

inFIRE Conference Report -- Tuesday, May 28, 2002

Visits to the British Library and the British Museum

We gathered in the lobby on Tuesday morning and walked the short distance to the British Library, situated next to St. Pancras/King's Cross Stations. As a special meeting was being held, we were unable to get a guided tour of the building, but proceeded on our own. There was a new exhibit: Trading Places : the East India Company and Asia.

“How did Britain become a nation of tea drinkers? How did words like shampoo, rice and bungalow become part of the English language? when did chintz first become popular? What was the first multinational company? ‘Trading Places’ marks the 400th anniversary of the first English trading post in Asia. It covers the history of the East India Company from 1602 until the loss of its monopoly in 1834 and the subsequent wide-reaching effects on both Britain and Asia. The exhibition shows how trade with India and China, Indonesia, Japan, Persia and other Asian countries brought new shopping opportunities and other long-lasting commercial and cultural changes. It also highlights the human cost of developing this trade.”

The John Ritblat Gallery houses the Treasures of the British Library, including the Magna Carta, a Gutenberg Bible, and manuscripts by Leonardo da Vinci, Jane Austen, Louis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) and (Sir) Paul McCartney.

<http://www.bl.uk/about/stpmap/exhibitions.html>

Also very impressive was the ‘King’s Library’ which forms the core of the building.

<http://www.bl.uk/about/stpmap/kings-library.html> This houses the 65,000 volume collection of King George III. (He’s the King the U.S. rebelled against in 1776.)

Many of us took advantage of our own shopping opportunity in the Library Book Store.

By this time the group was widely dispersed, and we made our individual ways to the British Museum. Again, we were unable to have a tour as a group, but several of us paid for a ‘Highlights’ tour -- that day focusing on Greece (the Elgin Marbles), Assyria (Ashurbanipal’s palace), Egyptian funerary equipment, and the Mildenhall Treasure from Roman Britain. Most of us managed to visit at least one of the 4 museum shops.

Back at the hotel, the attending members of the inFIRE Committee held their meeting, and later joined some of the others for dinner at a nearby restaurant.