

# John Ruskin and the National Gallery: evolving ideas about curating the nation's paintings during the second half of the nineteenth century

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## Introduction

On 28 April 1894, the Royal Academician Sir Hubert von Herkomer wrote to the director and trustees of the National Gallery offering them a watercolour portrait he had produced of the eminent Victorian writer and social reformer John Ruskin (1819–1900; Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Herkomer had undertaken the head-and-shoulders life-size likeness as part of a series of portraits of celebrated men of the day that he originally intended to bequeath to his children but later decided to give to a national repository. Ruskin had liked the image, declaring it to be 'the first that has ever given what good can be gleaned out of the clods of my face'.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the National Gallery rejected it. Certainly, the institution had no tradition of collecting watercolours, nor was it considered the national 'Walhalla' in the way the neighbouring National Portrait Gallery was – the institution where the work did end up some nine years later.<sup>3</sup> But the official reason for turning down the potential gift was that the Gallery was not in the habit of acquiring works by living artists.<sup>4</sup> In any case, by the time Herkomer wrote to the National Gallery, Ruskin was 'out of sight, out of mind'; sitting silent at his Lake District home 'Brantwood' and nursed by his cousin Joan Severn, he was no longer the force to be reckoned with that he once had been. Yet, during the previous half century, Ruskin's opinions about the National Gallery, its staff and their curatorial policies had been heard often and thunderously at the Gallery and beyond its walls.

Ruskin's first (semi-)public salvo against the National Gallery took the form of a letter from 'THE AUTHOR OF "MODERN PAINTERS"' to *The Times* published on 7 January 1847.<sup>5</sup> Nominally concerning picture cleaning, it in fact ranged more

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\* The illustrations to this text may be found by clicking this link: [Illustrations](#).

<sup>1</sup> National Gallery archives (hereafter NGA), NG7/171/11: letter from Herkomer to the trustees of the National Gallery, 28 April 1894.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Charles Saumarez Smith, *The National Portrait Gallery*, London: National Portrait Gallery, 1997, 144.

<sup>3</sup> Given by Sir Hubert von Herkomer, 1903, NPG 1336.

<sup>4</sup> NGA, NG1/6, Minutes of the Board of Trustees (1 March 1886–1 June 1897), page 272.

<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, 7 January 1847, 5. See the *Library Edition* of Ruskin's works: Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds, *The Works of John Ruskin*, London: George Allen/New York:

broadly, raising a number of issues that Ruskin saw as beleaguering the institution. The National Gallery had been founded in 1824 around a nucleus of thirty-eight old master paintings purchased by Lord Liverpool's government from the heirs of the financier and philanthropist John Julius Angerstein and had opened to the public in Angerstein's former town house, No. 100 Pall Mall. Despite having been investigated by a parliamentary Select Committee in 1835 to consider how it might perform more effectively as a public art gallery, few of the recommended forward-thinking changes had been enacted, not even after the Gallery's move in 1838 to a purpose-built edifice on Trafalgar Square. The painter and art historian Charles Lock Eastlake (1793–1865; Fig. 2) became a key player in its story after succeeding William Seguier (1772–1843) as keeper in 1843. Discontent with what he found to be the Gallery's *modus operandi*, Eastlake started to think strategically and holistically about the enlargement, display and cataloguing of the collection; and he was able to put many of his proposals into practice as his power and influence increased: in 1850 he became a trustee, an ex-officio position on the back of his having been elected president of the Royal Academy, and in 1855 he was appointed first director of the National Gallery, a position he retained until his death a decade later.

Of course Ruskin and Eastlake were not the only people to take an interest in how the National Gallery curated the nation's painting collection, and in many ways the issues they raised only repeated ones that others had aired and which would continue to be widely debated for the rest of the century. However, their voices were particularly important because of the prominence both men enjoyed within the Victorian art world, whether within the establishment, as in Eastlake's case, or outside its confines, as in Ruskin's.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Ruskin's claim in his letter of 1847 to *The Times* that some of the nation's priceless old masters had been irreparably damaged by cleaning was particularly powerful because of the authority claimed and widely commanded by his influential *Modern Painters*, whose first two volumes had been published in 1843 and 1846. Ruskin's voice, however, was only one in a chorus of public criticism aimed at the National Gallery more broadly, of which the most vituperative was undoubtedly that of 'Verax', the pen name of the art dealer and artist J. Morris Moore who would become Eastlake's nemesis (and who in reprinting Ruskin's letter in *The Abuses of the National Gallery*, published that same year, derided its claims to originality and jurisdiction). There were serious and immediate consequences to these public discussions, not least Eastlake's decision to resign as keeper at the end of 1847.

Both Eastlake and Ruskin were motivated by a desire to improve the care of the collections at Trafalgar Square, and in many ways the questions they posed and the solutions they came up with were similar. Nonetheless, Ruskin and Eastlake's

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Longman, Green, and Co, 1903–12, 39 vols; quoted hereafter as *Works of John Ruskin*, followed by volume and page number; here, *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 397–406.

<sup>6</sup> See Susanna Avery-Quash and Alan Crookham, 'Art beyond the nation: European vision for the National Gallery', in Andrea Meyer and Benedicte Savoy, *The Museum is Open: Towards a Transnational History of Museums, 1750-1940*, Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2014, 165–78.

relationship became more complicated over time,<sup>7</sup> with certain events beyond the walls of the Gallery only exacerbating the situation, not least the annulment of Ruskin's marriage, a matter in which Eastlake's wife Elizabeth became involved as a close confidante of Ruskin's wife, Effie.<sup>8</sup> Ruskin enjoyed better relations with two other members of staff at Trafalgar Square: Ralph Nicholson Wornum (1812–1877; Fig. 3), who would become keeper in 1855 and William Boxall (1800–1879), who would succeed Eastlake as second director in 1866. Wornum in fact named one of his sons John Ruskin Wornum, and a substantial batch of warmhearted correspondence concerning personal matters between Ruskin and Boxall is preserved in the Gallery's archive.<sup>9</sup>

What is remarkable is that despite never becoming a card-carrying member of the Victorian art world establishment, and with increasingly complicated relations with Eastlake, Ruskin developed a relationship with the National Gallery that was as sustained and deeply-rooted as any he had with other national art institutions. This article will attempt to explain why Ruskin got involved with the National Gallery at various points, what form his interventions took, and how such action fitted in with his evolving ideas about art galleries in general. The focus will

<sup>7</sup> See the intriguingly ambivalent letter from Eastlake to Boxall, 20 January 1847 (NGA1/22/122): 'I can have no objection whatever to meet M<sup>r</sup> Ruskin but I confess I prefer his imagination & his intellect (which I have in his books) to his morale which is also to be gathered from a flippant & uncharitable tone in his writings & which may be apparent in his manners – He has however got the blind side of me by his higher & better attributes & having no other feeling than admiration for his powers & regret at his occasional haste I repeat that an invitation from you to meet him would be in no way disagreeable.' That Eastlake nevertheless continued to accept invitations to dine at Ruskin's home is shown by two letters to Boxall of 11 May 1847 (NGA, NGA1/22/124-5). On his part Ruskin would inscribe with the author's warm compliments the title pages of the books he presented to Eastlake up to 1851. That of Eastlake's copy of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, for instance, published in 1849, bears the hand-written inscription: 'Charles Lock Eastlake, Esq. R.A. With the author's affectionate & respectful regards'; while Eastlake's copy of the first volume of *The Stones of Venice*, published in 1851, is inscribed: 'Sir Charles Eastlake. With the author's sincere and respectful regards.' Both volumes, as part of the Eastlake Library, are preserved in the National Gallery library: NB 85 RUSKIN and NH1071.31 RUSKIN, respectively. The wording 'With the author's affectionate & respectful regards' is identical to that which Ruskin used in the copy of the first volume of *The Stones of Venice* that he sent to J.M.W. Turner: see Ian Warrell, *Through Switzerland with Turner: Ruskin's first Selection from the Turner Bequest*, London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1995, 16. Eastlake also lent Ruskin books from his private art history library (see Julie Sheldon, ed., *The Letters of Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009, letter to Rawdon Brown, 12 July 1854, 164: 'Of him [Ruskin] we have heard nothing since he had the audacity to write to Sir Chas. He had borrowed some of Sir Chas' books & absconded without returning them.').

<sup>8</sup> See Susanna Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon, *Art for the Nation: The Eastlakes and the Victorian Art World*, London: National Gallery Company, 2011, 85, 88.

<sup>9</sup> See NGA, NGA2/5/12: pencil sketch of John Ruskin Wornum by his brother George Porter Wornum, dated May 1878; NGA2/8/1: photograph album, containing photographs of members of the Nicholson and Wornum families, c.1866–79, including photographs of John Ruskin Wornum, age 5 in 1873 (page 10, top left), and age 10 in 1879 (page 10, bottom left). See also NGA1/22: William Boxall correspondence, 1825–1901, which includes letters of a general kind from Ruskin to Boxall during the 1840s and 1850s.

be on Ruskin's developing thinking about what function a public art gallery should serve – what, in his opinion, was best practice in relation to preserving great art and arranging and exhibiting it for public benefit – and who he thought its 'public' was. We will start by plotting Ruskin's ideas in theory and then go on to trace his interventions in practice over two particular episodes at Trafalgar Square. We will see how his views and actions coincided or conflicted with the Gallery's, especially as represented by Eastlake's developing thinking; how Ruskin's ideas about the National Gallery fitted with his later thinking in relation to other public museums and galleries; and how they related to a wider national discourse on the topic during the second half of the nineteenth century.

## Part I. Theoretical concerns

### I. Visibility – (i) picture display: appropriate space, lighting and interior decoration

In the opening paragraph of his letter of January 1847 to *The Times*, Ruskin condemned the National Gallery, calling it a 'European jest', its entrance portico 'preposterous' and its galleries 'melancholy and miserable', and noted that those in charge 'neither knew how to cherish nor how to choose' paintings.<sup>10</sup> After this outburst, he went on to offer constructive criticism on how the pictures at Trafalgar Square might better be displayed, the topic of visibility remaining one of the two most basic principles that Ruskin fought for – the other being the safety of the precious works of art entrusted to the Gallery's safe-keeping. Ruskin's fundamental point here, and one that became a leitmotif in his thinking about art galleries in general, was the simple, if not yet universally acknowledged, one that if pictures were worth hanging, then they ought to be properly visible. To his mind this meant hanging them at eye level. By implication this meant having galleries long enough to prevent pictures from being hung sky-high as well as 'wide enough to allow of the spectators retiring to the distance at which the largest picture was intended to be seen'.<sup>11</sup> Ruskin would expand on the topic a decade later in his witness statements at the 1857 Site Commission, convened to discuss the ideal location for the National Gallery, where he suggested that 'at the utmost, two lines of pictures should be admitted on the walls of the room'.<sup>12</sup> Again, in later writing, he repeatedly noted the desirability of having only a single row of paintings. When writing, for instance, about the J.M.W. Turner collection, whose works on paper he would become involved with curating, Ruskin suggested: 'A *model* gallery should have one line

<sup>10</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 398. On the topic of visibility, see Christopher Whitehead, *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth Century Britain: The Development of the National Gallery*, Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005, 8–16; Giles Waterfield, ed., *Palaces of Art: Art Galleries in Britain, 1790-1990*, London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1991, 49–66.

<sup>11</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 403.

<sup>12</sup> *Report of the National Gallery Site Commission, together with the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, London: printed by Harrison and Sons, 1857 (hereafter 1857 Site Commission); Ruskin's answer in paragraph 2431; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 553.

only'.<sup>13</sup> It was on similar grounds that he came to believe that traditional Tribuna-like displays where the most treasured paintings were amassed in a dense hang in a single gallery, as at the Uffizi and Louvre, while creating a 'noble' effect, did not serve the visitor well because individual details of pictures were lost to view especially in those pictures hung sky-high.<sup>14</sup>

Ruskin was reacting against the norm for dense picture hangs in both private collections and public exhibitions, such as at the annual exhibition mounted by the Royal Academy of Arts in London since its foundation in 1769.<sup>15</sup> The National Gallery had followed this traditional type of display, largely due to its constricted site and hence its lack of wall space. Even after it left its first cramped sites on Pall Mall (where in 1834, when the foundations of Angerstein's house were affected by nearby building works, it moved temporarily to No. 105) for William Wilkins's purpose-built edifice on Trafalgar Square in 1838, its accommodation remained inadequate, so that its pictures continued to be displayed in an overcrowded arrangement (Fig. 4). This was partly because the Gallery occupied only the west wing of Wilkins's building, the east wing having been allocated to the Royal Academy (Fig. 5). Frequent debates arose thereafter, not least at the 1857 Site Commission, about whether one of the institutions should vacate the premises to allow the other more room to expand. Nothing was decided during the decade that Eastlake was in charge of both institutions, presumably because he felt a conflict of interest; and it was only in 1868 that the Academy was relocated to Burlington House, where it still remains. What compounded the overcrowding was the constant expansion of the collection through purchases, gifts and bequests.

On the desirability of displaying paintings so that they were visible, Eastlake had expressed views in keeping with Ruskin's. In 1845, a year after joining the ranks of the Gallery as its keeper, Eastlake had written an open letter to the prime minister, Sir Robert Peel, laying out what he felt were the institution's shortcomings and offering some practical solutions for its improvement.<sup>16</sup> There he stated how necessary it was to have sufficient gallery space: 'I need hardly observe that it is not desirable to cover every blank space, at any height, merely for the sake of clothing the walls, and without reference to the size and quality of the picture. Every specimen of art in a national collection should, perhaps, be assumed to be fit to challenge inspection, and to be worthy of being well displayed.'<sup>17</sup> To ensure the visibility of the pictures, Eastlake advocated allocating galleries with respect to the size of the paintings rather than being content with the notion that any sized room would suit any type of picture. 'Lofty rooms should', he conceived, 'be appropriated chiefly to large pictures, or to pictures with large figures' – here, he was thinking of

<sup>13</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 177.

<sup>14</sup> 1857 Site Commission; Ruskin's answers in paragraphs 2429–32; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 539–53.

<sup>15</sup> See David Solkin, ed., *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, New Haven, CT; London: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and the Courtauld Institute Gallery by Yale University Press, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Eastlake, *The National Gallery: Observations on the Unfitness of the present Building for its Purpose in a Letter to the Right Hon. Sir Robert Peel, Bart. By Charles Lock Eastlake, RA., Keeper of the National Gallery*, London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1845.

<sup>17</sup> Eastlake, *National Gallery*, 7.

grand Italian altarpieces – whereas ‘small, elaborate Dutch and Flemish pictures should, perhaps, in no case be far removed from the light.’<sup>18</sup>

A related point raised by Ruskin concerned the way that paintings were lighted – he wanted them to be properly illuminated so that they were properly visible. Given that there was at the time limited artificial lighting in public buildings and given the often gloomy English weather, exacerbated by London’s smoky atmosphere, people interested in promoting best practice at Trafalgar Square pressed for there to be as much light let into the galleries as possible. Ruskin came to think that the most important pictures in any public gallery should, ideally, be displayed each with lighting specifically adapted for them in their own ‘little recess or chamber’, so that they could be appreciated on their own terms. This idea, initially raised in a private letter to his father of 1852, was given public expression, first in his comments in relation to the display of the Turner collection in 1856 and then, at the 1857 Site Commission, when he spoke about how best to display large paintings.<sup>19</sup> Later on, he experienced the benefits of such an arrangement at first hand, when, as a privileged guest, he was allowed to study two paintings by Vittore Carpaccio in a secluded and well-illuminated room at Venice’s Accademia gallery in 1877.<sup>20</sup>

Eastlake was in agreement about the necessity of good lighting. He was known to be something of an authority on the subject, his acknowledged expertise being called on by colleagues responsible for arrangements at the new Randolph Galleries at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in 1840.<sup>21</sup> In his 1845 letter to Peel, he noted that in public galleries there should ‘always be a superabundance of light; and whatever has been deemed necessary in this respect in the best lighted continental galleries should be rather exaggerated in London.’<sup>22</sup> Many at the time promoted what they regarded as the merits of top lighting for picture galleries, whether privately owned or administered in the public realm. Ruskin was one such, noting in a second letter to *The Times* about the National Gallery, published on 29 December 1852, that a public art gallery ‘ought to consist of a series of chambers or galleries lighted from above’, a point he reiterated on subsequent occasions.<sup>23</sup> Eastlake was also aware of the advantages offered by side-lighting, especially for

<sup>18</sup> Eastlake, *National Gallery*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> John Ruskin to J.J. Ruskin, 1 January 1852, *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, xxviii–xxix; for Ruskin’s comments on the matter in his *Notes on the Turner Gallery* of 1856, see *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 95–181; and for Ruskin’s evidence before the 1857 Site Commission, see *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 539–53.

<sup>20</sup> See *Works of John Ruskin*, XXXIII, 315.

<sup>21</sup> See Mark Norman, “‘Keep those things aired that will stand in need of it’: on the development of preventive conservation at the Ashmolean Museum”, 5 ([https://cdn.axa.com/axa-art%2F3f162f31-8e69-4ede-805f-e856e5f4aab1\\_46e6b7a8-80d5-4e85-b685-659c9d464adf.pdf](https://cdn.axa.com/axa-art%2F3f162f31-8e69-4ede-805f-e856e5f4aab1_46e6b7a8-80d5-4e85-b685-659c9d464adf.pdf), accessed 19 October 2019); David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, 49; Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 169.

<sup>22</sup> Eastlake, *National Gallery*, 9. On the history of lighting in public art galleries, see Michael Compton, ‘The architecture of daylight’, in Waterfield, *Palaces of Art*, 37–47.

<sup>23</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 412. See also *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 176, for a similar statement.

small cabinet pictures.<sup>24</sup> He therefore favoured a mixed approach as the best solution for an eclectic collection such as that of the National Gallery.

Another way to enhance the visibility of paintings, according to Ruskin, was the choice of wall colour against which pictures were hung. He had distinctive views on this topic which reflected his interest in polychromatic medieval Italian buildings. In his witness statements at the 1857 Site Commission, he suggested that 'glowing colours' on gallery walls were preferable to the 'blankness and poverty ... of a dead colour'. He even suggested that, were a new building created for the Turner collection, ideally it would have a blaze of colour on its exterior – he promoted the creation of an effect similar to the Baptistery of Pisa through the introduction of 'the most beautiful British building stones ... variously shafted and inlaid'.<sup>25</sup> The idea of introducing 'the style of architecture so long used in Florence' persisted in his thinking: as late as 1882 he hoped to employ a mixture of 'red brick, faced with the marbles of Derbyshire' for a new but never constructed St George's Museum at Bewdley.<sup>26</sup> Ruskin's preferences had some bearing on the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, built between 1855 and 1860, whose pillars and columns were composed of variously coloured marbles to illustrate the different rocks of the British Isles.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, Eastlake was happy working with the traditional classicizing style of museum architecture. At the request of the architect George Basevi, he had supplied as early as 1837 a design (it depicted the Muses) for the white marble tympanum of the new temple-like Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.<sup>28</sup> In relation to internal wall colouring, Eastlake had noted in his letter of 1845 that any picture 'will be seen to advantage on a ground brighter than its darks and darker than its lights'.<sup>29</sup> After his appointment as director of the National Gallery, he was able to put into effect some of the suggestions that Ruskin and others had been promoting. He started to experiment with lighting, framing

<sup>24</sup> Eastlake continued to reflect on these matters. See Sheldon, *Letters of Elizabeth Rigby*, letter from Elizabeth Eastlake to John Murray, 4 September 1852, 128: 'In Dresden ... the gallery disappoints us. It is worth coming from Berlin here to prove how much the best pictures depend on good lighting, arrangement, and care to please ... But a fine picture gallery is building ... which promises to be ... well adapted to purpose. The plan of the screens and side lights is also adopted here, and we hope will be so in our future Nat: Gallery.'

<sup>25</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 179.

<sup>26</sup> 'Discussion and letters upon the proposal to build a new museum (1882, 1883, 1885)', *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 315. I am grateful to Paul Tucker for drawing this documentation to my attention.

<sup>27</sup> See *Works of John Ruskin*, XVI, 237; John Holmes, *Ruskin, the PreRaphaelites and the Oxford Museum*, York: Guild of St George, 2018; John Illingworth, 'Ruskin and tradition: the case of museums' in Michael Wheeler and Nigel Whiteley, eds, *The Lamp of Memory: Ruskin, Tradition and Architecture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, 39–53; Peter Howell, "'As beautiful as anything I know in civil Gothic", or "a very shabby bit of work of mine": Ruskin and the Oxford Museum' in Rebecca Daniels and Geoff Brandwood, eds, *Ruskin and Architecture*, Reading: Spire Books, 2003, 56–85.

<sup>28</sup> See Robertson, *Eastlake*, 49; Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 38.

<sup>29</sup> Eastlake, *National Gallery*, 15. He also thought about picture frames and said (page 16) that he did not want the viewer 'to be dazzled by a brighter object than the object contemplated' and therefore suggested 'avoiding a superabundance of burnishing' on picture frames.

and wall colour, many pioneering initiatives being recorded in the work diary assiduously kept by Wornum as keeper.<sup>30</sup>

## I. Visibility – (ii) picture cleaning and preventive conservation

A very significant factor affecting the visibility of pictures at the National Gallery was their state of preservation – essentially, how dirty they were. On this complex issue Ruskin did not always see eye to eye with those in charge at Trafalgar Square. During the vacation of 1846, four old masters had been cleaned: Rubens's *Minerva protects Pax from Mars* (Fig. 6), Cuyp's *Landscape, with Cattle and Figures*, Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* and Velázquez's *Philip IV hunting Wild Boar*. The cleaned pictures, when rehung among their much-darkened companions (Fig. 7), struck such a discordant note that members of the public and journalists were concerned with what had been done to make the pictures look the way they now did.<sup>31</sup> On 29 October, the first stinging attack, signed by 'Verax', appeared in *The Times*, where, among other things, it was claimed that the Rubens had been 'flayed'.<sup>32</sup> William Coningham (1815–1884), a Liberal politician and art collector, joined in the debate with a pamphlet in February 1847, which publicized the damage he felt had been inflicted as a result of the cleaning campaign.<sup>33</sup> Ruskin, as we saw, had first entered

<sup>30</sup> See Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 169–71. Some of Eastlake's letters also record his ongoing interest in practical matters such as wall colours. For instance, see Eastlake's letter to Michelangelo Gualandi, who he employed as an art agent in the Bologna area, dated 30 March 1861, where he asks him about the wall colours used in the town's picture gallery: 'mi scriva mi dica di che tinta sono le mura della Pinacoteca di Bologna.' Clearly Gualandi obliged as in the next letter that Eastlake wrote to him on 15 April 1861, he thanked him for sending a paint sample: 'La ringrazio del campione della tinta della Pinacoteca di Bologna.' (Johann Christian Senckenberg University Library, Frankfurt am Main, Michelangelo Gualandi Collection, uncatalogued). I am grateful to Giovanni Mazzaferro for sharing this information with me, pre-publication.

<sup>31</sup> See Jaynie Anderson, 'The first cleaning controversy at the National Gallery, 1846–1853', in Peter Booth et al, eds, *Appearance, Opinion, Change: Evaluating the Look of Paintings*, London: The United Kingdom Institute for Conservation, 1990, 3–7; Norman Brommelle, 'Controversy in 1846', *Museums Journal*, 56, 1957, 257–62; Susanna Avery-Quash, 'Sir Charles Eastlake and conservation at the National Gallery, London', *Burlington Magazine*, 157, December 2015, 846–54.

<sup>32</sup> See J. Morris Moore, *The Abuses of the National Gallery with the Letters of 'A.G.', of 'The Oxford Graduate'; the Defence of Mr. Eastlake, in 'The Daily News', &c, &c. and Remarks upon them. By Verax. To which are added Observations on the Minutes of the Trustees of the National Gallery, including Mr. Eastlake's Report by Verax*, London: William Pickering, 1847. For further details on Morris Moore, see Robertson, *Eastlake*, 81–82, 96–99, 158–61.

<sup>33</sup> William Coningham republished his principal letters to *The Times* (5 and 14 December 1846 and 5 and 8 January 1847) as a pamphlet, *The Picture Cleaning in the National Gallery, with some Observations on the Royal Academy*, which was noted in the *Athenaeum*, 20 February 1847, 204–5. See also Francis Haskell, 'William Coningham and his collection of old masters', *Burlington Magazine*, 133:1063, October 1991, 679; Robertson, *Eastlake*, 96–98. In 1848 Coningham presented the National Gallery with its first Italian 'Primitives': two panels of *Adoring Saints* by Lorenzo Monaco from the S. Benedetto altarpiece, originally located in the monastery of San Benedetto fuori della Porta Pinti, Florence (NG215–216).

the fray the month before. Deploring the personalized attack on Eastlake, he nonetheless called for a far more modest approach to cleaning.

The controversy revolved round the layers above the opaque pigment, which often consisted of a number of translucent glazes and in virtually all cases included a final protective covering of varnish. Although originally nearly colourless, the varnish discoloured over time, its yellowing effect becoming more intrusive as further coats were applied. Ruskin preferred to leave the varnish layers alone, firstly because he was accustomed to them and did not mind their deep golden appearance, and secondly – and more importantly – because he believed that any intervention beyond the most superficial cleaning necessarily affected a painting – and always negatively. Ruskin felt the Gallery should be a safe haven for fragile old masters and that all restoration, by its very nature was akin to destruction, which explains why in his letter of 1847 to *The Times* he likened the 1846 cleaning campaign to the violation of a sanctuary.<sup>34</sup> Having assessed how much damage he felt each painting had undergone, he commented:

It is of little use to be over-anxious for the preservation of pictures which we cannot see; the only question is, whether in the present instance the process may not have been carried perilously far, and whether in future simpler and safer means may not be adopted to remove the coat of dust and smoke, without affecting either the glazing of the picture, or, what is almost as precious, the mellow tone left by time.<sup>35</sup>

Ruskin pursued the matter further in statements he made ten years later at the 1857 Site Commission. He there explained that any injury a picture might suffer through dirt getting ‘into the interstices’ of its painted surface would be made significantly worse by subsequent cleaning: far from restoring the surface to its original state, the intervention would necessarily ‘scrape away some of the grains of paint’.<sup>36</sup>

The National Gallery’s stance was fundamentally different, as it was guided by the advice given and activity overseen by its in-house expert. Eastlake knew more than most about what techniques the old masters had used, what effects they had wanted to achieve, and what modern picture cleaning could do, having ‘had opportunities, for years, of observing the craft of picture cleaning in the atelier of [Pietro] Palmaroli and others at Rome’,<sup>37</sup> and having made ‘further researches into the technical history of painting’ – empirical archival documentation that informed his pioneering *Materials for a History of Oil Painting* in 1847. This experience and

<sup>34</sup> Ruskin held almost identical views in relation to the conservation of historical architecture. For instance, in *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), in its sixth chapter, ‘The lamp of memory’, Ruskin argued that restoration ‘mean[t] the most total destruction which a building can suffer’, and that it was as impossible to restore an historic building sympathetically as it was to raise the dead; see *Works of John Ruskin*, XVI, 242.

<sup>35</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 398–99.

<sup>36</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Ruskin’s answers in paragraphs 2418–20; see *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 543.

<sup>37</sup> NGA, NG16/338/1, transcript of a letter from Eastlake to George Vivian, 5 February 1847, cited in Jacob Simon’s manuscript ‘National Gallery conservation history’. I am grateful to Jacob Simon for sharing his scholarship, ahead of publication, with me.

knowledge encouraged Eastlake to initiate a pioneering cleaning campaign at the Gallery after he was appointed keeper in 1843. This programmatic approach was a step change for the Gallery given that Eastlake's predecessor, William Segquier, despite being tasked 'to attend to the care and preservation of the pictures',<sup>38</sup> had taken a conservative approach, responding as the need arose and then minimally, usually intervening only to the extent of having the pictures surface cleaned, oiled or varnished. When questioned during a Select Committee in 1835 about his work in this area, Segquier claimed that few pictures in the Gallery had been cleaned since its foundation in 1824 as they were not disguised by 'dirt, varnish, re-paint, or other defects'.<sup>39</sup> He said much the same again in the next Select Committee involving the National Gallery, which was set up in 1841.<sup>40</sup> This state of affairs was confirmed by his younger brother, John, a picture cleaner on the Gallery's books from 1830 to 1854. What John Segquier said at an all-important Select Committee of 1853, set up to look into all aspects of the running of the Gallery, in relation to his structural intervention on Sebastiano del Piombo's *Raising of Lazarus*, to tackle its then active worm damage,<sup>41</sup> appears as a rare exception to the Gallery's generally passive *modus operandi*.

In Eastlake's opinion, the pictures in the national collection were discoloured by varnish and dirt – encrustations that did not allow visitors to view the pictures as their creators had intended. For this reason, he was keen to remove all obfuscating layers. His wife, Elizabeth, an author, art critic and art historian in her own right, once described the process of cleaning as 'extracting a painting from its pall',<sup>42</sup> and this metaphor of revivification well expresses Eastlake's thoughts on the matter. Indeed, in his evidence to the 1857 Site Commission, Eastlake declared that dirt did no essential damage but rather sat on the surface 'like an added crust', and as such

<sup>38</sup> The wording comes from the Treasury Minute of 29 June 1824, published in *National Gallery: Return to an Address of the House of Commons*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1853; for further discussion, see Avery-Quash, 'Eastlake and conservation', 848.

<sup>39</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1836, William Segquier's answers in paragraphs 1539–42. See also Alistair Laing, 'William Segquier and advice to picture collectors' in Christine Sitwell and Sarah Staniforth, eds, *Studies in the History of Painting Conservation*, London: Archetype Publications in association with the National Trust, 1998, 97–120.

<sup>40</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on National Monuments and Works of Art*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1841, William Segquier's answers in paragraphs 2510–12.

<sup>41</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery, together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1853 (hereafter 1853 Select Committee), John Segquier's answers in paragraph 720. A report in *The Times* of 27 December 1853, page 5, summarizing the findings of the 1853 Select Committee, noted: 'During the keepership of Mr. William Segquier there is no record of any pictures having been cleaned.'

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Elizabeth Eastlake to Henry Austen Layard, 19 April 1863, quoted in Sheldon, *Lady Eastlake*, 219: 'Sir Chas wants you much to see a picture from Hampton Court – a portrait of Bandinelli called Correggio – which is now under Pinti's hands. He wants you to see what it is covered with before Pinti finally extracts it from its pall, so that you may better judge what Pinti does. The name of Lorenzo Lotto has been laid clear in the corner.' The painting in question is Lotto's *Portrait of Andrea Odoni* in the British royal collection.

could – and should – be removed.<sup>43</sup> In his opinion this process, when carried out correctly, did not take away any of the artists' original glazings, something that those ignorant of the cleaning process and its terminology, according to his wife, wrongly accused him of wanting to do or as having done.<sup>44</sup> Eastlake himself stated publicly that he did not believe that any of the Gallery's paintings had been overcleaned; indeed, in his letter of 1845 to Peel he noted only his 'entire satisfaction' at the work that had been carried out the year before, on 'a considerable number of the pictures in the Gallery', by John Seguier and Thomas Boden Brown under his 'daily superintendence'.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, this first cleaning campaign of 1844 had passed without public comment. However, as a result of the negative public and press reaction to the Gallery's second campaign of 1846, Eastlake was required by the trustees to submit a report of what had gone on. On the back of the submitted evidence, the trustees vindicated the activity authorized and superintended by Eastlake.

Originally keen to pursue his new path, in his letter of 1845 Eastlake had proposed that a spacious and well-lit conservation studio be set up on the same floor as the permanent galleries, to minimize handling risks and so that cleaning work could be done in-house, at any time. Such things he regarded as improvements on the current situation, in which pictures had to wait until the three-month summer closure to be cleaned in the permanent galleries.<sup>46</sup> Eastlake also suggested that scientists should be involved in order to utilize their specialist knowledge, and that if they were to 'examin[e] the grounds, materials, &c., of old pictures, [they would] be enabled to throw considerable light on the practice of painting in its best ages, and to impart useful information to artists'.<sup>47</sup> Pursuing the matter at the 1857 Site Commission, he suggested more than once that chemists would be the most appropriate professionals to discover whether the surfaces of old paintings were physically damaged by accumulated deposits of dust and dirt.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Eastlake's response to paragraph 50.

<sup>44</sup> See Sheldon, *Lady Eastlake*, 131–32: letter from Elizabeth Eastlake to John Blackwood, editor of the *Edinburgh Magazine*, 3 December 1853, in which she asks 'on what authority Sir Chas' name is connected with a passage – page 650 column 1<sup>st</sup> where he is stated to have spoken ambiguously about glazing, & also to have said "he would not hesitate to clean a picture", & "to strip off the whole of its glazings." As a sole answer to this statement I can only assure you of Sir Chas entire denial of such words, or of such a sense in any words; which, independent of his assurance, those in any way acquainted with his practice as a painter will readily believe.' The *Edinburgh Magazine* had published an article by the art critic John Eagles (1783–1855) on the National Gallery in its issue of December 1853 (pages 643–62), in which Eagles had condemned its picture cleaning and misquoted Eastlake. An article in its issue of February 1854, pages 167–84, corrected the misleading statement, noting Eastlake's general aversion to cleaning pictures. For more on Eagles, see Robertson, *Eastlake*, 73, 331, 428: as 'The Sketcher', Eagles' criticism of J.M.W. Turner had galvanized Ruskin to defend the painter through writing *Modern Painters*.

<sup>45</sup> Eastlake, *National Gallery*, footnote on page 17.

<sup>46</sup> Eastlake, *National Gallery*, 1847, 17.

<sup>47</sup> Eastlake, *National Gallery*, 1847, 18.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, 1857 Site Commission, Eastlake's answer in paragraph 23, where he responded to the query whether dust and dirt caused a chemical change to pictures, by noting: 'Perhaps a chemist would be better able to answer that question satisfactorily by

Unsurprisingly, given Eastlake's positive attitude towards scientists, he called on chemists, notably Michael Faraday (1791–1867), to provide advice to the Gallery throughout his directorship.<sup>49</sup> Eastlake was ahead of thinking current at the time, as it would not be until 1934 that a science laboratory was established at Trafalgar Square and longer still before a conservation studio was set up there.

It is important to note in the present discussion that over time Eastlake became far more cautious about picture restoration at the National Gallery. As a result of the furore caused by the 1846 cleaning campaign, no pictures were cleaned in the following vacation and when a further cleaning campaign was advocated in the early 1850s by the lawyer, collector and National Gallery trustee, William Russell (1800–1884), Eastlake, by now a trustee, expressed extreme reluctance. When the proposed picture cleaning did go ahead, a second controversy erupted in 1852.<sup>50</sup> Although Eastlake still believed in the virtues of picture cleaning, he was now hesitant to implement a systematic programme at Trafalgar Square, because, as he put it in one of his witness statements at the 1853 Select Committee, 'the cleaning of pictures is a subject which admits of no proof, and it is one [concerning] which the public mind may be easily unsettled ... It is quite immaterial whether they were cleaned now or ten years hence.'<sup>51</sup> While this may suggest that he recognized the need for public opinion to catch up with specialist knowledge, there is also evidence that Eastlake's own thinking had become more conservative. His clearest acknowledgement of the potentially hazardous nature of cleaning was expressed at the 1857 Site Commission, where he made declarations such as: 'the cleaning of a picture is always, more or less, dangerous'.<sup>52</sup> This sounds much more like something Ruskin would have said and demonstrates the narrowing of the gap in their thinking on picture cleaning during the preceding decade.

This increasingly cautious stance dovetailed with the Gallery's paying ever more attention to preventive conservation. Issues concerning environmental controls had been raised relatively early on in its history, and its initially piecemeal efforts in this direction were noted in a handful of responses at the Select Committees of 1835 and 1841. However, nothing had been taken forward systematically in the wake of either governmental report. Ruskin added his

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analysing the nature of the deposit which is formed on the surface of the picture.' See his similar response about the benefits of utilizing scientists in paragraph 24.

<sup>49</sup> Jacob Simon notes in his manuscript 'National Gallery conservation history' that Michael Faraday 'gave evidence on pollution to the select committees on the National Gallery in 1850 and 1853 and sat on the 1857 National Gallery Site Commission. He provided advice to the Gallery and more widely on glazing pictures (1850), varnishing as a way of protecting pictures (1850, 1853), pollution (1857), backing pictures (1858) and the effects of gas lighting (1859).'

<sup>50</sup> See Norman Brommelle, 'Material for a history of conservation: the 1850 and 1853 reports on the National Gallery', *Studies in Conservation*, 2, 1955, 176–86. The ensuing controversy over the cleaning of nine Gallery paintings focussed on what had been done to Claude's *Landscape with the Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah* ('The Mill') (NG12) and his *Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba* (NG26) and Veronese's *The Consecration of Saint Nicholas* (NG26).

<sup>51</sup> 1853 Select Committee, Eastlake's answer in paragraph 4557.

<sup>52</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Eastlake's answers in paragraphs 24, 51 and 89.

powerful voice to this debate from the mid-1840s, as a keen advocate of implementing measures to ensure the longevity of the pictures while not jeopardizing their safety.<sup>53</sup> In his letter to *The Times* of December 1852, Ruskin suggested several means of ensuring a safe and stable display environment for pictures within public art galleries. Firstly, he advised that pictures should be kept on the first floor of an art gallery, above the storey hosting the 'keepers' apartments, or ... schools' and in any case 'quite independent' of these other facilities, in order to 'diminish the risk of fire'.<sup>54</sup> He also recognized the need for a constant ambient temperature. He explained that the 'walls ought on every side to be surrounded by corridors, so that the interior temperature might be kept equal, and no outer surface of any wall on which pictures were hung exposed to the weather'.<sup>55</sup> More generally, the collection should be kept 'secure from damp, cold, impurity of atmosphere, and every other avoidable cause of deterioration'.<sup>56</sup>

Related issues had been raised by Eastlake in his letter of 1845, where he had drawn attention to the 'imperfect system of ventilating and warming the rooms' at the Gallery, and had pointed to the pioneering work on air filtration which a certain Dr Reid had carried out at the Palace of Westminster.<sup>57</sup> Although the 1850 Select Committee returned to this topic, it would be a century before air conditioning was seriously addressed. In the shorter term, the Gallery sought simpler and cheaper ways of mitigating the spread of dirt that was brought inside partly by visitors and partly from the Gallery's location near to public baths, wash-houses and fountains, whose coal-powered engines sent volumes of smoke through Gallery windows, kept open for ventilation.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the director was able to report to the 1857 Site Commission that since 1855 changes to tackle the ingress of smoke, dust and damp had been implemented through 'the provision of more mats ... more doors ... [and] more effectual scrapers'.<sup>59</sup>

One approach to preventive conservation which was attended to promptly was covering the pictures with sheets of glass. This was yet another subject on which Ruskin could speak knowledgeably from having looked after an art collection of his own. '[A]ll the important pictures in the gallery', he stated in his January 1847 letter to *The Times*, 'should at once be put under glass, and closed, not merely by hinged doors, like the Correggio, but permanently and securely. I should be glad to see this done in all rich galleries, but it is peculiarly necessary in the case of pictures exposed in London, and to a crowd freely admitted four days in the week.'<sup>60</sup>

<sup>53</sup> See Hero Boothroyd Brooks, 'Environmental conditions in relation to easel-painting conservation in the second half of the nineteenth century at the National Gallery and the South Kensington Museum, London', in Andrew Oddy and Sandra Smith, eds, *Past Practice – Future Prospects (The British Museum Occasional Papers: Number 145)*, London: British Museum, 2001, 19–23.

<sup>54</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 413.

<sup>55</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 413.

<sup>56</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 411.

<sup>57</sup> Eastlake, *National Gallery*, 3, 20 and footnote on page 20.

<sup>58</sup> See 1857 Site Commission, Eastlake's answers in paragraphs 17–19.

<sup>59</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Eastlake's response in paragraph 21. See also David Saunders, 'Pollution and the National Gallery', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 21, 2000, 77–94.

<sup>60</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 402.

Glazing was a matter to which Ruskin returned in his letter to *The Times* of December 1852, where he pointed out that pictures so treated had remained in good condition. 'The Raphaels and Correggios have been under glass for many years', he noted, continuing, 'they are as fresh and lovely as when they were first enclosed; they need no cleaning, and will need none for half a century to come'.<sup>61</sup> On that premise, he feared the worst if 'the rest of the pictures [were] left exposed to the London atmosphere and to the operations which its influence [rendered] necessary, simply because they [were] not thought worth a pane of plate glass'.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, in Ruskin's later witness statements at the 1857 Site Commission, he would even assert that pictures were often 'more beautiful under glass' due to the effect of the 'very slight colour in the glass' on the pigments.<sup>63</sup>

The Gallery itself started to evaluate the effect of putting glass in front of its pictures in 1850. In March the trustee William Russell had written on the subject, while acknowledging the negative side effect of reflections in the glass. The prime minister, Lord John Russell (Russell's cousin), gave his approval to start some experiments and as a result Russell, Faraday and Eastlake were appointed to undertake the trial. They published their findings, derived from their own research and from answers to a questionnaire they had circulated to various European public galleries,<sup>64</sup> and Eastlake drew attention to this cutting-edge document in his evidence at the 1857 Site Commission.<sup>65</sup> It was in his witness statements at this hearing that Eastlake admitted the evolution of his thinking, declaring that 'since that mode of protecting pictures [had] been adopted in the National Gallery', he had become 'very much reconciled to it', believing now that glazing provided protection not only 'from the effects of smoke and dust in the atmosphere' but also 'from the careless touch of visitors'.<sup>66</sup> Another recommendation from the 1857 Site Commission had been that pictures might usefully be protected from behind, by enclosure within a box or by covering the backs with tinfoil or some impermeable substance.<sup>67</sup> As indicated earlier, Wornum's diary is a rich source of information on the novel experiments undertaken at the Gallery, including those to find the most effective backing material that was also fireproof (Fig. 8).<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, the programme of mounting paintings with glass, despite the expense, was rolled out gallery-wide.

<sup>61</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 409.

<sup>62</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 409.

<sup>63</sup> 1857 Site Commission: Ruskin's answer in paragraph 2413; see also his answers in paragraphs 2410, 2411 and 2416; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 542.

<sup>64</sup> See their *Report ... to Inquire into the State of the Pictures in the National Gallery* of 24 May 1850. The replies gathered from the international survey arrived too late for inclusion in the commissioners' original report; they were published in November 1850 as a *Further Report on the Subject of the Protection of Pictures in the National Gallery by Glass*.

<sup>65</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Eastlake's answer in paragraph 3.

<sup>66</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Eastlake's answer in paragraph 4.

<sup>67</sup> See Avery-Quash, 'Eastlake and conservation', 850.

<sup>68</sup> See Avery-Quash, 'Eastlake and conservation', 849–50.

## II. Extending the canon – (i) picture acquisition

Another major aspect of curatorship at the National Gallery in which Ruskin helped bring about radical change related to the type of painting deemed eligible for purchase with public funding. What he was reacting against was the restricted content of traditional private collections in Britain. This included the National Gallery's core collection, amassed by Angerstein from the 1790s with the help of various experts, notably Thomas Lawrence (Fig. 9). Many of Angerstein's pictures were recent importations from revolutionary Europe, hailing from important aristocratic French and Italian collections, including the celebrated Orléans collection from Paris. These pictures were in line with academic teaching as to what constituted the best kind of art for students to learn from and the public to enjoy. This meant that apart from a few examples of British art by William Hogarth, Joshua Reynolds and David Wilkie, the collection was dominated by continental old masters, mainly sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian and French paintings in what was commonly referred to as the 'grand manner'. While Sebastiano del Piombo's *Raising of Lazarus* took centre-stage, other important Italian pictures were Raphael's *Pope Julius II* and two works then thought to be by Titian. There were Italianate landscapes by the French painter Claude Lorrain and the Dutch Golden Age painter Aelbert Cuyp, while among Angerstein's northern pictures were Peter Paul Rubens's *Rape of the Sabine Women* and Rembrandt's *Woman taken in Adultery*. The Sir George Beaumont gift of fifteen works in 1826 and the Revd William Holwell Carr bequest of thirty-five pictures in 1831 were comparable in taste as both donors ascribed to and promoted the established hierarchy of artistic schools; and this was also true of the trustees' initial purchases, such as Correggio's *Madonna of the Basket*, bought in 1825.

Together with Anna Jameson (1794–1860)<sup>69</sup> and George Darley (1795–1846),<sup>70</sup> Ruskin was among the first in England to put forward in print alternative proposals regarding the type of art the National Gallery should be buying with tax-payers' money. All three promoted the purchase of examples of the earlier periods of European, especially Italian painting.<sup>71</sup> This new type of acquisition policy had already been put into practice abroad, where unknown artists from eras previously seen as 'primitive' or ugly had come to be the focus of attention in certain leading

<sup>69</sup> On Jameson's efforts, see Susanna Avery-Quash, 'Illuminating the old masters and enlightening the British public: Anna Jameson and the contribution of British women to empirical art history in the 1840s', 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 28, 2019, doi: 10.16995/ntn.832.

<sup>70</sup> On Darley's efforts, see Robyn Cooper, 'The growth of interest in early Italian painting in Britain: George Darley and the *Athenaeum*, 1834–46', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 43, 1980, 201–20.

<sup>71</sup> See Susanna Avery-Quash, 'The growth of interest in collecting early Italian art with special reference to paintings in the National Gallery', in Dillian Gordon, *National Gallery Catalogues. The Fifteenth Century. Italian Paintings. Volume I*, London, 2003, xxvi. Alexander William Crawford Lindsay, 25th Earl of Crawford, 8th Earl of Balcarres (1812–1880), the author of *Sketches of the History of Christian Art* of 1847, was another important early British advocate for early Italian art but he did not engage in direct discussions about the National Gallery's collecting policy.

public art galleries. At the Uffizi in Florence, as early as the 1780s, the assistant director, Luigi Lanzi (1732–1810), created a new ‘Old Paintings’ Gallery, where works by the early Italian masters including Botticelli were first shown in public, and produced a new-format catalogue.<sup>72</sup> Along similar lines, in 1811, the director of the Musée Napoleon, Paris, used looted paintings from across Europe – a result of the Napoleonic Wars – to adorn a new wing dedicated to Italian painting before Raphael. Again, in 1821 the king of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm III, bought the entire collection of Edward Solly (1776–1844), which featured numerous pre-1500 Italian, German and Netherlandish pictures, and which entered the public domain the following decade with the foundation of the Berlin Museum.

In Ruskin’s letter to *The Times* of January 1847 he insisted that hitherto overlooked schools of painting should be acquired: ‘Whatever may be the intrinsic power, interest, or artistical utility of the earlier essays of any school of art, it cannot be disputed that characteristic examples of every one of its most important phases should form part of a national collection.’<sup>73</sup> This attitude helps to explain Ruskin’s listing in the same letter of the names of earlier Italian painters then missing from the Gallery’s permanent collection: ‘no Perugino ... no Angelico, no Fra Bartolomeo, no Albertinelli, no Ghirlandajo, no Verrochio, no Lorenzo di Credi – (what shall I more say, for the time would fail me?)’.<sup>74</sup> Ruskin had not always thought this way, being the first to admit that up to the early 1840s he had been comparatively blind to the merits of historical art, and that the earliest foreign trip he had taken without his parents accompanying him in 1845 had been revolutionary in the development of his thinking in this regard. Between May and July of that year and in Pisa and Florence especially he had been ‘very much taken aback’ by the early Italian masters – Giotto, Benozzo Gozzoli, Ghirlandaio and above all Fra Angelico – with the purpose of studying whom he had come to Italy.<sup>75</sup> Having acquainted himself with the painting of Angelico through books and engravings the previous year, he had been overwhelmed by encountering his work, face to face, in all its vibrant colour or as he put it, ‘rainbow hue’.<sup>76</sup> In particular, he had been amazed by Angelico’s *Annunciation* (c.1430–34), on a small panel set into a reliquary then in the sacristy of the convent church of San Marco, which he thought ‘as near heaven as human hand or mind will ever, or can ever go’.<sup>77</sup>

But it was not just new names from the realms of early Italian art that Ruskin helped to introduce to the public. Among many other artists from different centuries and countries, we may take the sixteenth-century Venetian painter

<sup>72</sup> See Luigi Lanzi, *La real galleria di Firenze accresciuta e riordinata per comando di S.A.R. l’Arciduca Granduca di Toscana*, Pisa: Iacopo Grazioli, 1782.

<sup>73</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 403.

<sup>74</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 404–05. Fra Angelico et al were names heard frequently in the wake of the publication of *De la poésie chétienne* (1836) by A.F. Rio (1797–1874), who did much to popularise the study of Italian ‘Primitives’, although certain of the artists listed by Ruskin, notably Albertinelli and Lorenzo di Credi, were still less than familiar.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in E.T. Cook, *The Life of John Ruskin*, 2 vols, London: George Allen, 1911, I, 181.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Harold I. Shapiro, ed., *Ruskin in Italy: Letters to his Parents, 1845*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, 96, letter no. 50, from Ruskin to his father, Florence, 4 June 1845.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Shapiro, *Ruskin in Italy*, 96, letter no. 50. Ruskin’s drawing of the reliquary (now at Lancaster) was engraved for *Modern Painters* V.

Tintoretto as a second key example of a master who Ruskin did much to place on the artistic map for British audiences. Ruskin experienced a second major revelation during his 1845 trip, when on 24 September he encountered Tintoretto's mural cycle in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice, including the mighty *Crucifixion* in the confraternity's chapel. Writing to his father, in an often-quoted passage, Ruskin recorded: 'I never was so utterly crushed to the earth before any human intellect as I was today, before Tintoret. Just be so good as to take my list of painters, & put him in the school of Art at the top, top, top of everything, with a great black line underneath him to stop him off from everybody [else]'.<sup>78</sup> This reaction to certain old masters paralleled Ruskin's earlier response to some contemporary British painters. Just as Ruskin had taken up his cudgels in the first volume of *Modern Painters* to defend J.M.W. Turner, whose art he felt had been misunderstood and unjustly abused or neglected, in the second volume of that magnum opus he continued to write against fashionable taste, although now he focused on redeeming the reputations of various foreign painters from the more distant past. As he put it in his unfinished autobiography *Praeterita*, in writing the second volume of *Modern Painters* a prime motivation had been to 'explain and illustrate the power of two schools of art unknown to the British public, that of Angelico at Florence and Tintoret in Venice'.<sup>79</sup>

The National Gallery started to acquire and display works by new names, including some of those advocated by authoritative voices beyond its walls like Ruskin. The findings of the 1853 Select Committee, published in 1855, had recommended that the Gallery immediately change track in terms of its future acquisitions. No longer was it to remain a treasure trove of acknowledged masterpieces, but henceforth was to aim to become a survey collection, able to demonstrate visually the whole history of western European painting from its origins in thirteenth-century Italy. In actual fact the same message had arisen from the findings of the earlier 1835 Select Committee, published that year, but nothing had been done in response. On the back of a Treasury Minute of 1855, on the other hand, which resulted from the publication of the 1853 Select Committee's report, the National Gallery was reconstituted. Radical, permanent changes resulted in all aspects of its policies and management. In addition to the creation of an all-powerful new position of director, a £10,000 annual purchase grant was established with an accompanying new acquisition policy that focussed on filling perceived gaps, with priority initially given to early Italian art. Eastlake was happy to effect this change as he had been interested in early art from a young age. Indeed, when

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Shapiro, *Ruskin in Italy*, 211–12, letter no. 132, from Ruskin to his father, Venice, 24 September 1845.

<sup>79</sup> John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, 3 vols, London: George Allen, 1907, II, x, 413; *Works of John Ruskin*, XXXV, 413. Other discoveries and reassessments of painters are recorded in Ruskin's private correspondence. See, for instance, Ruskin's letter regarding his discovery of Cimabue, transcribed in John Lewis Bradley and Ian Ousby, eds, *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 253, letter from Ruskin to Norton, from Assisi, 21 June 1874, where Ruskin describes Cimabue as his 'newly found treasure' and 'a man of personal genius equal to Tintoret'.

he was only twenty-three, Eastlake had expressed a hope that the nascent National Gallery would not neglect acquiring earlier art.<sup>80</sup>

A few preliminary transformative acquisitions had started to be made at Trafalgar Square during Eastlake's keepership. In 1844 the Gallery acquired one of its first pre-1600 paintings, Giovanni Bellini's *Doge Loredan* (Fig. 10). That same year, however, the Gallery also acquired several works by seventeenth-century Italian painters, including Guido Reni's *Susannah and the Elders* (Fig. 11); for although willing even at that early stage to fill gaps to expand its holdings in areas previously neglected,<sup>81</sup> the Gallery was also happy to continue purchasing more conventional and traditionally-esteemed works by the great seventeenth-century masters, including Italian Baroque painters. The acquisition strategy that Eastlake promoted throughout his association with the National Gallery may be summed up in a phrase of Lady Eastlake's regarding her husband's desire to 'give the public new names & wider ideas'.<sup>82</sup> Ruskin also gave the public 'new names' as discussed above, although the number of schools which those artists represented, was fewer. Unsurprisingly, Eastlake's buying activity of 1844 produced a furious reaction from Ruskin, partly because he felt the national collection already had sufficient examples of this type of painting. 'It puts me into a desperate rage', he fumed, 'when I hear of Eastlake's buying Guidos for the National Gallery. He at least ought to know better – not that I should anticipate anything from looking at his art, but from his reputed character and knowledge.'<sup>83</sup> As another crucial passage in his letter of 1847 to *The Times* makes clear, Ruskin did not think much of the later schools in terms of aesthetic merit or moral worth. The Baroque era, in particular, to Ruskin's mind, had brought about only a decline in art and therefore should not be promoted through public purchase and display in the present:

[W]e shall with more wisdom learn of those of whom [Michelangelo] Buonaroti [sic] and Titian learned, and at whose knees they were brought

<sup>80</sup> See Robertson, *Eastlake*, 37, who quotes Eastlake as saying early on: 'I am afraid there is too little interest in England for early pictures which throw often so much light on the leading characteristics of schools of art ... I hope the *historical* view of art will not be ultimately overlooked in our National Gallery.'

<sup>81</sup> Eastlake alluded to the governmental dictate in his evidence in the *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords appointed to consider and report in what Manner the Conditions annexed by the Will of the late Mr Turner, R.A., to the National Gallery can best be carried out (...)* and to report thereon on the House; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix. Session 1861 (hereafter 1861 Select Committee). On being asked (18 July 1861, page 4, paragraph 15) 'Upon what principle do you proceed in purchasing pictures for the National Gallery ...?', Eastlake replied: 'At present, I should say that the great object is to procure the finest pictures of any period, but in 1853 the Committee of the House of Commons on the subject of the National Gallery, expressed a distinct wish in their report, that works of the early masters should be added to the Gallery, and I have acted in accordance with that expressed wish for some years, when good opportunities have presented themselves.'

<sup>82</sup> Letter from Elizabeth Eastlake to Mrs Austen, 26 September 1858, cited in Sheldon, *Lady Eastlake*, 185.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Ruskin to H.G. Liddell, 12 October 1844; quoted in Robertson, *Eastlake*, 84.

up, and whom to their day of death they ever revered and worshipped, than of those wretched pupils and partisans who ... betrayed [Art's] trusts, darkened her traditions, overthrew her throne, and left us where we now are, stumbling among its fragments.<sup>84</sup>

This statement helps to explain Ruskin's response to a question he was asked a decade later at the 1857 Site Commission concerning whether students who attended his elementary drawing class at the Working Men's College in London would prefer to look at an early Italian painting or a Baroque one. His definite and immediate reply was: 'I cannot tell you, because my working men would not be allowed to look at a Bolognese Picture'.<sup>85</sup>

## II. Extending the canon – (ii) frameworks for display

Traditionally, pictures in private collections had been arranged in what Giles Waterfield has defined as an 'aesthetic hang',<sup>86</sup> where one important work would take centre-stage on a wall, flanked by symmetrical groupings of pictures, chosen according to their size, prevailing tone, scale of the figures or subject matter rather than by artist or date. At the start of the nineteenth century such an arrangement remained the norm in private collections all over Europe and was then extended into the earliest public art galleries. The National Gallery was certainly arranged like this at its foundation. This kind of display worked well for those 'in the know' – the connoisseurs – but in the context of a public museum, where the general public needed some guidance, it no longer seemed appropriate or useful. People started to question its validity, including Anna Jameson, who, in her pioneering *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London* of 1844, contrasted 'variety' as a principle suited to the arrangement of pictures in a private collection with the 'formal system' needful in a public one. 'A public gallery,' she believed, 'should be arranged with a view to instruction; a certain system of classification and chronological progression should be aimed at.'<sup>87</sup>

Many hoped that after the Gallery re-opened in the Wilkins building in 1838 there would be the chance to introduce a new type of hang along chronological lines, such as would reflect the influx of new schools of painting, in particular the early Italian schools. But in the early years in Trafalgar Square overcrowding remained such a problem that the positioning of paintings was largely dictated by their size, so that the displays appeared random and were confusing. It even seemed as though things were going backwards not forwards, for at least there had been some rationale behind the aesthetic-style picture display of the national collection in Angerstein's house. In the 1840s, when things were at their worst, strong criticisms

<sup>84</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 404.

<sup>85</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Ruskin's answer in paragraph 2451; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 546.

<sup>86</sup> See Giles Waterfield, 'Picture hanging and gallery decoration', in Waterfield, *Palaces of Art*, 49–66.

<sup>87</sup> Anna Jameson, *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London*, London: Saunders and Otley, 1844, 384. On the topic of arranging paintings by school and date, see Whitehead, *Public Art Museum*, 16–27.

appeared in the press. Typical of these was an article by the Anglo-Scottish art teacher, writer and manager of the Royal Scottish Institution, Charles Heath Wilson (1809–1882), in which he compared galleries in Munich, Versailles and the Vatican with the muddled displays in Britain's art galleries. While not mentioning the National Gallery by name, Wilson surely had it in the front of his mind:

It is a singular system which arranges pictures by the size, upholsterer-fashion, without the slightest reference to school, sentiment or subject, and crowds them together in shabby rooms of a monotonous dingy tint, with dirty floors, and miserable furniture and fittings ... Naturalisti, Tenebristi, and all the other *isti* jumbled together, the saints of Italy and the nudities of the Flemish School in strange juxtaposition.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the continuing limitations of the building, various pioneering trials took place to arrange pictures by schools. According to an article of 1887 on the history of displaying pictures at the National Gallery, the earliest of such efforts had occurred in 1853: 'The Venetian works were hung together on one side of a room, while examples of other Italian Schools occupied the rest. Dutch and Flemish pictures had a room to themselves, but this distinction could not yet be accorded to the Spanish School ... [and] the contents of other rooms remained unclassified.'<sup>89</sup> Here then we find the beginnings of a logical – if not fully geographical or historical hang.<sup>90</sup> Then in 1856, the year after Eastlake became director, a second, more modest rearrangement took place. In 1857, further efforts were made. Although, due to its size, Veronese's *Family of Darius before Alexander* had to be hung in the same room as the Flemish pictures, 'an attempt was made to group together some of the earlier examples of Italian art in a *quattrocento* room'.<sup>91</sup> When a major new top-lit gallery, designed by the architect James Pennethorne, was opened in 1861, it was initially devoted to the Italian Renaissance collection (Fig. 12). Despite having to be abandoned almost immediately after Eastlake's death in 1865 for want of room, the principle of displaying works by school and date was taken up again and extended at Trafalgar Square at the end of the century by his eponymous nephew, Charles Locke Eastlake (1836–1906),<sup>92</sup> who succeeded Wornum as keeper in 1878.

Ruskin initially agreed that an optimum arrangement was to hang pictures in a national gallery by artist, school and date. In his letter to *The Times* of December

<sup>88</sup> C.H. Wilson, 'Some remarks upon lighting picture and sculptures galleries', *Art Journal*, 1 August 1851, 205–7; here 207.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Locke Eastlake, 'Picture hanging at the National Gallery', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, 22, 1887, 817–26, here 817.

<sup>90</sup> These efforts were acknowledged by commentators outside the Gallery. For instance, in his evidence at the 1861 Select Committee, Richard Redgrave, a senior administrator at the South Kensington Museum, in response to the question, 'In what way would you suggest that the pictures in the National Gallery should be arranged?', replied: 'I think that the old masters should be thrown into schools, which arrangement has been begun very judiciously' (19 July 1861, page 23, paragraph 183).

<sup>91</sup> Eastlake, 'Picture hanging', 818.

<sup>92</sup> For a discussion of Charles Locke Eastlake's work at the National Gallery, see Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *Art for the Nation*, 207–23.

1852 he argued not only that ‘the works of every master should be collected together, either in the same apartment or in contiguous ones,’<sup>93</sup> but also that pictures should be ‘arranged in chronological and ethnological order’<sup>94</sup> to show developments. At the 1857 Site commission, he repeated this preference: ‘my great hope respecting the National Gallery is, that it may become a perfectly consecutive, chronological arrangement.’<sup>95</sup> Again, when asked, ‘Do you hold much to the archaeological, chronological and historical series and teaching of pictures?’, Ruskin answered with a simple, bold ‘Yes’.<sup>96</sup> Yet it is clear that he came to hold other, distinctive views concerning how the pictures at the National Gallery might best be presented to its visitors, advocating a number of fresh approaches which questioned current attitudes and assumptions about who the gallery should be serving and therefore what type of art it should be displaying and how that art should be presented. At one point, Ruskin put forward the idea that there should be two different types of picture gallery running in parallel which could serve the diverse needs, as he perceived them, of two different kinds of visitor. The National Gallery fell into one category, that of the ‘great Gallery’, which comprised art institutions full of top-quality paintings, aimed at small groups of specialists who would not mind travelling to a more remote location to see these fine works in a quieter setting. Simultaneously, there should be a second type of institution, which Ruskin called a ‘popular Gallery’, displaying work of secondary importance and open to larger crowds of general visitors in an easily accessible location.<sup>97</sup>

A second unconventional idea of Ruskin’s was to mix and match paintings in the setting of a public art gallery with a selection of very different kinds of objects – not only works on paper such as drawings and engravings, but also sculpture and other decorative art objects that had been produced at the same time and in the same place as the paintings. In his opinion such displays would enhance understanding of the society that had created these objects – a position in keeping with his belief in the interconnections and essential unity existing between different art forms, as illustrated, for instance, in his lecture of 1859 on ‘The unity of art’.<sup>98</sup> Ruskin’s proposal also attests to his belief that when looking at works of art the public should be encouraged to think about questions other than connoisseurial ones concerning attribution and dating, notably why a picture had been painted in the first place and what it revealed about the society that had created it.

## **Part II. Ruskin’s direct interventions at the Gallery**

### **I. Proposal for the National Gallery to purchase paintings by Tintoretto**

Ruskin’s theories about ideal gallery layouts and the types of paintings to acquire and display help explain both the nature of and his reactions to his direct dealings

<sup>93</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 412.

<sup>94</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XII, 413.

<sup>95</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Ruskin’s answer in paragraph 2401; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 541.

<sup>96</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Ruskin’s answer in paragraph 2473; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 549.

<sup>97</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Ruskin’s answer in paragraph 2458; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 547.

<sup>98</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XVI, 293–318.

with the National Gallery on two occasions in the 1850s, first over an old master (Tintoretto), and then over a contemporary British painter (Turner). During Ruskin's stay in Venice in the winter of 1851, he learned that certain altarpieces by Tintoretto might be available for purchase from their ecclesiastical settings, contacting Eastlake on the subject on 10 March 1852,<sup>99</sup> and then in March and April notifying a Gallery trustee, Lord Lansdowne. At this point there were four paintings under discussion: Tintoretto's *Crucifixion* in San Cassiano (Fig. 13), the *Marriage at Cana* in the Madonna della Salute, another *Crucifixion* in SS Giovanni e Paolo, and *The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* in the Madonna dell'Orto.<sup>100</sup> The trustees wanted a second opinion and so Eastlake wrote to Ruskin and asked him to contact Edward Cheney (1803–1884), a mutual acquaintance based in Venice, who, as well as being a bibliophile, art collector and patron of the arts, acted as an unofficial art consultant for the Gallery – he would go on to supply information regarding the Lombardi-Baldi collection of early Italian art from which the Gallery secured twenty-two examples in 1857.<sup>101</sup> Cheney's reply to Ruskin, which the latter duly forwarded to Eastlake, included estimates of the pictures' financial value. Ruskin seriously disagreed with the stated estimates, suggesting in his accompanying letter to Eastlake that the pictures were worth double what Cheney thought.<sup>102</sup> At this point Ruskin, presumably keen to secure some kind of deal, now focussed on just two works – the San Cassiano *Crucifixion* and *The Marriage at Cana* – at a suggested combined cost of £12,000. But things did not go in Ruskin's favour and the trustees rejected his proposal.

Recalling what Ruskin had said about Tintoretto's art largely explains why Ruskin was so keen to provide London with examples of the Venetian seicento master's work. He had said of his epiphany at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco: 'I had seen that day the Art of Man in its full majesty for the first time; and that there was a strange and precious gift in myself enabling me to recognize it.'<sup>103</sup> This passage is crucial in relation both to Ruskin's understanding of the unsurpassed greatness of Tintoretto's art and his dawning awareness of himself as a chosen,

<sup>99</sup> See Robertson, *Eastlake*, 126–28, who cites Ruskin's letter to Eastlake of 10 March 1852, preserved in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, MS. MA 2249.

<sup>100</sup> NGA, NG5/89/7: extract from letter from Ruskin to Marquess of Lansdowne, 25 March 1852, asking him to use his influence to get Ruskin the authority to buy some Tintoretts in Venice; NG5/90/3, extract of a letter from Ruskin to Marquess of Lansdowne, dated 30 April 1852, naming pictures by Tintoretto recommended for purchase.

<sup>101</sup> See Avery-Quash, 'The growth of interest in collecting early Italian', xxiv–xliv.

<sup>102</sup> NGA, NG5/91/2: letter from Cheney to Ruskin regarding the Tintoretts, 18 May 1852; and NG5/91/3: letter from Ruskin to Eastlake regarding the Tintoretts with transcript of reply from Cheney, 19 May 1852. Cheney had estimated the San Cassiano *Crucifixion* and *Marriage at Cana* at a maximum of £3,000 and the other *Crucifixion* at a maximum of £500; Ruskin thought the San Cassiano *Crucifixion* was worth £7,000 and *The Marriage at Cana* £5,000 and the other *Crucifixion* £3,000. Robertson, *Eastlake*, 127, note 14, quotes the following dismissive remark of August 1851 by Cheney about Ruskin to Lord Holland: 'I am surprised that he should have succeeded in forming the sort of reputation that he has acquired. He has so little taste that I am surprised he admired Holland House.'

<sup>103</sup> Epilogue to *Modern Painters*, II, quoted in Cook, *Life of John Ruskin*, 2 vols, London: George Allen, 1911, I, 186.

prophetic mouthpiece. Just as his namesake, the Jewish prophet and preacher John the Baptist, had been destined, according to Christian belief, to foretell Christ's advent as the 'Son of Man' bringing spiritual salvation through word and deed, Ruskin believed he had been chosen by God as a messenger tasked with bringing salvific images – the 'Art of Man' – together with a truthful interpretation of that art to Queen Victoria's Christian subjects. This position, in turn, makes sense of the heightened language that Ruskin adopted when he wrote to Gallery officials to introduce his offer. Of the artist, he proclaimed 'no man who ever touched canvass possessed powers so magnificent as those of Tintoret',<sup>104</sup> and of his own aim to get examples into the national collection, he spoke equally passionately. 'The more I study him ... the more I regret that we have none of his works in England', he noted in one letter, and in another: 'Let me have credentials ... and I will send home ... two such pictures as English eyes never yet saw.'<sup>105</sup> He had already published what he thought of the greatness of Tintoretto's paintings in *Modern Painters* II and in the 'somewhat copious notices' of the painter included in *The Stones of Venice's* 'Venetian Index',<sup>106</sup> but now he wanted to bring actual examples from Venetian churches to London. According to his then-wife Effie, when the Gallery turned down his offer Ruskin was beside himself with rage and disappointment, and would have written a very 'unbusinesslike letter to the trustees' had she not intervened.<sup>107</sup> Ruskin must have felt that the trustees were rejecting his prophetic message and that by stopping examples of exemplary art reaching London, they were failing in their duty of service to the British public.

Officials at Trafalgar Square, however, saw things differently. Firstly, the Gallery already had an example of Tintoretto's work, even if Ruskin mistakenly stated otherwise: Tintoretto's *Saint George and the Dragon* (Fig. 14) had been part of the national collection since the accessioning of the Holwell Carr bequest in 1831. Secondly, they would have taken seriously Cheney's opinion that the SS Giovanni e Paolo *Crucifixion* was not a fine example nor in good physical condition. There would have been concern too that Ruskin's estimate was so much higher than Cheney's and that if Ruskin's offer were accepted those high prices might set an unhelpful precedent in the old master art market.

Interestingly, this was not the last time that Ruskin thought of proposing the purchase of a Tintoretto to the National Gallery. Some twenty-five years later, on 3 March 1877, he drafted a letter to the Gallery's third director, Frederic Burton (1816–1900; he succeeded Boxall in 1874), in which he proposed the purchase of a Tintoretto just 'discovered' by him in 'the chapel of the Hospital of St Mark' (i.e. S.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Robertson, *Eastlake*, 126.

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Ruskin to Eastlake, 10 March 1852, quoted in *Ruskin and his Circle*, London: Arts Council, 1964, 73 (cat. no. 331).

<sup>106</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XI, 360. The index also, albeit more briefly, touched on works in Venice by other painters in the city, namely Giovanni Bellini, Veronese and Titian, ideas that were developed in supplements to *St Mark's Rest* (1877 and 1879) and in his guidebook to the Accademia, Venice.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Robertson, *Eastlake*, 128.

Lazzaro dei Mendicanti), in the Venetian sestiere of Castello.<sup>108</sup> It represented the pilgrimage of St Ursula, a Christian princess and a martyr saint whose story would increasingly dominate Ruskin's thoughts once he had come to associate her with Rose La Touche, the Irish girl to whom he proposed marriage in 1866. Prompted by his friend, the painter Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), Ruskin had become aware of and had first studied the earlier cycle of paintings of St Ursula's life by Vittore Carpaccio on a visit to Venice in 1869. Three years later he published an interpretation of one painting in the series, *The Dream of St Ursula*, in *Fors Clavigera*,<sup>109</sup> where in 1876 there appeared a comprehensive account of her life written for him by an Oxford pupil, James Reddie Anderson (1850–1907).<sup>110</sup> Now, though, he was thinking about how to acquire for London's National Gallery an image of St Ursula by Tintoretto – perhaps as an appropriate companion for the painter's representation of St George, England's patron saint after whom Ruskin named his Guild. Acting out of 'prudence', however, Ruskin never sent the letter.

With hindsight, we might think that the Gallery missed an opportunity in 1852 when it rejected Ruskin's offer to act on its behalf. After all, when it did eventually acquire an altarpiece by Tintoretto of the kind Ruskin had in mind, it was a very damaged example: Tintoretto's *Christ Washing the Feet of the Disciples*, originally from the Venetian church of S. Trovaso, purchased in 1882. However, the Gallery did secure the excellently-preserved *Family of Darius before Alexander* by another great Venetian cinquecento painter, Paolo Veronese, in 1857. Ruskin received the news of this acquisition while giving evidence at the 1857 Site Commission. His immediate response was generous, noting that 'nothing had given [him] such pleasure in a long time' and that it was 'the most precious Paul Veronese in the world ... and quite a priceless picture'.<sup>111</sup> Ruskin was clearly delighted that something he regarded as a treasure was now safely deposited for posterity in the public domain.

## II. The Turner bequest at the National Gallery and Ruskin's supervision of its works on paper

The short-lived exchange with the Gallery over potential acquisitions of paintings by Tintoretto in 1852 was followed by a far more sustained and involved interaction over the bequest of J.M.W. Turner. Although the painter had died in December 1851, his bequest to the nation was settled on the Gallery through a Chancery Decree only in 1856, after a protracted legal dispute with Turner's relatives.<sup>112</sup> With

<sup>108</sup> The draft was enclosed in a letter to Joan Severn, preserved in the Ruskin collection at the University of Lancaster (L108(E)). I am grateful to Paul Tucker for sharing this information with me.

<sup>109</sup> Letter 20, *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVII, 334–51.

<sup>110</sup> Letter 71, 4 October 1876, *Works of John Ruskin*, XXVIII, 740–42. Ruskin had continued to study Tintoretto's work in Venice, not least Tintoretto's *Paradise* in the Accademia in June 1870.

<sup>111</sup> 1857 Site Commission, Ruskin's answer in paragraph 2498; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 552.

<sup>112</sup> See Selby Whittingham, *An Historical Account of the Will of J.M.W. Turner, R.A.*, 2nd edn, London: J.M.W. Turner R.A. Publications, 1996.

this decision, the Gallery became responsible for well over 20,000 paintings, watercolours, and drawings.<sup>113</sup> Inadvertently, the gift put huge pressure on the Gallery, not least in terms of space because, according to the will, the entire Turner collection was supposed to be housed within the National Gallery's walls within a decade of painter's death. To be able to show a selection of works in a timely fashion, temporary offsite accommodation was hastily found. Initially, parts of the Turner bequest were hung in two rooms at Marlborough House, a Government property then unoccupied. A display of twenty oil paintings was mounted by the end of November 1856. This was followed by one of a selection of the 102 finished watercolours, held at the end of January 1857. By the autumn of 1859, however, when Marlborough House reverted to royal usage, it was reported that 'all the pictures and the majority of the Turner Drawings [had been] removed to [the] South Kensington [Museum]',<sup>114</sup> with the remainder put in store at Trafalgar Square. Just before the ten-year stopgap expired, the exiled portion was returned to the National Gallery, where a 'Turner Gallery' was opened at the end of 1861.<sup>115</sup>

The accessioning of the Turner collection into the national holdings had other significant repercussions. It compelled the Gallery to extend its traditional curatorship from just paintings, whether in oil, tempera or fresco, to encompass watercolours and drawings, a collecting strategy which, as noted above, Ruskin himself would come increasingly to favour. Traditionally, the British Museum had been England's national repository for works on paper, and the National Gallery at this point owned only very few works on paper, all of which had come into collection as gifts not purchases.<sup>116</sup> It was largely due to the lack of staff and to the limited experience of Eastlake and Wornum that Ruskin was brought in to assist with the works on paper, initially as an eighteen-month attachment from the summer of 1857.

Ruskin, who became a friend of Turner's in 1840 and whose family's art collection contained a good number of Turners, felt that he possessed an understanding of the artist's life and work superior to that of anyone else, which

<sup>113</sup> Wornum, *Turner Gallery*, xxi, gave the following statistics: 'Finished pictures, one hundred; Unfinished (the majority mere beginnings, and of little or no value of any kind), one hundred and eighty-two; Drawings and sketches of all kinds, nineteen thousand and forty-nine (of these about five hundred are of a high class, and about fifteen thousand are mere lead-pencil outlines). Total of bequest, nineteen thousand three hundred and thirty-one pictures, drawings, and sketches.'

<sup>114</sup> For information concerning the Turner drawings during their time at the South Kensington Museum, see the National Gallery's board minutes: NGA, NG1/4, 202-3, 279, 352, 366; the quotation comes from 202-3.

<sup>115</sup> See Wornum, *Turner Gallery*, xxiii, where he noted that the six rooms comprising the entire National Gallery 'together contain some four hundred pictures only, showing that five times the present accommodation would be but a moderate provision, even for the actual collection.'

<sup>116</sup> For example, Agostino Carracci's two huge Farnese Gallery Cartoons of about 1599 were presented to the National Gallery by Lord Francis Egerton in 1837 (NG147-148). Baldassare Peruzzi's drawing of *The Adoration of the Magi* of 1522-23 was given by Lord Vernon in 1839; it was formally transferred to the British Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings in 1994.

earned him the right to be involved in the public administration of the Turner bequest. Immediately after the painter's death in December 1851, he had started mulling over what a future Turner Gallery might look like, telling his father in January 1852 that he wanted to 'take the position of his Interpreter to future generations',<sup>117</sup> a role that would enable him to continue the critical work he had already devoted to this artist, most notably in the first two volumes of *Modern Painters*.<sup>118</sup>

Records in the Gallery's archive reveal something of a tussle between Ruskin and Gallery officials as he sought to promote himself as the rightful curator and exegete of Turner's works on paper. Though lacking any official position within the rigidly hierarchical Victorian art world, Ruskin adroitly manoeuvred himself in such a way that the institution finally brought him on board. To raise awareness of how important it was for the nation to care for Turner's oeuvre, and to publicise his offer to undertake this activity himself and for free, Ruskin published another letter in *The Times* (on 28 October 1856) which, unlike those of 1847 and 1852, was signed.<sup>119</sup> Having followed this up a month later with a private letter to the Gallery's trustees, Ruskin went on to approach the prime minister, William Gladstone, again by letter (on 8 December) but this time over the heads of Gallery officials, whose response to the letter he had written them he had not waited five days to hear. At first officials at Trafalgar Square apparently wished to block or curtail any Ruskinian involvement with the Turner collection. Bearing in mind his record of attacking the Gallery in the press, some of them doubtless viewed him as a troublemaker best kept at arm's length. This interpretation may explain why it was that when, in November 1856, the director appointed a small committee to consider the requirements for exhibiting a selection of paintings and drawings by Turner, Ruskin was not included.<sup>120</sup> Another apparent rebuff took place a month later, when Ruskin received a letter from the keeper, dated 16 December, thanking him for his

<sup>117</sup> See Warrell, *Through Switzerland*, 17, who quotes a letter from Ruskin to his father at the end of February 1852 in which he declared of Turner: 'my great mission is to interpret him.' His self-proclaimed task was referred to by other writers; Lady Eastlake, for instance, in her review of Walter Thornbury's *Life of J.M.W. Turner* (1862), referred to Ruskin, ironically, as 'the especial prophet of Turner' (*Quarterly Review* for April 1862, page 474).

<sup>118</sup> See the letter written by H. Hewitt, a landscape painter, to Francis McCracken, a collector, about the impact of *Modern Painters*: 'It is almost as though Turner had written an important & mysterious Letter & sealed it, and the Graduate [Ruskin] has broken the seal, & laid open the Epistle to be seen by all.'; quoted in Warrell, *Through Switzerland*, 14.

<sup>119</sup> *The Times*, 28 October 1856, 6–7; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 81–86. On 30 October, in the same newspaper (page 4), a critical response to Ruskin's letter of 28 October from 'A Turnerite' was published, who denounced Ruskin as an 'experimentalist in the matter, and therefore the last person to be intrusted with such an important charge'. A two-part editorial, 'The Turner Gallery at Marlborough-house', was published in *The Times*, 10 and 13 November 1856 (on page 7 in each case), which restated Ruskin's offer to help catalogue the works on paper.

<sup>120</sup> NGA, NG1/4: report of the meeting of the trustees of the National Gallery, 17 November 1856, 60. The committee members chosen by Eastlake from within Gallery staff were Wornum and the Gallery's trustee William Russell, and its external members were Turner's patron and Ruskin's collecting rival, H.A.J. Monro of Novar, and the artists William Clarkson Stanfield and David Roberts.

further thoughts about how best to frame Turner's sketches but noting that the Gallery had already anticipated them and so did not need any further assistance.<sup>121</sup> In the end, Ruskin's help was accepted; a board meeting of 9 February 1857 decided that he should, after all, produce a prototype for a mount and frame along the lines he had already proposed.<sup>122</sup> Interestingly, Ruskin was never remunerated for his work, nor was his earlier generous offer to pay for the materials associated with the mounting and framing of a hundred Turner drawings taken up.<sup>123</sup> Presumably, the Gallery did not want to feel beholden to Ruskin in any way.

Ruskin and Eastlake each concentrated on looking after a different part of Turner's vast oeuvre. While Eastlake, previously trained as a painter and now simultaneously in post as president of the Royal Academy – and himself a very long-standing friend of Turner's<sup>124</sup> – focussed on Turner's works in oil, Ruskin was tasked with curating Turner's watercolours, which suited him very well given his often-voiced opinion that this part of Turner's output was the key to a proper understanding of the artist, not least as the founder and genius of the British school of watercolour painting.<sup>125</sup> Specifically, Ruskin believed that Turner's *unfinished* watercolour sketches were superior to his finished drawings and oils because they were 'interesting in subject' and 'in most instances as true to the character of the places they represent as they are admirable in composition' whereas his elaborated drawings and paintings had been 'warped from [their] first impression by attempts

<sup>121</sup> NGA, NG6/1: letter from Wornum to Ruskin, 16 December 1856. It was noted that the Gallery had determined to show 'about a hundred of the best drawings selected from several classes' and that they would be displayed 'not in a situation exposed to the sun' and when 'not on exhibition will be covered by a curtain'.

<sup>122</sup> NGA, NG6/2/344, letter from Wornum to Ruskin, agreeing to a trial of his method for framing the Turner drawings, 3 February 1857. For other letters from Ruskin in relation to framing the works on paper in the Turner collection, see NGA, NG5/134/3: drawing of a frame by John Ruskin, 2 March 1857; and NGA, NG5/220/1 (2 March 1857).

<sup>123</sup> See NGA, NG5/226/4: letter from Ruskin regarding the mounting of Turner drawings, 30 May 1857, where he notes that 'there was a great difference between using my own money in this business and the public money. With my own, I could have provided a temporary piece of cabinet making which would have answered the purpose of showing what I meant; (and all practical purposes of exhibition,) until I had time to replace it by a thorough piece of work. But now I use the public money, and I am doing the thorough work at once – which takes both more thought and more time, for a good upholsterer won't work in a hurry.'

<sup>124</sup> Eastlake did much to promote his friend's reputation, for instance, penning a notice about Turner's activity in Rome for the January 1820 issue of the *London Magazine* and reviewing an exhibition of Turner's paintings in Rome in December 1828. Turner and Eastlake also influenced each other's work as painters. For example, two of Turner's most 'theoretical' paintings, *Shade and Darkness* and *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory)* – were inspired by Goethe's colour theory and were painted in 1840, the year in which Eastlake's translation of Goethe's treatise on colour, *Zur Farbenlehre*, was published. See John Gage, 'Turner's academic friendships: C.L. Eastlake', *Burlington Magazine*, 101, December 1968, 677–85.

<sup>125</sup> Jacob Simon's manuscript 'National Gallery conservation history', especially the section '2.4: Eastlake, Wornum and the treatment of modern British paintings', contains much relevant material in relation to how Gallery officials looked after Turner's oil paintings and works on paper.

at idealism'.<sup>126</sup> Ruskin's understanding of the value of Turner's watercolour sketches explains why he was so keen to prepare an exhibition of them, which, as Ian Warrell has pointed out, was an unusual decision when 'the prevailing aesthetic favoured paintings that demonstrated the laborious efforts of the artist to capture precise details'.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, even in the first catalogue that Ruskin produced on the Turner collection, *Notes on the Turner Gallery at Marlborough House* of January 1857, which was dedicated to a discussion of the thirty-four Turner *oil* paintings chosen for display in late November in Marlborough House,<sup>128</sup> he took the opportunity to promote Turner's *works on paper* by urging their display in public museums.<sup>129</sup> While in certain quarters there was a new favouring of Turner's finished watercolours,<sup>130</sup> Ruskin's promotion of the *unfinished late* ones was a notable milestone in the reception of Turner's work. Indeed, through his writings and display ideas in relation to Turner's work, Ruskin upset traditional ways of thinking about hierarchies of media, finish and genre, pressing for a new order in which watercolour had as much weight as oil painting, 'non finito' as much as finished work, and landscape as much as history painting. This approach had echoes of the way in which, as discussed above, Ruskin had promoted the acceptance of new names into the old master canon through pressing for the acquisition and display of then unfashionable and little-known artists and his equally distinctive advocacy of displaying oil paintings next to other types of the fine and decorative arts.

As far as Turner's works on paper were concerned, the Gallery undertook an extensive cleaning programme of these, given that they were in a very poor state when Ruskin and Wornum came to assess them. It is not easy to trace the procedures they adopted, as the Gallery's Manuscript Catalogue does not record their work as rigorously as it does work of the same kind carried out on its old master collection or indeed on Turner's oil paintings, which were found to be in a condition no less parlous than the works on paper. A source of increasing frustration to Ruskin was the display spaces designated to them that he felt were

<sup>126</sup> Turner, *Catalogue of the Turner Sketches*, 6–7. See also *The Times*, 28 October 1856; *Collected Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 82, where Ruskin described the late watercolour sketches – 'Studies from nature, or first thoughts for pictures; in colour' – as 'more precious and lovely than any finished drawings'.

<sup>127</sup> Warrell, *Through Switzerland*, 9; see also NGA, NG5/131/4; NG1/4, 64.

<sup>128</sup> See *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 102 and note.

<sup>129</sup> In his appendix devoted to discussing 'the best mode of exhibiting that collection', Ruskin noted (*Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 178) that sketches and studies and engravings should be acquired.

<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, the editorial in *The Times*, 10 November 1856, 10, where Turner's works on paper are promoted as the most important part of his oeuvre: 'To know what he was we should see all his works – in water colours as well as those in oil. (...) He was even greater in his drawings than in his pictures, and some of the highest merits of the latter are due to the success with which he contrived to impart to his oil pictures the peculiar qualities of water-colour drawings – air and luminousness.' This stance was repeated in the second part of the editorial, published on 13 November 1856, where it was noted that Turner's watercolours were better crafted and therefore in a better physical condition as well as more attractive being less marred by 'the extravagancies and eccentricities which disfigure his later works in oil'.

detrimental to the physical condition of the works on paper, quite apart from the fact that they were neither sufficiently ample nor adequately lit to ensure optimum viewing conditions for visitors. In line with what he had urged earlier on, Ruskin advised that, ideally, those works on paper chosen for display should 'be arranged in two rows along a well lighted wall not exposed to sunshine'.<sup>131</sup> It was, indeed, largely on the grounds of inadequate space and light that Ruskin and others condemned the Turner Gallery's first home at Marlborough House as not fit for purpose.<sup>132</sup> Although Ruskin admitted that the Turner collection's second temporary home at the South Kensington Museum was more spacious, a new issue arose in relation to the decision of the director, Henry Cole (1808–1882), to install gas lighting so that his museum could remain open after dusk for the benefit of the working population. Wornum recorded in his diary Ruskin's objections to gas lighting and the fact that he had had a letter on the issue published in *The Times* on 29 October 1857,<sup>133</sup> while Eastlake declared in his evidence at the 1861 Select Committee, established to look into the future management of both the Vernon collection and Turner bequest of British art, that he was 'decidedly opposed to gas in the neighbourhood of pictures,' disagreeing with those 'high authorities' who believed it was 'innocuous'.<sup>134</sup> After the Turner collection's return to Trafalgar Square and its housing in the basement of the Wilkins building, Ruskin became distraught again but now for yet another reason: the damp. In his estimation, this was the prime reason for the build-up of moisture on the insides of the glass and for the mildew on the works on paper themselves.<sup>135</sup> Despite the Gallery's statements that it had tackled the issue,<sup>136</sup> damp clearly remained a severe problem as it was

<sup>131</sup> NGA, NG5/131/6: letter from Ruskin on precautions necessary when mounting and exhibiting the Turner drawings, 8 December 1856.

<sup>132</sup> See, for instance, the editorial in *The Times*, 10 November 1856, 7: 'Sir Charles Eastlake and Mr. Wornum have done their best with the miserable space and more miserable means of lighting at their disposal, but they cannot condense 100 square feet into 10, or send sunbeams through brick walls.'

<sup>133</sup> See NGA, NG2/3/3/1: Wornum Diary, entry for 15 October 1859: 'Mr Ruskin visited the new Rooms yesterday approved highly of the hanging, but strongly objected to the gas'; and entry for 21 October 1859: 'Letter of Mr. Ruskin in the Times condemning the adoption of evening exhibition by gas. I suspect he is right – it dries the air too much.' Ruskin's letter was published, under the heading 'The Turner Gallery', in *The Times* on 29 October 1859; see *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 339–40.

<sup>134</sup> Select Committee 1861, Evidence of 18 July 1861, page 13, Eastlake's response in paragraph 102.

<sup>135</sup> See NGA, NG1/4, 146; NGA2/3/2/13: Wornum Diary, entry for 14 November 1861; NG5/148/3: Ruskin writing regarding mildew on the Turner drawings, 16 October 1863; NG6/3, 22 October 1863; NGA, NG5/155/5, Ruskin writing regarding the condition of the Turner drawings, 17 November 1864.

<sup>136</sup> The Gallery kept Ruskin informed regarding the mildew issue; see, for instance, NGA, NG6/3/143: letter to Ruskin of 22 October 1863, stating that the mildew was limited and that the drawings had been stored in a dry room since 1854; and NG6/3/201: letter to Ruskin of 17 October 1864 informing him that the mildew had receded.

discussed, among other places, by Ruskin in his revised 1881 catalogue of the Turner watercolours.<sup>137</sup>

Indeed, it was the inadequate accommodation of the Turner collection at Trafalgar Square that tested the friendship between Ruskin and Wornum to breaking point – Ruskin accusing Wornum of not giving enough time or resources to sorting out the issue – and this caused Ruskin almost to resign from his position in October 1863. In a letter of that date, he explained that he could ‘no longer be of any service in this work but while the drawings are kept in that room and so long as there are no available means of properly and periodically looking over the whole collection, it would be either a waste of time and health to act any further, in hope of preserving them.’<sup>138</sup> Eastlake, we can imagine would have been sympathetic to Ruskin’s stance if not to the aggressive tone he adopted, given that he likewise had expressed grave concerns about the deficiencies of the basement setting for the Turner collection, at least in relation to its poor lighting.<sup>139</sup>

### **(i) Access to the Turner collection**

Ruskin’s first allocated task in relation to the Turner collection’s works on paper was to implement a programme of framing, mounting and storage, starting with those works he deemed the most important and therefore potentially the most useful.<sup>140</sup> Characteristically, his stated fundamental aim was to make them

<sup>137</sup> See John Ruskin, *Catalogue of the Drawings and Sketches by J.M.W. Turner, R.A. at present exhibited in the National Gallery: Revised, and cast into progressive Groups, with explanatory Notes*, London: George Allen, 1881; *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 351–88. In the preface, Ruskin noted that the ‘most delicate and precious watercolours’ were ‘kept in a cellar ... in which two thirds of them are practically invisible ... all are exposed to irreparable injury by damp’. See also NGA, NG1/6, 119, 341.

<sup>138</sup> NG5/148/3: letter from Ruskin to Wornum, 16 October 1863. See also Charles Locke Eastlake, ‘The administration of the National Gallery: a retrospect’, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, 54, December 1903, 926–46; here 940–41, where he notes that Ruskin told him that he should have resigned over what Ruskin regarded as his incompetent management of the Turner collection. Eastlake the younger was keen to refute this accusation, and therefore used the article to enumerate the improvements he had brought about in relation to the display environment, public access, etc.

<sup>139</sup> See Select Committee 1861, Evidence of 18 July 1861, page 10, Eastlake’s response to paragraph 71. When asked whether he thought that ‘the Turner collection would be capable of being properly seen if it were transferred from the South Kensington Museum to those rooms?’, Eastlake’s response was: ‘Certainly not; they were called the cellars when the Vernon pictures were exhibited in them.’ What he preferred to countenance was Lord Overstone’s suggestion (page 10, paragraph 72) that ‘a separate gallery for the reception of the Turner collection would be speedily commenced’.

<sup>140</sup> For Ruskin’s correspondence on framing, see NGA, NG5/131/2: directions for framing some of the Turner drawings, December 1856; NG5/134/3: drawing of a frame by Ruskin, 2 March 1857. For Ruskin’s correspondence on mounting, see NGA, NG5/216/2 (2 February 1857); see also NGA, NG5/243/2: letter from Ruskin regarding an estimate for the mounts for the Turner sketches, 5 January 1858.

'serviceable to the public, without compromising their safety'.<sup>141</sup> He published his ideas about how best to frame and mount the finished watercolours in *The Times* of 28 October 1856: 'They should be enclosed each in a light wooden frame, under a glass the surface of which a raised mount should prevent them from touching. These frames should slide into cases, containing about 12 drawings each, which would be portable to any part of the room where they were to be seen.'<sup>142</sup> By contrast, in relation to the 'large mass of the less interesting ones', Ruskin suggested they 'might be kept as the drawings are at the British Museum, and shown only on special inquiry.'<sup>143</sup> Ruskin repeated these ideas in various letters to the Gallery and amplified on them in the appendix of his *Notes on the Turner Collection* (1857), where he conjured up what an ideal Prints and Drawings department might look like: 'The department for the drawings [i.e. finished watercolours] should be, of course, separate, and like a beautiful and spacious library, with its cases of drawings ranged on the walls (as those of the coins are in the Coin-room of the British Museum), and convenient recesses, with pleasant lateral light, for the visitors to take each his case of drawings into.'<sup>144</sup>

Ruskin had long been interested in such library furniture even designing some himself. His first attempt at making a receptacle was a cupboard to hold picture frames, which he had made for his own study in his parents' London home and which he arranged to have transported to his last home in the Lake District. For the National Gallery, he designed eight cabinets and oversaw their manufacture in 1858 by Snell & Co, his usual cabinet makers, for £218.14s.6d. Although they no longer exist, some of the later cabinets Ruskin designed for the collections of Turner drawings he gave to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge do survive (Fig. 15), from which a good sense can be gained of what the National Gallery furniture would have looked like.<sup>145</sup>

## (ii) Cataloguing the Turner collection

Another strand of Ruskin's work to make the Turner collection accessible related to his attempts to engage the public intellectually with it, which he did largely through cataloguing parts of it.<sup>146</sup> This endeavour dovetailed with a push within the

<sup>141</sup> John Ruskin, *Catalogue of the Turner Sketches in the National Gallery: Part I*, London: printed by Spottiswoode and Co, 1857, 2; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 187.

<sup>142</sup> *The Times*, 28 October 1856, 10; *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 83–84. He even thought out a way of having the best works on paper shown in gold frames, advocating in his *Notes on the Turner Collection* of 1857 (*Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 180): 'For the more beautiful ones, golden frames should be provided at central tables; turning on a swivel, with grooves in the thickness of them, into which the wooden frame should slide in an instance, and show the drawing framed in gold.'

<sup>143</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 84.

<sup>144</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 180.

<sup>145</sup> For further information and images, see section on 'Furniture' in Robert Hewison, Ian Warrell and Stephen Wildman, *Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites*, exhib. cat., London: Tate Publishing, 2000, 194–98.

<sup>146</sup> The present article does not discuss whether or not Ruskin and Wornum oversaw the burning of Turner's erotic drawings, as this episode has been comprehensively covered by

National Gallery to produce and disseminate scholarly catalogues of its painting collections, an initiative that had first been discussed seriously at the 1835 Select Committee and to which Eastlake returned in his letter of 1845 to Peel, when he noted that 'a more complete catalogue' should be produced as a 'means by which the Gallery ... might be made more generally useful and instructive'.<sup>147</sup> The first fruits of change were seen in a new-style catalogue written by Wornum and edited by Eastlake, which was published in 1847 as the National Gallery's *Descriptive and Historical Catalogue* and thereafter constantly updated and revised.<sup>148</sup> It was innovative on account of the mass of facts it brought together, including 'biographical notices of deceased painters' (which did not include anecdotes),<sup>149</sup> provenance information, and scholarly footnotes citing primary sources from the past and secondary literature from the present.

Whereas Wornum and Eastlake's catalogues were aimed at recording key empirical facts about all of the Gallery's pictures and so were arranged within school and by date of production, Ruskin's first catalogue of the works on paper was different in intention and deliberately selective both in terms of the number of works of art discussed and the information dwelt on. His *Catalogue of the Turner Sketches in the National Gallery: Part I* was submitted to the trustees as a trial catalogue for the works on paper and therefore never reflected an exhibition that actually took place, a fact that gave him comparative intellectual freedom to experiment. Ruskin used his text to draw public attention to the merits of Turner's

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Ian Warrell elsewhere; see Ian Warrell, *Turner's Secret Sketches*, London: Tate Publishing, 2012. What is important for the current discussion is that a decision to destroy part of the bequest would have been Eastlake's alone, as director. Given that in Eastlake's evidence at the 1861 Select Committee on the Vernon collection and Turner bequest, he stated that he knew that the drawings still existed, it seems that Ruskin's recollection of having been a witness to their burning, which he mentioned in a letter to Boxall of 3 May 1862, is not correct. A batch of erotic drawings is, in any case, preserved in Tate's collection, which Warrell, I and others believe to be the material to which Eastlake referred in his witness statement.

<sup>147</sup> Eastlake, *National Gallery*, 18. Eastlake noted (page 19) that in any new style catalogue it would be desirable to include 'the facts relating to the history of each artist, and in some cases to the history of the picture itself, and its subject'.

<sup>148</sup> Susanna Avery-Quash and Corina Meyer, "'Substituting an approach to historical evidence for the vagueness of speculation": Charles Lock Eastlake and Johann David Passavant's contribution to the professionalization of art-historical study through source-based research', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 18, June 2018, 44–46.

<sup>149</sup> Wornum, in his 1862 illustrated catalogue to the Turner Gallery, would underline the necessity of avoiding groundless and potentially harmful gossip. See Wornum, *Turner Gallery*, iii: 'there are few men of eminence of whom so little can be said that is satisfactorily known, or that rests on anything more than personal gossip. Of this latter class of information there is an abundance of anecdotes, genuine enough to the narrator and his friend who first circulate them, yet not of the slightest authenticity for a published memoir ... it must always be unsafe to publish and make permanent eccentricities as characterizing your neighbour, with which, if the real truth were known, it might be discovered that truth had no concern whatever.' Given that Wornum's text was published very soon after Thornbury's biography of Turner, it is possible that this passage was a veiled attack on the Thornbury's unbridled prose.

watercolours, especially the late unfinished ones and mainly those of Alpine landscapes, which he felt were of supreme importance as embodiments of Turner's creative genius. He spent time discussing the deeper meaning of their subject matter<sup>150</sup> as well as how formal elements such as line and colour affected their meaning. Indeed, a notable feature was Ruskin's asides about what the drawings might teach an art student about composition or how to create certain effects. As a result – and this was a typical feature of Ruskin's work, from the first volume of *Modern Painters* on – the catalogue was transformed into a publication that could also usefully serve as a drawing manual. By going deep rather than broad, he hoped that his commentary would teach people to look more attentively and hence become better artists, even more enlightened citizens. Another difference was that Ruskin laid emphasis on judging a work in terms of its perceived beauty allied with truth, rather than by any other yardstick such as historical interest, physical state of preservation or market value. Of course, this alternative framework was largely the result of the contents of the Turner bequest which, as pointed out earlier, had pushed the National Gallery into a new area of interest, where the traditional criteria used to assess eligibility and excellence were necessarily less applicable.<sup>151</sup> Equally radical was the language and tone of Ruskin's prose. He used a comparatively personal, conversational tone, which included the imperative mode of address when he was particularly keen that his readers should notice something beneficial about one of Turner's drawings. His didactically and morally charged prose was very different from the sober scholastic tone of the Gallery's official catalogues. Ruskin clearly approved of both the format and style, for he employed it again for the catalogue accompanying an exhibition he organized of Turner's work from his own collection, held at the Fine Art Society in London in 1878.<sup>152</sup>

It is telling to compare Ruskin's imaginary catalogue with the inaugural display of works on paper at Marlborough House, which opened at the end of January 1857. In contrast to Ruskin's focus on comparatively few, late and unfinished watercolours, the exhibition displayed a generous selection of the finished watercolours, aimed at showing the full range of Turner's work in terms of subject matter and date of execution. It included many scenes from round the United Kingdom, illustrations from Turner's *Liber Studiorum* and Rogers's *Italy* and even a modern history subject – the funeral of Sir Thomas Lawrence,<sup>153</sup> and covered fifty years of artistic production.

It is revealing for other reasons to compare Ruskin's first catalogue with the second one he produced which was published to accompany a new display. In

<sup>150</sup> Ruskin noted in his letter to *The Times* of 28 October 1856 (*Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 83) that the untitled sketches were 'nearly valueless till their meaning is deciphered, but of great interest when seen in their proper connexion'.

<sup>151</sup> On this topic see *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 545–46; XXVIII, 407; XXIX, 560; XXX, 305.

<sup>152</sup> See *Notes by Mr. Ruskin – Part I. On his Drawings by Turner: Part II. On his own Handiwork illustrative of Turner, exhibited at the Fine Art Society's Galleries, 1878*. In the 'Prefatory Note', Ruskin noted (*Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 411): 'The drawings here shown are divided into groups, not chronological merely, but referred to the special circumstances of their production, or temper of mind in which they were produced.'

<sup>153</sup> See Warrell, *Through Switzerland*, 'Appendix I. 'The first selection of watercolours from the Turner bequest, 1856', 148.

Ruskin's *Catalogue of the Sketches and Drawings by J.M.W. Turner, R.A. Exhibited in Marlborough House in the Year 1857–8* (Fig. 16) one detects a complex welding of his ideas with those of National Gallery officials. In certain ways Ruskin's vision won out. He had consistently argued that the finished watercolours should not be the only ones displayed, because they were, in his opinion, less important than Turner's unfinished sketches and because they were more at risk from sunlight on account of their intense, vibrant colours. In the second exhibition, it is therefore interesting to note that, for the first time, numerous *unfinished* works were introduced into the display. On the other hand, the Gallery's wish to show a selection of watercolours from across Turner's life, in opposition to Ruskin's previous focus solely on Turner's late work, was heeded. Ruskin's 'Introductory Remarks' record the various changes in thinking that gave rise to the final format of the exhibition and hence to the content of the accompanying catalogue:

The delicate and finished drawings, exhibited at first in Marlborough House, being of a character peculiarly liable to injury from exposure to light, and it having been judiciously determined by the trustees that they should be framed and arranged for exhibition in a manner calculated to secure their protection when not actually under inspection, as well as to render their examination ultimately more convenient to the public, a selection has been made in their stead from Turner's sketches and drawings, calculated to exhibit his methods of study at different periods, and to furnish the general student with more instructive examples than finished drawings can be. The finished drawing is the result of the artist's final knowledge, and nothing like it can be produced by the scholar till he possesses knowledge parallel in extent; but an artist's sketches show the means by which that knowledge was acquired.<sup>154</sup>

Another major compromise was the way the information was presented. While the catalogue's division of Turner's works on paper into four consecutive parts ('Period of development', 'First Style', 'Second Style' and 'Third Style') mirrored the chronological approach adopted by Wornum in his catalogues of Turner's paintings, the contents of the entries are written along typical Ruskinian lines. They mix advice about what could be learnt from Turner's technique with personal evaluations and justifications for why particular works had been included, while omitting any reference to secondary scholarly comment. Something of the complexity of his relations with the Gallery is palpable in the way that Ruskin carefully delineated in the preface the nature and extent of his authority as an expert adviser to the National Gallery: 'By the permission of the trustees, I have had access to the drawings ... But it must be distinctly understood that I alone am answerable for any statements made in this Catalogue, and that it has no official or authoritative character whatsoever.'<sup>155</sup>

<sup>154</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 235.

<sup>155</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 236.

### (iii) Loans from the Turner collection

In addition to his involvement with displaying Turner's works on paper in London, Ruskin was seminal in getting batches of them sent round the country for use by regional art institutions of one kind or another – an initiative completely new to the Gallery and one that was in keeping with Ruskin's constant desire to bring great art to large numbers of people. When the chairman of the 1861 Select Committee asked: 'I believe that it was once an opinion of Mr. Ruskin's that the Turner collection would enable six separate collections of a most instructive character to be made, which might be circulated in the country; would that be desirable if the conditions of the will permitted it?', Eastlake had replied: 'Yes, I think that good might be done by such means.'<sup>156</sup> Ruskin had first raised the idea formally in the report he submitted to the Gallery's trustees in 1858 regarding the selecting and framing of works on paper. He reckoned that once the works considered most suitable had been chosen for display in London a portion of Turner drawings 'not advisable to exhibit with the body of the collection ... might be distributed with advantage among Provincial Schools of Art.'<sup>157</sup> This division between works judged relevant for retention in London with other works of a different kind being sent to the regions recalls Ruskin's two-tiered approach to museum display in which paintings were divided between the metropolis and regional venues according to which were deemed most suitable to the audiences in those locations.

The pioneering scheme was taken forward during Boxall's directorship, when the trustees agreed in July 1867 that 'a selection from the remaining Drawings and Sketches be made by the director and properly framed for the purpose of being circulated by way of temporary loan amongst such provincial Museums'.<sup>158</sup> By December 1868 it was reported that a selection of 225 Turner sketches had been made and that they were in the process of being mounted and framed.<sup>159</sup> The practicalities were undertaken by Wornum, as keeper, who ensured that each resulting set included works from every major period of Turner's life so that it might act as a miniature survey of Turner's complete artistic oeuvre. A second criterion of selection was to show a representative range of Turner's creative techniques, which explains the fact that each collection contained a number of pencil sketches (which never featured strongly in the London displays), as well as the

<sup>156</sup> Select Committee 1861, 18 July 1861, Eastlake's answer in paragraph 51.

<sup>157</sup> See 'Mr Ruskin's report on the Turner drawings in the National Gallery', *Works of John Ruskin*, XIII, 319. The first two categories were '(1) Drawings arranged for immediate exhibition, or which it is desirable so to arrange' and '(2) Drawings which can only be exhibited in the event of the enlargement of the National Gallery.' The third category was the one noted above as 'not advisable to exhibit with the body of the collection'. See also Ian Warrell, 'R.N. Wornum and the first three loan collections: a history of the early display of the Turner bequest outside London', *Turner Studies*, 11:1, Summer 1991, 37.

<sup>158</sup> NGA, NG1/4, 412: board meeting of 1 July 1867. By the terms of Turner's original will, his oil paintings had to remain at the National Gallery; however, with the passing of the Gallery's Loan Act of 1883, paintings were allowed out on loan; see Alan Crookham, 'The Turner bequest at the National Gallery,' in Ian Warrell, ed, *Turner Inspired: In the Light of Claude*, London: National Gallery Company, 2012, 56, 58.

<sup>159</sup> NGA, NG1/4, 439: board meeting of 14 December 1868.

emphasis on unfinished works. This emphasis may also reflect the fact that in London the intended audience was as much the general public and specialists as aspiring artists, whereas the regional roadshows were intended for artists.

No official catalogue was produced for any of the groups of loans, but Wornum did initiate a loans-out book to keep track of the movements of the collections. Originally, three groupings were created, which were sent to Edinburgh, Dublin and Leeds. Board minutes, official correspondence and the Gallery's annual reports fill out the record of which institutions benefitted from the scheme and offer some information about the loans themselves.<sup>160</sup> Such documentation also records the measures taken to ensure the loans reached their destinations safely. For instance, drawings were packed in cases 'lined with India-rubber bands', which, as Jacob Simon has pointed out, was 'a very early example of packing precautions for a travelling exhibition',<sup>161</sup> and questions were asked of lenders to ensure their venues met the National Gallery's standards in relation to environmental conditions, including the fact that display spaces should not be lit by gas. The initiative was well received, with adjustments made to accommodate requests from regional partners. Thus, in 1871 it was agreed to extend the loan period from one to two years, with even more latitude as to the return date in subsequent years, while in the 1890s the number of loan collections doubled from three to six.<sup>162</sup>

Having pioneered the idea for the circulation scheme, Ruskin himself requested certain loans on a number of occasions, albeit not of any of the pre-prepared study packs. Thus, in January 1878, he submitted a request for a group of Turner drawings for students at his art school at Oxford (the 'Ruskin School of Drawing'), works which he noted testily had never been seen by the public, having 'lain useless this last quarter of a century (1852–1878!)'.<sup>163</sup> Later, in 1893, Ruskin was

<sup>160</sup> The Loans Out Books are NGA, NG18/1, which record the full listing of institutions which borrowed Turner drawings and paintings from 1868. I am indebted to Zara Moran, Assistant Archivist at the National Gallery, for compiling the following list which records information about the loan institutions and the type of works they borrowed from the Turner collection over a twenty year period from 1868 to 1888 ('P' indicates 'painting' and 'D' indicates 'drawings'): South Kensington Museum 1868 P; National Gallery of Ireland 1871 D, 1884 P, 1885 D; Museum & Gallery Birmingham 1871, 1891 D; Hartley Institution, Southampton 1878 D; University Galleries, Oxford 1878 D; Corporation of Bradford 1881, 97 D; Corporation of the City of Glasgow 1881, 1882, 1883 D, 1884 P, 1898 D; Corporation of Liverpool 1882 D, 1884 P; Corporation of Nottingham 1884 P; Corporation of Oldham 1884 P; Corporation of Leicester 1894 P; Corporation of Stockport 1884 P; Corporation of Warrington 1884 P; Corporation of Stoke on Trent 1884 P; Corporation of Sheffield (Mappin Gallery) 1884 P, 1889, 1890, 1892 D; Corporation of Manchester 1884 D & P; Plymouth Institution 1884 P; School of Art of Scarborough 1884 D; Art Gallery of Aberdeen 1885 D; Corporation of Sunderland 1887, D; Jubilee Exhibition Manchester 1887 P; Art Gallery of Wolverhampton 1888 D.

<sup>161</sup> See *Report for the Year ended 31st December 1869*, 3. See Jacob Simon's manuscript, 'National Gallery conservation history'.

<sup>162</sup> Warrell, 'First three loan collections', 38.

<sup>163</sup> NGA, NG39/84: letters from Ruskin to Frederic Burton, 5 January–1 August 1878, regarding arrangements for the Turner drawings chosen by Ruskin to be sent to the Oxford Schools.

behind another initiative that saw some Turner pictures dispatched to his St George's Museum at Walkley, near Sheffield.<sup>164</sup>

### Part III. Ruskin's final links with the National Gallery

#### (i) Ruskin's proposed bequest of his 'entire property' to the National Gallery, 1862

Ruskin's relationship with the National Gallery continued well after the time he was involved with it officially as a consultant curator of part of the Turner collection. Despite increasingly tense relations with its staff, he never fell out of love with his favourite pictures in the collection at Trafalgar Square, and constantly sought ways to increase the Gallery's impact. It is a little-known fact that he at one point determined on leaving a very generous legacy to the National Gallery.<sup>165</sup> He wrote two short letters concerning this proposal to Wornum on 3 May 1862, a fact that Wornum carefully noted in his working diary.<sup>166</sup> To make sense of what might seem like a surprising turn of events given the strained relations Ruskin was then experiencing with the Gallery over the Turner collection, we should remember that Ruskin was at the time experiencing a personal and spiritual crisis, on the back of which he seems to have been 'trying to persuade himself he was dying'<sup>167</sup> and in preparing now to leave once more for Italy and Switzerland, where he had contemplated settling the previous winter,<sup>168</sup> he may have imagined he would be leaving England indefinitely. These circumstances make sense of his desire to get his will in order.

In the more detailed of the two notes of 3 May, Ruskin announced that a few days earlier he had drawn up a new will in which 'after some minor legacies', he had left the Gallery £5000 of India stock – worth £11,000 in the present market – and 30,000 3 percents', noting that the Gallery would thereby receive 'about a clear £35,000'.<sup>169</sup> He went on to explain that he wished the trustees to use the interest from this financial legacy 'at their discretion, for the purchase of pictures for the National

<sup>164</sup> NGA, NG24/1893/5: loan of collection of Turner pictures to the Ruskin Museum, Sheffield, 2 August–18 September 1893.

<sup>165</sup> Ian Warrell mentions this episode briefly in *Turner's Secret Sketches* (page 48), proposing a connection between the legacy and the burning of Turner's erotic sketches: Ruskin had written a third letter (on the same day that he penned the two letters about his intended legacy), in which he recalled Wornum having burnt the erotica in his presence and with his blessing; see NGA, NG5/348/4: letter from Ruskin to Wornum, 3 May 1862.

<sup>166</sup> See also NGA, NG2/3/3/1: Wornum Diary, entry for 3 May 1862, where Wornum recorded with a 'Note Bene' and three crosses in the margin: 'His [Ruskin's] fortune bequeathed to the trustees to buy *only Pictures by Titian, Paul Veronese, Velazquez, & Reynolds.*' He noted that he had 'Received three letters from Mr Ruskin', and that 'two relat[ed] to his Will and bequest to the National Gallery'.

<sup>167</sup> Tim Hilton, *John Ruskin: The Later Years*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000, 42.

<sup>168</sup> John Dixon Hunt, *The Wider Sea: A Life of John Ruskin*, New York: The Viking Press, 1982, 282–83.

<sup>169</sup> NGA, NG5/348/3(ii): letter from Ruskin to Wornum, 3 May 1862.

gallery by Titian, Paul Veronese, Velasquez, or Sir Joshua Reynolds'.<sup>170</sup> He clarified: 'When good pictures by any of these masters are not to be had, the interest is simply to be accumulating till it reaches an amount which will tempt sale by the holders whoever they may be. No sum is to be thought extravagant for a good Titian or Veronese.' The second note (Fig. 17) appears to make his offer yet more generous, as in it Ruskin records that he would be happy for the Gallery's lawyer to 'draw up a will, leaving the entire property of which I may be possessed at my death, to the Trustees of the National gallery, for the purposes named in the enclosed letter', noting that he would be content to sign the will before leaving England and to destroy a now redundant earlier version.<sup>171</sup> He urged the wording to be made 'sure and simple, so as to render litigation impossible' – doubtless an attempt to avoid any repetition of what had happened when Turner's relatives had disputed his will and the matter had ended up as a protracted legal battle.

Wornum replied four days later, conveying the trustees' appreciation of Ruskin's liberal intentions and their reassurance that they would 'endeavour faithfully to apply [his funds] in strict accordance with your views and wishes'.<sup>172</sup> Yet, in the end, these intentions were never carried out. Frustratingly, nothing else in the Gallery's archive, including Wornum's papers, sheds further light on this little-known yet significant episode.<sup>173</sup> Research into Ruskin's unpublished correspondence and extant paperwork may assist; in relation to published material, there is correspondence from 1869 between Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton, first Professor of Fine Arts at Harvard, a friend, follower and correspondent of Ruskin about a new will – not the same one as drafted in 1862 – apparently in more than one draft. In a letter of 26 April 1869, Ruskin notified his friend of his decision to make the new will, adding that his relatives were likely to react badly to its new contents and so Norton should be prepared to fight them in the courts,<sup>174</sup> while in another letter, dated 4 May 1869, reference is made to a cancelled will of 11 April 1869. That second letter records Ruskin's intentions concerning some of his art collection – that at this point he was intending leaving to the University of Oxford

<sup>170</sup> Ruskin's inclusion of Reynolds relates to his current interest in that painter, as manifested in his article 'Sir Joshua and Holbein' of 1860; see *Works of Ruskin*, XIX, 1–15.

<sup>171</sup> NGA, NG5/348/3(i): letter from Ruskin to Wornum, 3 May 1862.

<sup>172</sup> NGA, NG6/3/31: letter from Wornum to Ruskin, 7 May 1862. See also NGA, NG6/3/33, duplicate transcript of NG6/3/31; letter crossed through in pencil.

<sup>173</sup> See NGA, NG1/4, page 285, which refers to Ruskin's letter being read at the 6 May 1862 meeting of the trustees: 'Read a letter from Mr John Ruskin, dated 3rd of May 1862, addressed to the Secretary and having reference to the contemplated bequest of a portion of his property, for the purposes of the National Gallery.'

<sup>174</sup> See Bradley and Ousby, *Correspondence of John Ruskin*, 132 (letter no. 87, 26 April [1869]): 'Unless at risk of fulfilling my testament forthwith, I could not stay longer in town, but I will draw up the new one quickly when I am over the water – and send it from Paris or Neuchatel – when drawn up it can be sent to Venice for me to sign. Meantime *keep this* – If my next of kin go into chancery, fight them until there's no money left – and then, give up the Turners for my drawings – it will be a lovely lesson to the nation on the beauty of law – far more useful to them than any Turners. I've a great mind – now that I think how I should laugh, (– if I knew anything about it down below –) – to leave the will as it is – only for the nuisance it would be to *you*. But I'll write another as soon as I can.'

his 'Titian' (Catena's *Portrait of the Doge, Andrea Gritti*), Tintoretto (presumably the sketch for *The Doge Alvise Mocenigo Adoring the Redeemer*) and oils by Turner (including the *Slave-Ship*, which he subsequently sold) while 'The portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds of Mrs. – [A sketch, "The Lady with the Brooch" was] to be given to my cousin'.<sup>175</sup> However, this was not Ruskin's last will either; there is extant documentation at The Huntington Library concerning Ruskin's last will and codicils which dates between 1883 and 1887.<sup>176</sup> In the end, Joan Severn, Ruskin's second cousin and the person who looked after him in his declining years, together with Ruskin's secretary, W.G. Collingwood, and Charles Eliot Norton, acted as Ruskin's executors, with Severn and her family inheriting Ruskin's estate.<sup>177</sup> The way things turned out, the National Gallery received no bequest from Ruskin but from this episode it seems that at one point he wanted to ensure that the British public would be enabled to enjoy yet more first-rate examples by masters he most admired – some old favourites with a couple of new names added into the mix.

By a quirk of fate, a Venetian sixteenth-century painting that Ruskin once owned does now belong to the Gallery – Vincenzo Catena's *Portrait of the Doge, Andrea Gritti* (Fig. 18), a picture presented in 1947 by the widow of the art dealer Otto Gutekunst in her late husband's memory. At the time that Ruskin acquired the work in 1864, he declared to a friend, John Rawdon Lubbock Brown (1806–1883) who was a resident in Venice and an historian of the city: 'I have just possessed myself of a portrait of the Doge Andrea Gritti. It is my notion of Titian's work, and that is all I care about'.<sup>178</sup> It is characteristic of Ruskin not to take anyone else's attribution into consideration. He was interested in what this portrait revealed to the viewer about sixteenth-century Venetian politics and artistic patronage, although during the infamous Ruskin versus Whistler trial in November 1877, it was brought into court by Ruskin's chief witness Edward Burne-Jones (Ruskin's mental health was so poor that he could not defend himself), as a counterpoint to Whistler's *Nocturnes* to demonstrate what Burne-Jones believed Ruskin would have considered to be an example of 'noble methods of work'.<sup>179</sup>

## **(ii) Ruskin's promotion of Gallery pictures as study aids and companions through life**

<sup>175</sup> See Bradley and Ousby, *Correspondence of John Ruskin*, 135-37 (letter no. 91, 4 May 1869).

<sup>176</sup> There is a copy or 'summary' of Ruskin's (presumably last) will at The Huntington Library, San Marino, California: JR 533. Ruskin, John. [Last Will and Testament]: Summary of Will & Codicils. 1883-1887. I am grateful to Paul Tucker for sharing this information with me.

<sup>177</sup> For Ruskin's relationship with Joan Severn, see Rachel Dickinson, ed., *John Ruskin's Correspondence with Joan Severn: Sense and Nonsense Letters*, London: Maney Publishing, 2009.

<sup>178</sup> Letter from Ruskin to John Rawdon Brown, 2 September 1864, preserved in the British Museum (<https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/users/ruskinlib/eSoV/texts/vol24/vol24p184.html>, accessed 19 October 2019). Ruskin reiterated his attribution in the same letter: 'I bought it of the Dean of Bristol, after it was exhibited at the British Institute, where it looked well, and I've been trying to get it ever since – and have got it at last. (...) This is fearfully damaged (...) But it is Vecelli's, I'll aver.' 'Vecelli' was Titian's surname.

<sup>179</sup> See Hewison, *Ruskin*, 144 (cat. no. 126).

Ruskin found various ways of promoting the Gallery's collection by directing numerous artists, including a number of his own amateur female pupils, to study Ruskin-approved pictures at Trafalgar Square as optimum examples whereby to hone their artistic skills. The case of Louise Blandy (1860–1890) is fairly typical: Ruskin had got to know her in 1873, as she was the daughter of his dentist; she would go on to become one of his paid copyists as well as his secretary. In terms of her artistic education, Ruskin took her to the National Gallery for the first time in January 1874 and gave her drawing lessons by post. A year later, in January 1875, he wrote to her: 'Remember: your chief difficulty will be in forming your taste ... don't go to exhibitions. Don't go to [the South] Kensington [Museum]. Content yourself with the few things I send you and with the National Gallery ... The frightful curse of modernism is to have the work of fools thrust in one's face every instant.'<sup>180</sup> One result of her study at the National Gallery is a detail of the angels from Fra Angelico's *The Resurrection* (Fig. 19).<sup>181</sup> It was eventually placed in the museum Ruskin established for his foundation, the Guild of St George, at Sheffield. Another female pupil was Octavia Hill (1838–1912), who Ruskin met when she was struggling to earn her keep at the age of fifteen. He gave her lessons and commissioned a few drawings from her for *Modern Painters*. It was under his tutelage that she made copies of pictures in the National Gallery's collection, notably after Bellini's *Portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan* in 1859<sup>182</sup> and Spinello Aretino's *Two Haloed Mourners* in about 1877.<sup>183</sup> Apparently, Ruskin considered her work 'dainty, delightful and perfect',<sup>184</sup> but he discouraged her from pursuing art professionally. Instead, she became a social reformer and founder of the National Trust.

This activity by amateur women artists parallels Ruskin's employment of male professionals, who he commissioned to make copies either for his St George's Museum at Walkley or as illustrations to his public lectures or his books. Most of these artists were British-born, including George Butterworth, John Wharltton Bunney, Arthur Burgess, Charles Fairfax Murray, Frank Randal, and T.M. Rooke; but there was also the Venetian Angelo Alessandri.<sup>185</sup> In relation to the old masters, Murray, for instance, made studies after the Florentine painters Sandro Botticelli,

<sup>180</sup> See exhib. cat. *Ruskin and his Circle*, 82. What Ruskin says here of modern art anticipates his view that Whistler had thrown a paint pot in the public's face. A collection of eighty-seven letters, dating between 1874 and 1882, primarily written from Ruskin to Blandy, discussing her studies and chronicling their relationship, is preserved at The Huntington Library: John Ruskin and Louise Blandy Papers, mssHM 57251-57339.

<sup>181</sup> Louise Blandy, detail after Fra Angelico, *The Resurrection*, watercolour, bodycolour and gold; collection of the Guild of St George, Museums Sheffield.

<sup>182</sup> Octavia Hill, after Giovanni Bellini, *Portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan*, 1859, watercolour and bodycolour on paper; collection of the Guild of St George, Museums Sheffield.

<sup>183</sup> Octavia Hill, after Spinello Aretino, *Two Haloed Mourners*, c.1877, watercolour; St Marylebone Public Libraries Committee. See exhib. cat. *Ruskin and his Circle*, 73 (cat. no. 332).

<sup>184</sup> Quoted in a label text in the exhibition *John Ruskin. The Power of Seeing*, Two Temple Place, London, 2019.

<sup>185</sup> For more on these individuals, see exhib. cat. *Ruskin and his Circle*, 80–82.

Filippo Lippi and Benozzo Gozzoli and copied works by the Venetian artist Carpaccio.

Some of the copies made at Ruskin's request after Italian paintings ended up in museums of his making or created under his supervision. For instance, a copy of Botticelli's *Mystic Nativity* (now National Gallery) that Murray made (but not in fact for Ruskin; Fig. 20) was acquired by the museum that Charles Eliot Norton established at Harvard, which, with an associated drawing school, was run along similar lines to Ruskin's art establishments in Sheffield and Oxford. A large number (between two and three hundred by 1886) went to St George's Museum, where Ruskin attempted to create his ideal kind of museum as an object lesson in how to do things in contrast to most public art galleries in Britain and Europe, which he had come increasingly to feel did not collect or display works of art in ways best suited to fostering knowledge of and education in art among their visitors. There, the copies sat among other works of art, including one genuine old master. Through Murray's agency, Ruskin had secured a *Virgin Adoring the Christ Child* attributed by Murray to Verrocchio from the Manfrin collection in Venice. Ruskin praised this as 'an entirely priceless example of excellent painting, exemplary for all time'<sup>186</sup> – words that recall his assessment of Veronese's *Family of Darius*. Ruskin felt it was a painting particularly appropriate to the metalworkers of Sheffield given that Verrocchio was 'the great Master of Bronzework and of painting', his talents bridging the fine and applied arts. Interestingly, he informed Prince Leopold, youngest son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, that the painting, through its beauty and dedicated workmanship, showed everything he wished to say about art.<sup>187</sup>

Yet, extant accounts reveal that the fine arts, including historical paintings and copies after them, played a comparatively minor role within an eclectic gathering of objects, including important and numerically larger collections of minerals, rare books, and photos of architectural studies of medieval and early Renaissance buildings. At Sheffield comparatively little weight was given to the fine arts because Ruskin's prime focus was on natural objects while the purpose of the displays was to encourage an understanding of the interconnections between manmade art and divinely-inspired creation, most profoundly in terms of beauty, and how aesthetical questions might relate to ethical ones pertaining to goodness and truth. As Ruskin said about his own museum: '[it] may perhaps be nothing but a two-windowed garret. But it will have in it nothing but what deserves respect in art or admiration in nature. A great museum in the present state of the public mind is simply an exhibition of the possible modes of doing wrong in art, and an accumulation of uselessly multiplied ugliness in misunderstood nature.'<sup>188</sup> This stance may help explain why Ruskin was not bothered about commissioning copies in tempera so as to reflect the medium of many of the original works of art: he was happy with watercolour because his main concern was not to teach viewers about technique but to offer them a record of a particular work's subject matter and formal

<sup>186</sup> *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 193.

<sup>187</sup> See *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 311–12.

<sup>188</sup> Ruskin to William Bragge, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 7 September 1875; reprinted in *Works of John Ruskin*, XXX, 305–6.

qualities, not least its colouring. It may also explain why Ruskin did not give over more time to write or commission a general catalogue for his museum or one dedicated specifically to its paintings, instead devoting his time to writing about mineralogy, botany and ornithology, which reflected the St George's Museum's core strengths and Ruskin's own current primary interests relating to the Guild of George's educational work.

The difference in objects and their display was directly related to the different audience that Ruskin had in mind for his Sheffield museum. First and foremost, he was thinking about 'working men' (this included women), especially the metalworkers of Sheffield, rather than any elite group of art lovers from the middle or upper classes. In evidence he gave at a Select Committee of 1860 that was investigating public institutions, Ruskin noted that his museum was for workers, who might feel uncomfortable inspecting paintings at Trafalgar Square surrounded by predominantly middle- and upper-class visitors.<sup>189</sup> It was with the working hours of this type of visitor in mind that he opened his museum, unusually, twelve hours a day and by appointment on Sunday afternoons. Here he was putting into practice his idea that museums of different kinds of objects and in different locations worked best for different audiences with specific needs and requirements.

## Conclusion

This article has traced the many and diverse interventions that Ruskin made in relation to the National Gallery and its historical painting collection in the second half of the nineteenth century. Above all else he was concerned with the visibility and safety of the works of art at Trafalgar Square. In addition to these abiding interests, he considered what type of art the National Gallery should be acquiring and how it should be displayed and catalogued, all matters which directly related to the question of what type of visitor the National Gallery was aiming to attract through its doors. Over almost half a century, Ruskin addressed fundamental questions, either adding weight to conclusions that reformers within the Gallery, like Eastlake and Wornum, were reaching, or else suggesting distinctive approaches of his own, alternative to those they put forward. His involvement was crucial especially during the 1840s and 1850s when the Gallery was forging a new path, which led initially to its reconstitution through the Treasury Minute of 1855, and thereafter to a new existence under a new dispensation. Of those public figures operating outside the institution it would perhaps be difficult to find anyone whose engagement was more sustained or comprehensive in scope.

Ruskin's involvement at the National Gallery was also important because what he proposed in relation to Trafalgar Square had some bearing on what he said and wrote later about certain other major art institutions, whether in London, Oxford, Sheffield or Venice. Furthermore, his thinking begged bigger questions about what constituted expertise in the field, and the criteria which should be used when deciding which works to acquire, and how to care for, display and catalogue them, all of which had consequences for the type of art history that was being

<sup>189</sup> John Ruskin, evidence in 'The Public Institutions Committee', 20 March 1860, reported in *Works of John Ruskin*, XVI, 472–548.

written and how artistic culture was being presented to and digested by the nation and its foreign visitors.

While certain Ruskinian concepts such as how a 'great Gallery' and a 'popular Gallery' might be run on different lines for different types of visitors has not been taken forward by the National Gallery (or by any other UK public art gallery), Ruskin's engagement with and questioning of the most fundamental curatorial practices has borne fruit in various ways, especially in the last decade, not least at Trafalgar Square. For instance, in about 2012, a number of designated research strands were established, including one concerning iconography and another concerning the meaning of a painting's making, in order to showcase research coming out of the Gallery which approached its paintings from other angles than the traditional connoisseurial ones of attribution, dating and valuation. And more recently, and in line with preparations for the National Gallery's 200th anniversary in 2024, other research has been undertaken about how best to engage new audiences, including in relation to the tone of voice adopted across all Gallery activities, whether written or oral, whether on site or transmitted virtually, so that now visitors are being addressed in a more direct, engaging and open-ended manner. Through constantly questioning how the National Gallery was doing things in his day (and not being afraid in the process of developing his thinking, even of changing his mind), Ruskin contributed fresh perspectives to the developing fields of art history and museum management, offering thought-provoking alternatives which trustees, directors and curators at the time had to take seriously, even if they did not take on board everything he said. In the present, especially in the wake of Ruskin's bicentenary last year in 2019, many of those associated with the running of public art galleries are rediscovering with interest what Ruskin had to say, and in some instances adopting or adapting his ideas with enthusiasm.

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