, 1870). Owing to a
protraction of a life interest in the legacy, the Edwards bequest did not revert to the Museum until 1769; and in February of that year the Trustees were concerned to define the terms for the use of the interest arising from the fund.

Their first resolution on February 1769 restricted the use of the interest to the purchase of items for increasing and enlarging the Cottonian Library, whether of:

... manuscripts, books of antiquities, ancient coins, medals and other curiosities of art or nature books, prints, drawings... (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1769: GM 646)

But there was nothing to suggest, or even to justify the inclusion of natural productions or curiosities. What went on behind the scenes is not revealed, but it is clear that both at the General Meeting and at the Standing Committee, protests were made at the exclusion of anything relating to natural history. In consequence, in September Dr Maty was ordered to:

... report from time to time the Standing Committee what the purchases he thinks may be made in order to supply the deficiencies in the department of Natural History. (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1769: GM 654)

This was followed by a report in December that:

... the Collection of Natural History is particularly deficient in that part which consists of dried birds and other land animals both from their scantiness and bad preservation... (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1769: GM 656)

Whereupon, at the same meeting the February resolution was supplemented by another authorizing the Trustees to use the proceeds of the Major Edwards Fund for the purchase of:

... such Natural Curiosities... as shall be appropriate to the collection of Natural History... (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1769: GM 659)

Accordingly monies from the Edwards Fund joined those from other sources thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>£.</th>
<th>s.</th>
<th>d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Edwards Money</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duplicates Money (books, coins etc.)</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir William Hamilton Money</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King’s Donations</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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Far from being devoted only to augment the Cottonian bequest of manuscripts and books, the Edwards Fund came to be used for the purchase of natural history specimens (such as the Moll Collection in 1815) and also contributed to the ‘extra duties performed’ by the Museum’s officers. In his evidence to the Select Committee of 1835 (Parliamentary Papers 1835: 1006–24) Sir Henry Ellis was certainly misinformed in saying that the Fund had been used only for manuscripts, books, coins and medals. All this is now merely of academic interest, but the fact remains that for over 45 years a succession of Keepers of natural history relied on the Edwards Fund not only to augment the collections, but for such original work as was done (Edwards, 1870: 443).

It was, however, not only with money matters that Maty concerned himself. As Keeper, he made a positive approach to building up the collections. Without waiting for benefactors, he sought out what others had and to add it to the Museum. Under his initiative the Museum became more than a repository; it became an institution, gaining in importance as it grew.

One of Maty’s contacts was the portrait painter, John Greenwood (1727–92) (Greenwood, 1890) who, born in Boston, Mass., had spent five years in Surinam painting and collecting fauna, plants and natural curiosities. He spent the next five years in Amsterdam before coming...
to settle in London in 1763 where he set up as a dealer in works of art. It was probably through Maty that Greenwood offered his rich and splendid collection of birds and land animals to the Museum for £500, eventually bought for £460, for which, with another specimen or two, Maty paid £480 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1770: GM 660, C1251). Greenwood’s collection was followed by another, the Leman Collection also of birds and land animals for which the Trustees paid £117. These monies coming from the sale of duplicate books. In March 1770, a selection of 170 dried rare birds from the Kukham Collection in America called for another £70 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1770: GM 670). Encouraged by the public’s response, Maty took every opportunity of purchasing what he could, either in London or while on leave in Holland, Geneva or elsewhere, and what he paid out of his own pocket the Trustees repaid him out of the Edwards Fund to the tune of £50 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1770: C1258–71).

These very substantial additions caused the collections to overflow into the Saloon and Antichamber where visitors usually gathered, so that in future visitors assembled in the Stone Paved Room near the Hall.

In February 1770, some 18 months after Solander had left the manuscript of his cataloguing efforts in Maty’s hands, Maty whose interest in the collections was properly aroused, submitted a somewhat impressive memorial to the Trustees (Appendix 5). This contained the suggestion that he should continue the cataloguing where Solander had left off, include what had since been acquired and add ‘the Synonims in the chief languages of Europe’. This would take at least a year and could be paid for ‘out of a donation of money from his Majesty’, such as Solander had received, namely £100 a year. The Trustees’ response to this statement of intent was to authorize a minute of 2 June 1770 (B.L. Add. MSS. 35612, f. 215) giving Maty permission to make such a catalogue, for a fee of £100 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1770: GM 668, C1245), but as will be recorded subsequently, no such catalogue either in Maty’s or in Solander’s hand has come down to us. That nothing was done by either appears to be borne out by a note, apparently made for Joseph Banks on Solander’s death, which reads as follows:

June 2 1770. The GM [General Meeting] voted £100 to Dr Maty for making a Catalogue of the Mammalia and Aves in the Museum; but it does not appear that he ever received any part of that sum as he never made any progress in the said Catalogue. (B.M. Trustees Minutes 1770: GM 672)

An explanation could be Maty’s loss of health which may have started about this time, and led to his death six years later. That his efforts as a collector gave him some satisfaction is clear from a letter he wrote a year before his death to Lord Hardwicke’s son:

... upon the whole I think that part of our Collection the most brilliant as well as the most complete in Europe, excepting perhaps, the Cabinet du Roi at Paris. (B.L. Add. MSS. 31299, f. 1)

The birds had, however, to await the arrival of Solander’s successor, Edward Whitaker Gray (1748–1806) in 1782 before they were arranged according to the Linnaean system, and they were not given a catalogue until the 1830s when Gray’s great-nephew, George Robert Gray (1808–72) was appointed assistant to his brother, John Edward Gray (1800–75) (Gunther, 1976).

In the eighteenth century, museums were not considered the place for practical zoology and the nearest Maty got to it was the translation of a paper by Professor L. Spallanzani FRS (1729–99), professor of philosophy at Modena, who showed what accurate observation could reveal of the nature of life and growth in the regeneration of severed worms and of the limbs of toads and salamanders (Spallanzani, 1769).

In 1767, Maty, as Secretary of the Royal Society, allowed himself to get involved in a strange incident which although of little importance, is mentioned here because it touches on natural history. The previous year the crew of HMS Dolphin, a man of war under the command of the renowned Commodore Byron, reported sighting people of unusual size on
the coast of Patagonia. This was attested in a letter from a Mr Charles Clark, an officer on board the ship, who maintained that the natives, seen at close quarters, were nine feet in height being measured by the extension of the arm upwards to the natives’ heads (Clarke, 1768). When the report reached the Academie des Sciences in Paris, and was stoutly denied by a French navigator, the Academy wrote to the Secretary of the Royal Society for confirmation. After interviewing the authors of the report and being persuaded of their bona fides, Maty formally confirmed this. However, the denial of other French navigators, agreed in 1767 by the Captain of the Sloop Swallow, (Carteret, 1771) lent humour to the story, ridicule being heaped on the unfortunate Secretary of the Royal Society. It inspired the French writer, G. F. Coyer (1707–82) to a lengthy Lettre au Docteur Maty, Secrétaire de la Société Royale de Londres, sur les Géants Patagons (Coyer, 1767).

**Benefactors and benefactions**

Even before Montagu House opened its doors, there was an immediate response for the establishment of a national cabinet of curiosities, rather than merely a national library and archive. This is clear from the actions of one or two collectors. The first gift to be registered came by the Will of William Lethieullier of 23 July 1755 (Edwards, 1870: 347). It was mainly of Egyptian antiquities, but since it included some bottled specimens and a pelican it qualifies for mention here. The first collection of scientific interest followed in 1757, from Gustavus Brander (1720–87), a merchant and antiquary who was a collector of fossils and other curiosities, but sadly none of the specimens has survived. One of Brander’s conditions was that he should be appointed a Trustee, an honour accorded him in 1761 when he became one of the most regular attenders with Dr Birch and Mr Watson on the Standing Committee; several later benefactions were also made by him (B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738–84: I (24): 56–7).

To accord the benefactors the honour which the Trustees considered their due, a *Benefactions Book* of velum (also called the Velum Book) was designed in 1756 and the names of donors and gifts inscribed in it (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1758: GM 224). At first these were also recorded in the Trustees Minutes of the General Meeting and of the Standing Committee, but when after September 1770 the proceedings were simplified (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1770: GM 674), gifts were ‘recited from the Benefactions Book’ at the General Meetings and formally recorded with resolutions of thanks by the Standing Committee. The first volume of the *Benefactions Book* extends into the 1800s, and with the long series since, is preserved in the Director’s office at the British Museum.

Few of the early benefactors could equal the generosity of Lethieullier and Gustavus Brander, but their number and what they gave is evidence of the good will the Museum enjoyed from the first. The more wealthy Trustees, some of them landed gentry with estates and gardens, sent trees and plants for the Montagu House grounds (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1756: GM 102). Examples were the Rt. Hon. Arthur Onslow, the Speaker; Lord Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice; the Duke of Argyle; the Earl of Northumberland and the botanists Peter Collinson and William Watson. It was recorded that when Montagu house opened, there were already no less than 600 species of plants in its gardens (Pulteney, 1790, 2: 305). More interesting was the manner in which the benefactors spanned the social spectrum of the day: the gentry of course, medical men were well to the fore, clergymen, journalists, those in colonial service, from governors downwards, travellers, naval and other seamen, traders, publicans, there was hardly a profession or occupation, that was not represented; and some were wives whose husbands can occasionally be identified.

Over the first 20 years of the Museum’s life there were about 250 donors who must have added another thousand or two natural history specimens to the collections and several donors gave on more than one occasion. In the early years the names of the majority of donors appear in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and many were Fellows of the Royal Society or of the Society of Antiquaries. About four fifths of such donors can thus be easily identified, but fewer in the later years when the Museum attracted less distinguished donors. At first there were
more gifts in the broad class of ‘antiquities’ than of natural history specimens, but the latter increased as time went on.

The senior staff of the Museum, such as the Under-Librarians and their assistants, were also among the early donors. Matthew Maty foremost among them. He evidently did the round of the London salerooms picking up antiques, objects of art, books, busts and portraits, and some natural history specimens. On his trips to Holland and elsewhere he generally came back with something for the collections. Between 1758 and 1776 the *Benefactions Book* records him making gifts on no fewer than 20 different occasions; the entry of 14 November 1760 lists some 38 books, including several of his own works, which are still in use in the British Library today. On 28 May 1762 the *Benefactions Book* lists 17 busts and portraits given by him.

Most of Maty’s medical and naturalist friends and acquaintances also emerge as donors, the more eminent being John Fothergill, William and John Hunter, Thomas Percival, John Pringle, Alexander Russell, William Watson and Thomas Hollis, the literary editor of Lincoln’s Inn.

Among the well-known naturalists who made gifts were George Edwards, FRS (1694–1773), ornithologist and friend of Sir Hans Sloane, the donor of the famous painting of the Dodo (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1759: GM 278) and John Ellis, FRS (1710–76), who gave a copy of his *Natural history of the coralines* with the original specimens and drawings (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1758: GM 238). Ellis was, incidentally, the first outsider to assist with the displays, being invited by Solander to help arrange a sizeable collection of animals made by John Greg, Secretary of HM Commission in the West Indian islands, which had been presented in 1766 by Lord Hillsborough (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1766: GM 548, 1767: GM 600). Mention must certainly be made of the gift in 1766 by Mr Browne of Sarum of a 21-foot crocodile from the River Indus which formed John Edward Gray’s first memory of Montagu House at the age of four, when it stood across the door of the back staircase, one of the few specimens to survive into the 1800s (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1766: GM 574).

The department of a museum bearing the title ‘Modern Curiosities’ was bound to attract anatomical freaks and oddities of preservation, ‘monsters’ such as: pigs with two heads and six legs, one of which was dissected by William Hunter (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1770: GM 671, 1774: C1460), a lamb-skin and tortoise, each with two heads (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1774: C1399, 1437), a lizard with two tails (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1768: GM 631), the remains of a human heart on a *patera* (dish of wood) found in a hole cut in a column of a church in Cambridgeshire (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1759: GM 273), the body of a man preserved as a mummy from Tenerife (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1773: C1408) and so on.

Fossils were still apt to be looked upon as ‘curiosities’, while ‘monstrous bones’, were evidence of a past creation. The shapes of stones, particularly of flints if resembling objects such as pear, say, or a petrified loaf, were also seen as worthy of the Museum. Since the Department of Natural Productions cared for the collections of Antiquities, Coins and Medals, the list of benefactions includes the names of several of the better known antiquaries, such as the Revd Dr William Stukeley, Dr Martin Folkes and others who stood on what was then the boundary of natural history.

Ten years after the museum opened, a change is detectable in the nature of the benefactions. While gradually increasing, there was a shift in their origin, more coming from overseas; and what was coming in was more important. The aim of collectors became more purposeful and systematic, but not yet generally more scientific. Gifts came through the agency of wealthy landowners like Lord Hillsborough (1718–93) and the Marquis of Rockingham (1730–82), who diverted collections made on their behalf overseas to the Museum (B.L. Add. MSS. 45875). But the real stimulus to the collections came from the voyages of discovery which heralded Britain’s maritime supremacy and the concept of Empire. Public demand brought the Admiralty formally to charge Capt. Cook’s second expedition (1772–75) with pursuing scientific exploration, with the result that in 1780 the *Benefactions Book* contains the names of Capt. James Cook, and his officers and gunners on board the *Resolution* and *Discovery*. The Forsters, father and son, the officially appointed naturalists to the expedition, brought specimens also.
There are however, two benefactors who symbolize the first decade or so of this period extending into the early 1800s; the first and foremost is Sir William Hamilton, FRS (1730-1803) (Wroth, 1890); and the second, to become one of the greatest of the Museum’s benefactors, the then Mr Joseph Banks, FRS (1743-1820) (Jackson, 1885).

In 1764, when Sir William Hamilton was appointed British envoy to the court of Naples, he may well have visited Montagu House and met Matthew Maty there. In 1768, Maty’s son, Paul Henry, on a travelling scholarship from Cambridge, stayed with Hamilton in Rome and Naples (B.L. Add. MSS. 40714: 47; 42069: 80). Before Sir William’s marriage to an heiress in 1782, the extent of his means was dependent on his own exertions, and these took the not unprofitable form of collecting antiquities and natural productions (rocks, lavas, marine specimens etc.) from the area of the Bay of Naples; from 1768 onwards he was sending chests of them back to the British Museum, where Maty was pressing the Trustees for show cases (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1768: GM 619, 1770: GM 674). In 1772, Sir William accepted from the Museum the princely sum of £8401 for an outstanding collection of antiquities which formed the nucleus of the Hamilton Collection, later to be displayed as a whole (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1772: GM 689-90). Sir William remained envoy for 36 years, until 1800, when the Kingdom of Naples was overwhelmed by the spread of revolution and by the Napoleonic wars. In this period, however, apart from collecting, he produced treatises on volcanoes and earthquakes which are among the scientific and artistic treasures of the period (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1776: C1532).

Although Sir Joseph Banks’ connection with the Museum is generally associated with the legacy of his botanical collections in 1820 (and therefore, with a later generation) his first gift was manuscripts in Icelandic donated in December 1773, followed by some birds in January 1775 (B.L. Add. MSS. 45875). His first major gifts of ‘curiosities’ from the South Seas appears to date from October 1778, to be followed by a long succession which, in 1780, inspired the Trustees to refer to his ‘... repeated liberality to the Museum’ (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1780: C1744). On 30 November 1778 his election as President of the Royal Society made him ipso facto a Trustee, and as such he attended his first meeting of the Standing Committee (rather than of the General Committee) on 18 December.

The largest benefaction to come to the British Museum in this period was from the Royal Society which, in 1781, was about to move from its quarters in Crane Court, off Fleet Street, into the then new Somerset House. Although this was five years after Maty’s death, it is difficult to believe that in his dual role as Secretary of the Society and Principal Librarian, he would not have been concerned to some extent with the decisions involved.

The Royal Society’s collection was based on a ‘Repository of Rarities’ purchased in 1666, its composition in 1681 being described in Nehemiah Grew’s Museum Regalis Societatis. As the collection grew, this catalogue was supplemented by manuscript lists made between 1696 and 1779 (Royal Soc. MSS. 413-19), but how many of the hundreds of natural history specimens remained in a condition to be exhibited at Montagu House in 1781, when the removal took place, or how many survived the century, is not on record (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1781: C1761-6). There had already been a comment on the Society’s museum by a German traveller, Uffenbach, that while he could ‘mention the Royal Society with honour, their Museum was a great disgrace’ (Costa, 1812). The Society’s final list closed on 3 June 1779, and contains the names of several donors who had also given specimens to the British Museum, the indefatigable Peter Collinson being among them.

Principal Librarian, 1772

Following the death of Dr Gowin Knight in June 1772, Maty’s promotion as Principal Librarian could almost be taken for granted. Dr John Jortin’s phrase of 16 years earlier was still true, that there was ‘... not a man in England more fit for it.’ (B.L. Add. MSS. 36269: f. 104-6). In his 15 years at Montagu House, Maty had been involved as much in its affairs as any member of its staff, and certainly as much as any of the Trustees. He had been Keeper of two departments, supervised a catalogue of printed books, and initiated the growth of the natural
history collections. Moreover, his writing had shown him to be possessed of a universal mind. His one competitor within the Museum was Dr Charles Morton, who had neither Maty’s many-sidedness nor record of achievement, and it was little short of tragedy for the British Museum in the last quarter of the century that Maty’s tenure of office was so short, and Morton’s, as his successor, so long.

The appointment was made by the King under the British Museum Act on the recommendation of the Principal Trustees. Since the text of His Majesty’s Sign Manual had been included in the Trustees Minutes on Dr Knight’s accession, it was in keeping with Maty’s character and his nationality, to have it repeated (Appendix 6). This was not done on any subsequent occasion (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1772: GM 1347, C1346–8). The formalities for Maty’s appointment were completed at a General Meeting of the Trustees on 24 September 1772:

Dr Maty, having been appointed Principal Librarian of the Museum by his Majesty; and also Expenditor by the principal electing Trustees; in the room of Dr Knight, lately deceased, has produced his respective appointments before the Committee; and has signed Bonds for the due Execution of each Office in the Penal Sum of £2000 and £1000 respectively, and said Bonds have been deposited in the Iron Chest . . .

(B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1772: GM 693).

Once appointed to the Museum in 1756, the question of Maty’s nationality appears not officially to have been raised. There were good reasons for allowing the matter to rest. There was at the time much anti-foreign feeling in the country, and there was no point in drawing public attention to a foreigner at the British Museum. On the occasions he visited the Continent he passed for an Englishman. Finally, the cost to the individual of being naturalized was high.

The four years of Maty’s incumbency were not marked by any particularly noteworthy event or change in administrative direction as might have been expected of so versatile a man. His biographers attribute the lack of verve to a failing health; in the administrator of the 1770s there is certainly not the vivacity that inspired the journalist of the Journal Britannique in the 1750s. The Principal Librarian was also subject to the inhibitions of high office, being seen as a servant of the Trustees rather than as a director.

As Principal Librarian Maty had the satisfaction of seeing the initiatives he had taken during the years of his Keepership bear fruit. The most important was the diversion of the Edwards Fund into the purchase of specimens of natural history, which set the precedent for acquiring outside collections. Maty’s ties with the Royal Society made it certain that its duplicates came to the Museum, for example those from the Hudson’s Bay Company and the Falkland Islands (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1772: C1320). Gustav Brander also suggested an exchange of some Royal Society duplicates of natural curiosities for 24 specimens from the Museum’s collection (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1772: GM 716, C1401).

These years, appropriately, coincided with an event as important in the history of the nation as in that of the Museum, namely the first of Capt. Cook’s voyages (with Joseph Banks, on the Endeavour) which set out with the aim of scientific exploration. The trophies of this first expedition were Banks’ property and did not come to the Museum until some years later, but those of Capt. Cook’s second expedition in Resolution and Adventure (1772–75), which Banks had declined to join, were presented to the Museum by the Admiralty on condition that a room was set aside for them. They comprised a large collection of ‘natural and artificial curiosities’, including arms, costumes and domestic utensils, for which, since there was no space in the rooms given to natural history, Maty suggested the adaptation of the room containing the Sloane MSS. at a cost of £122.11.8 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1775; GM 740, 754). It is appropriate to Maty’s memory that this first large benefaction that the Museum received in the dawn of the era of great voyages of discovery, was the last he was to arrange. He died the following summer, and it was left to Solander to form the famous Otaheite Room of South Sea Curiosities.
Maty also sought a solution to the growing problem, that while the Trustees were allocating funds to buy new specimens, those in the Museum were being allowed to deteriorate from lack of a ‘proper person’ to look after them. He referred to those from the Falkland Islands and the Hudson’s Bay recently acquired from the Royal Society and ‘put into a state of preservation, 4d for a beast and 2d for a bird’ (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1772: C1362). The preservation of stuffed animals and the care of the Museum’s collections remained an unsolved problem for at least another half century, so that by the 1800s few remained of Sloane’s original specimens, and as likely as not few of what Maty had added.

Maty also brought forward complaints of the dampness of the Reading Room in the ‘base story’ (ground floor) (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1774: GM 710). The Keeper, the Revd Richard Penneck, FRS registered his protest as his predecessor had done 15 years before, by absenting himself without leave on the grounds of health. In February 1774, when he was brought to account for dereliction of duty, a General Meeting of the Trustees agreed to an alternative location, and by October a part of the Royal Library (the ‘south-west angle room upon the first State Story’) was adapted at a cost of £112.4.6 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1774: GM 715). Dr Penneck survived to hold court there until his death in 1803.

To add to the amenities of Montagu House, Maty sought leave of the Trustees to enclose a small corner of the garden for his private use, and to remove a large dung hill which offended himself and his wife, at a cost of 16 guineas (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1772: GM 694, C1357). He also asked for an alteration to the wine and coal cellars; to cut down a tree, ‘a great nuisance to his apartments’ and to cure dry rot, a periodical recurrence in Montagu House, which had ‘seized upon the floor of his parlour’ (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1773: C1383, 1775: GM 743, 1776: C1507).

The return of Daniel Solander

In 1771, on his return with Banks from Capt. Cook’s Endeavour voyage, the Trustees gave Solander two years further leave of absence to work with Banks on the botanical collections obtained during the voyage. Back in the Museum in March 1773, Solander took Maty’s place as Keeper of the Department of Natural Productions. His return, with a reputation vastly increased by five years absence, may have inspired the Trustees to a homily directed at Solander as well as at his former deputy, John Justamond, then appointed his Assistant. The formal opening of the Iron Chest in their presence for the deposit of their Bonds was taken as a reminder that:

Upon this occasion they were informed that the Trustees expected from them their constant Attendance upon their Duty in their Own Persons and not by any Deputy.
(B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1773: C1371)

Although few members of the committee could have been aware of it at the time, neither of these appointments were more important to the Museum than another, namely that of Joseph Planta (1744–1827), then aged 29, in place of his father, Andrew, recently deceased (Wroth, 1896). As Principal Librarian 26 years later, Joseph Planta was to make up for the neglect of a generation by weaning the British Museum out of its eighteenth century habits.

In the nine years of Solander’s keepership, 1773–82, he was as occupied outside the department as in it. He continued to live with Banks in Soho Square, helping him with the botanical collections. The prestige travel conferred, together with his social gifts, made calls on his energies. In 1780 he was appointed deputy to the Principal Librarian, Charles Morton, compelled by gout to long absences outside London (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1778: GM 790, C1625).

The state of the collections after over 20 years of display was a growing source of anxiety, since many of the specimens, especially the stuffed animals, were in a state of decay, and the shells and insects were faded from exposure to light (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1778: C1634). There were several requests to the Trustees for money for proper boxes, drawers, spirit bottles and other means of preservation.
The arrangement of the Otaheite or South Seas Room must have occupied some time. In it were brought together the several collections made during the course of Capt. Cook's voyages. In this arrangement, from 1780, Solander had the help of William Peckover, the Gunner on the third voyage, who was able to contribute unique local knowledge. Opened to the public in August 1781, the Otaheite Room remained one of the Museum's most popular attractions for the next 30 years.

With the catalogues of collections however, there is no evidence that progress was made. In the 18 months from January 1778 to June 1779, Solander was occupied with the collections of the Duchess of Portland (1714-85), the leading patroness of natural science in the eighteenth century; but again, no catalogue was produced. It was this continued inability to bring his work to a conclusion that has given Solander the reputation of '... the most promising yet the most disappointing of the pupils of Linnaeus' (Dance, 1966: 106).

Solander's official diary is a strange, even revealing document (B.L. Add. MSS. 45875). Others used their diaries to record the progress of their work; Solander's served almost exclusively to record the benefactions. If there were none over the fortnightly period, the entry read: 'Nothing new', and this was repeated and signed 150 times. It was as if the writer found nothing of significance to interest him, like Louis XVI of France, whose entry in his diary for March 14 1789, when rebellion was breaking out throughout the country, was 'Mardi 14: rien.' It recorded his Majesty's lack of success at the hunt.

The question of catalogues was next given serious attention some 25 years later. Then, under the Principal Librarian, Joseph Planta, the Trustees appointed a Sub-Committee to review the establishment and duties of the officers. In 1807 it was reported that:

Departments of the Museum

4. In the Department of Natural History all the Catalogues are represented to be so defective, that the under-Librarian here will have a choice of labour in which he must be directed (under the sanction of the Trustees and of the Principal Librarian) by the joint consideration of his own peculiar qualifications, and the urgency of the particular work. (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1807: GFM 1011)

This was not a deficiency that could be made good in a day. It awaited the arrival in 1824 of the man capable not only of establishing the tradition of the British Museum catalogue, but also with the ability to match the need, namely John Edward Gray (1800-75).

Of Solander's Assistant, J. O. Justamond, there is little to record. The testimonial Solander had given him in 1768 was hardly merited. Less than a year after his father-in-law's death Justamond became involved in debt and petitioned the Trustees for six months' leave, presumably to escape his creditors, abroad (B.M. Trustees minutes, 1777: C. 1591). Although Maty's son, Paul Henry (1745-87), appointed as Solander's Assistant, appealed in his favour in the strongest terms, Justamond's place was declared vacant (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1778: GM 782).

Club of Honest Whigs

Maty's social activities during his years as Principal Librarian must, in his then state of health, have been limited by the duties imposed by the Museum and at the Royal Society. If he made any exception, it would have been to join his friends of the Old Medical Club of 1741. This seems to have enjoyed a long life since it reappears in the 1750s and prospered until Maty's death. It, or its successor (since these coffee-house groups had a constantly changing membership), is mentioned in 1757 in connection with the first visit of Benjamin Franklin to London. Franklin's friendship with Maty developed first with Collinson and later with Fothergill over electrical experiments, was cemented in the years Franklin spent in England as a plenipotentiary for the State of Pennsylvania (Brett-James, 1925: 79-118). In these negotiations Franklin had Fothergill's unstinting help and the support of those he met, at what he called the 'Club of Honest Whigs' at the St Paul's Churchyard (later at the London Coffee-House on Ludgate Hill) on alternate Thursday evenings. The old Medical Club, open to a
wide range of interests, brought in men such as Dr Richard Price (1723–91), the Unitarian Minister in London, Dr Joseph Priestly (1733–1804), theologian and man of science, Dr John Hawkesworth (1715–73), author and journalist, Dr Andrew Kippis (1725–95), non-conformist divine, John Stanley (1713–86), composer, John Lee (d. 1840), wood engraver, and others (Fox, 1919:317).

Although Maty's views on the worsening relations between the colonists and Parliament are not known to us, like the Quaker Fothergill he was a man of peace, and must have been deeply grieved at the British government's attitude to the turn of events in North America. He would have remembered the atmosphere of tolerance and fairness that had attracted him to England 30 years before. Since he died just a month after the Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776, he was spared the anxiety of a senseless and fruitless war.

**Death and post-mortem**

In the last year or two of his life, ill-health must have inflicted trials on a man of Maty's active mind. In such leisure as there was from concern with committees of Trustees and the routine of office, he returned to the fascination of rare books by attending sales. It had been suggested in 1775 that the Museum should offer £5000 for Dr Anthony Askew's complete library, but Maty's outlay was only £302.6 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1775: GM 729). A year later at Mr Stanley's sale, Maty spent £21.14 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1776: C1503). In October he was empowered to arrange the purchase from the Dresden Library of duplicates in a collection of Byzantine works and other classics (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1775: C1493). In March 1766 his purchases of books from the Cesar de Missy sale amounted to £70.18 (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1776: C 1508).

In the evening of his life he found solace in completing a memoir to the *Miscellaneous works* of his patron, Lord Chesterfield, which was left to his son-in-law, John Justamond, to see through the press (Maty, 1777). It is on this work rather than by any of his other activities that Maty's reputation, outside the British Museum, generally rests.

In the first of these classes [i.e. historical] Doctor Maty holds a position from which it is impossible to dislodge him – that of being the primary source from which all subsequent biographies of Lord Chesterfield have been, and always will be, compelled to draw much of their information (Craig, 1907: 354).

Matthew Maty is believed to have died in his apartments at the British Museum, and it is not known where he was buried. A memorial service was held in the Oxendon Chapel near the Haymarket, off Conduit Street, and a sermon was preached on Sunday, 11 August 1776, by Maty's nephew, the Revd Charles Peter Layard, AM, FRS (1749–1803), Dean of Bristol and a Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, grandfather of Austen Henry Layard (1817–94), the excavator of Nineveh. The Revd Layard's address was couched in the social verbiage of the time and adds little to our knowledge or appreciation of its subject's talents, achievements and character (Layard, 1776). By his will Maty added to the many benefactions he had made to the Museum in the 20 years of his service: the portrait of himself as a young man and also four busts he had retained from the many he had given, namely those of Petrarch, Boccaccio, Machiavelli and Dante (B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1776: GM 755).

It was a loss to the Museum, as well as a personal tragedy for himself, that Maty's years as Principal Librarian should have coincided with the grip of the illness that brought his death on 2 August 1776, although its symptoms had been present, he averred, for some eight years. A portrait by F. Bartolozzi, engraved in 1776, shows a rather frail Maty (Plate 5). It was typical of him that since he could not himself know the cause of his death, a post-mortem by two of his surgeon friends should, 24 hours after it, show what it was, and that the cause should provide a paper for the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions* (Hunter & Watson, 1777). For several years Maty had been inconvenienced by some 20 purging stools every 24 hours, and suspected that the trouble lay in a diseased colon contracted in the kidney region. There was
no evidence to confirm his idea that the cause might have been an internal bruise from the hilt of a sword, even if a more noble concept. The heart and lungs were sound.

With Matthew Maty’s passing, Charles Morton, the last of the three original Under-Librarians, and a pupil incidentally of Boerhaave’s, was promoted Principal Librarian and held the position until his death in 1799. Daniel Solander remained Keeper of the Natural History Collections until his premature death at the age of 46 in 1782, when he was succeeded by his assistant, Revd Paul Henry Maty (1745–87), Matthew’s brilliant, if cantankerous son, who also died early. As Maty jun. was not a naturalist an assistant, Dr Edward Whitaker Gray (1748–1806), was appointed in 1778, one of whose first tasks was the rearrangement of the Bird Room, full of Maty’s specimens, according to the Linnaean system (Gunther, 1976).

Acknowledgements

Of the research for this paper, about three fourths was done at the British Museum (for Trustee’s records), in the British Library for Additional Manuscripts and at the Williams’ Library, for a copy of Journal Britannique. A copy of the Trustees’ Minutes is now conveniently located at the British Museum (Natural History). The remaining fourth was spent at the Wellcome Library for Medical works, the Royal Society, the Greater London Record Office, the India Office Library and at the Royal College of Physicians. The privilege of being given access to material in such institutions, with the help always willingly given, must be gratefully acknowledged.
At the British Museum (Natural History) the General Library, under the librarianship of Mr M. J. Rowlands, helped secure the reproduction of documents from outside sources. The author is also indebted to Dr P. J. P. Whitehead for historical information and perspective, to Mr A. C. Wheeler for a critical appraisal of the whole paper and to Mr R. E. R. Banks and Miss D. Norman as editors for seeing the work through the press. Thanks are also due to Dr Uta Janssens-Knorsch, for expediting a copy of her thesis as soon as it came to the author’s knowledge.

Acknowledgement must be made of permission by the Musée Condé of Chantilly, to reproduce their portrait of ‘Le Docteur Maty’, and by the Royal College of Physicians of London of an historical letter bearing Maty’s signature of 30 September 1767.

Appendix 1

Journal Britannique, 1750–55

1 a Contributors who signed

Archer, Edward, MD (1718–89), physician at Small-pox Hospital
Bevis, John, MD, FRS (1693–1771), astronomer
Bolton, Etienne, astronomer
Du Plessis, J., literature
Durand, David, FRS (1680–1763), minister
Savoy Fr. churches, philologist, antiquary
Floyer, Antoine, physician
Formey, J. H. S. (1711–97), Sec. Roy. Acad. Berlin
Grashuis, Johan (c. 1700– ), physician, Dutch, MD, Leyden
Herberden, W., MD, FRS (1710–1801), physician, author, historian

Herbert, H. N., MD, physician
Jackson, John – (1686–1763), theological writer
Jortin, John, DD, FRS (1698–1770), ecclesiastical historian
Kirkpatrick, J., MD, FRS (1696–1770), physician
Layard, D. P., MD (1721–1802), physician, author
Le Cointe, Gedeon (1714–82), preacher and philosopher
Lining, J., American physician, Carolina
Needham, J. T., FRS, FSA (1713–81), divine, scientist, author
Palairet, Elias (1713–65), philologer
Palairet, John (1697–1774), French author
Porter, J., physician
Ward, John (1679–1758), rhetoric, antiquities

1 b Anonymous contributors (initials only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initials</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>No. of articles</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
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<td>Jean Des Champs (minister) (1709–65)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>theology, history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.M.</td>
<td>Paul Maty</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>mathematics (see also ‘M’ below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.D.M.</td>
<td>César de Missy (1703–75)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Bible scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.R.O.</td>
<td>unknown minister</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>theology, history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.J.</td>
<td>John Jackson (1686–1763)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.</td>
<td>Paul Maty (?)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.F.B.</td>
<td>J. F. Barnouin (minister d. 1770)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.M.</td>
<td>Elizabeth Montagu (?) (1720–1800), sister of Lady Wortley</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>feminism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 65

Appendix 2

The Society of Gentlemen: Birch’s Thursdays’ Tea
(In date order of joining)

1751 Birch, Thomas; Jortin, John; Maty, Matthew; Missy, César de, Huguenot minister attached to the Church of the Savoy; authority on Vatican archives; Young, Robert, surgeon, St Bartholomew’s Hospital, Gt Russell St; Ravaud, David, FRS.

1752 Brown, John, Revd (1715–66), preacher essayist, friend of Bishop Warburton; Wetstein, Caspar, the Revd, FRS d. 1760, Chaplain to her Royal Highness the Princess Dowager of Wales
1753 Heathcote, Ralph, DD (1721–95), author
1756 Clarke, Samuel, son of the more famous Dr Samuel Clarke, DD (1675–1729) the metaphysician

Occasional visitors
Hayter, Thomas, Bishop of Norwich (1702–62), eminent divine, pamphleteer, preceptor to George III when Prince of Wales
Heberden, William, MD (1710–1801), eminent physician, historical writer, attended Warburton, Cowper, Johnson
Jeffreys, Walter, FRS, 1717
Markham, William, Archbishop of York (1719–1807)
Mason, Edward, secretary to Duke of Cumberland
Warburton, William, Bishop of Gloucester (1698–1779)
Wray, Daniel (1701–83), antiquary, assisted Lord Royston, B.M. Trustee 1765

Appendix 3

Royal College of Physicians (Register book, 1765–71)

3a Licentiate Committee, 1765 [*Trustees of the British Museum]*
Adee, Swithin, FRS (c. 1700–86) Lawrence, Thomas* (1711–83)
Askew, Anthony, FRS (1722–74) Monro, Donald, FRS (1727–c. 1802)
Baker, Sir George, FRS (1722–1809) Pitcairn, William* (1711–91)
Battie, William* (1704–76) Pringle, John, FRS (1707–82)

3b Signed letter of protest, 30 September 1767 (Plate 2)
Alexander, Benjamin (1736–68) Garthshore, Maxwell (1732–1812)
Archer, Edward (1718–89) Hay, Alexander, FRS
Brinkenden, John (1735–74) Hill, John, d. 1789
Bromfield, Robert, FRS, d. 1786 Hunter, William, FRS (1718–83)
Chapman, Samuel Kennedy, Hugh Alexander, d. 1795
Dickson, Thomas, FRS (1726–84) Maty, Matthew (1718–76)
Duncan, Sir William, d. 1774 Morris, Michael, FRS, d. 1791
Elliot, Sir John, d. 1786 Russell, Alexander, FRS (1715–68)
Ford, John, d. 1806 Silvester, Sir John Baptist, d. 1789
Forsdike, George, FRS (1736–1802) Wayman, Luke

Appendix 4

Dr Knight’s plan for Montagu House, 14 January 1757

Agreeable to the desire of the Committee, Dr Knight delivered in a plan for the General Distribution of Sir Hans Sloane’s Collection of natural and other products. The Greatest and most valuable part of this Collection consists of things relating to Natural History: wherefore that part will first claim our attention, and will merit a particular regard in the general distribution.

All the articles that come under the head may be properly classed in the three general divisions of Fossils, Vegetables and Animals. Of these the Fossils are the most simple; and therefore may be properly disposed in the first Rank; next to them the Vegetables; and lastly the animal substances. By this arrangement the Spectator will be gradually conducted from the simplest to the most compound, and most perfect of nature’s productions. I would therefore humbly propose that the Fossils may be placed in the first room next to the Saloon; and when they are properly disposed, to begin with the Vegetables where the Fossils end, either in the same room or in the next according as the space will permit. In like manner the Vegetables may be succeeded by the Animals and animal substances: and since there is found in Nature a gradual and almost insensible transition from one kind of natural production to an other, I would indueavour both in the general and particular arrangement, to exemplifie those gradual transitions as much as possible.

As the class of vegetable productions will be imperfect unless a good collection of dried plants make a part thereof; such a collection seems to be much wanted to render this branch of Natural History complete. I would therefore beg leave to propose, as the Hortus Siccuses would take up too much room,
and are already otherwise disposed of, to make a collection quite new; and to digest them according to Linnaeus' System, and deposit them in a cabinet to be constructed for that purpose according to the proportions laid down by Linnaeus himself in his *Philosophia Botanica*. His proportions are, in Paris measure 7 feet ½ in height, 16 inches in breadth, and 12 inches in depth. Such a cabinet may very well stand against one of the jambes of the windows, which are at present vacant.

If the Fossils and Vegetables can be contained in the first rooms, the room at the west end, with the lip adjoining, will remain for the Animals and animal substances.

Some of the Vegetables, and a considerable and valuable part of the Animals are preserved in spirits, and would be a great ornament to the Collection if placed in the cabinets; and I presume it would give more satisfaction to the publick to see them each arranged there with the things of the same kind, than to have them put together in the Base Story.

At the same time the Monsters and anatomical preparations, will be best joined with the skeletons, and other parts of anatomy in the Base Story: more especially as all these are not proper objects for all persons, particularly women with child. The large room in the Base Story at the west end will be very fit for this purpose; and being under the rooms to which its contents belong, will have a communication with it by the back stairs. If on account of this disposition the two rooms allotted to the animalia should be found too small to contain the whole, a continuation of this class may be made in the two rooms adjoining the Committee room.

As to the antiquities they may be put in the largest room in the Base Story at the east end, to which the next room may be added if necessary. This situation will be the more proper on account of the medals, if they should be placed above, as there will be a communication by the back stairs.

The little room at the west end opening upon the back stairs may contain the miniature pictures, and a cabinet of some of the most valuable and curious productions of art. The rest may be put in the Base Story, as also the instruments, habits, indian curiosities, etc.

*Ordered* that the sum of one hundred pounds be impressed to Dr Knight by a draught upon Mr Race. The draught was accordingly made, and signed by the Trustees present.

Meeting adjourned.

(B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738-84 I (21): 51-52)

**Appendix 5**

**Maty's plan for catalogues, February 1770**

Dr Solander, a few days before he left England, put into my hands his papers relative to the Catalogue of the objects of Natural History that they might be ready in case the Trustees should think proper to make use of them.

It appeared, upon a review of these papers, that the first and chief object of the Doctor had been the Plants and Insects; both which he examined and described in a manner, which does great honor to his learning and industry; and these parts, indeed the most intricate, of the work may now at any time be easily completed. But with respect to the other classes, except a few Animals and Birds, nothing appears to have been done, and the fossils, fishes, serpents etc. as well as the Antiquities and artificial curiosities, remain entirely untouched.

Yet as the business of the Catalogue seems to be of very great importance, both to ascertain what we have, and to separate the duplicates, it were to be wished that some other hand might be engaged in the same work, as there certainly will be employment for more than one man.

This is still become more necessary, since, by the accessions of several new articles, and chiefly by the late purchase of rich collections of birds and land animals, these two classes have been considerably increased, and will probably be more so from future acquisitions.

As these new objects, together with those which we had before, are now intended to be placed in a systematical arrangement, it will naturally fall in my way, tho' with a considerable increase of labour, to make a Catalogue of these two classes.

I, therefore beg leave humbly to offer myself to the Trustees, and if they should think proper to allow me the same appointment, which my Assistant Dr Solander enjoyed for some years, out of a donation of money from his Majesty – which was applied to that use, I would engage:—

1. In the course of a twelve month, to begin at Lady Day next, to prepare and finish a Catalogue of the two first classes of the Linnean System of Animals, viz the *Mammalia* and the *Aves*, consisting of proper descriptions of the Objects in these two Classes, which we now have or may acquire in that time, together
with the Synonims in the chief languages of Europe, and such particulars as might render these
descriptions interesting:
2. At the end of the said twelve month, to go on with the other classes, and if Dr Solander should, on his
return, still be at liberty or inclined to pursue his work, to agree with him about the parts which he might
reserve to himself, or rather to assist one another in the same great undertaking.

I beg leave to add, that, should the Trustees think proper to employ me in this work, it shall not
prevent my discharging my duty in other respects, as one of the Officers of the Museum.

M. Maty

(B.M. Trustees Reports, 1738–84 1: 246–8)

Appendix 6

His Majesty’s Sign Manual for appointment of Principal Librarian, 21 July 1772

Dr Maty attended the Committee and delivered at the Table His Majesty’s Sign Manual appointing him
Principal Librarian of the Museum which is as follows:

George R.

Whereas by an Act of Parliament made in the Twenty-Sixth Year of the Reign of Our Royal
Grandfather, Intituled an Act for the Purchase of the Museum or Collection of Sir Hans Sloane, & of the
Harleian Collection of Manuscripts, & for providing One general Repository for the better Reception
and more convenient Use of the said Collections, and of the Cottonian Library and of the Additions
thereeto; It is Enacted that the Principal Librarian, to whom the Care & Custody of the said General
Repository shall be chiefly committed, shall be nominated and appointed in Manner following, (that is to
say) the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Chancellor or Lord Keeper and the Speaker of the House of
Commons, or any two of them, shall recommend to his said Majesty, his Heirs, and Successors two
Persons. Each of whom, They shall judge fit to execute the said Office and such of the said Two Persons
so recommended, as his said Majesty, his Heirs, & Successors, by Writing under His or Their Sign
Manual shall appoint, after He shall become bound to the Trustees of the British Museum for the due
and faithful Discharge of His Office in such penal Sum, not being less than One Thousand Pounds as the
said Trustees at any General Meeting assembled, or the Major Part of them shall think proper, shall have
and hold the said Office during such time as he shall behave well therein; And whereas the Most
Reverend Father in God and our faithful Councillor Frederick, Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate and
Metropolitan of all England, & Our Right, Trusty and Wellbeloved Councillor Henry Lord Apsley, our
Chancellor of Great Britain by Writing under Their Hands, have humbly recommended unto Us, Charles
Morton and Matthew Maty, Doctors of Physic in Pursuance of the said Act; We have constituted and
appointed by these Presents pursuant to the said Act, do Constitute and appoint the said Matthew Maty,
Doctor of Physic, to be the Principal Librarian, to whom the Care and custody of the said General
Repository of the British Museum shall be chiefly committed: And that the said Matthew Maty shall
(after giving such Security as is required by the said Act) have and hold the said Office during such time
as He shall behave well therein, according to the true Interest and Meaning of the said Act.

Given at Our Court at St James the 21st day of July 1772 in the Twelfth Year of Our Reign.

By His Majesty's Command,

Rochford.

(B.M. Trustees Minutes, 1772: GM 1347, C1346–8)

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38pp.

vols.

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