

**ON THE SUPPLY OF PRINTED  
BOOKS FROM THE LIBRARY  
TO THE READING ROOM OF  
THE BRITISH MUSEUM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649139804

On the supply of printed books from the library to the reading room of the British Museum by  
Sir Anthony Panizzi

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**SIR ANTHONY PANIZZI**

**ON THE SUPPLY OF PRINTED  
BOOKS FROM THE LIBRARY  
TO THE READING ROOM OF  
THE BRITISH MUSEUM**



ON THE  
SUPPLY OF PRINTED BOOKS FROM  
THE LIBRARY TO THE  
READING ROOM OF THE BRITISH  
MUSEUM

---

" The requisition to insert the Titles and Press-marks on the  
" tickets is not merely reasonable but it is indispensable, if  
" the Library is to be conducted with satisfaction to the Public  
" and to the Librarians. If people will not take the trouble to  
" comply with Rules, which, so far from being vexatious, are  
" absolutely necessary for their own comfort, they have no right  
" to complain. The fault is *theirs*, if mistakes and delay arise ;  
" and it is as absurd as unjust to impute the effect of their own  
" ignorance or carelessness to the Officers of the Museum."

SIR NICHOLAS HARRIS NICOLAS.

---

M D C C C X L V I.



46.1746.

THE publication of the annexed correspondence has been determined upon not for the pleasure of exposing the mistakes and inconsistencies of Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, but for the purpose of drawing the attention of those who take an interest in the collection of Printed Books in the British Museum to a most important part of its management, *viz.* the supply of books to readers. In order to make the correspondence intelligible, it will be necessary to explain not only the circumstances which gave rise to it, but also the system of arrangement adopted to secure a regular attendance upon the readers from the Library, as well as the reasons why this system has been suggested; and it is hoped that, when the whole system is carefully examined, it will not be found undeserving of that support, without which it is impossible that any scheme can be carried out.

At the risk of entering into minute and very uninteresting particulars, well known to those who are conversant with the arrangements of a large Library, it is requisite to state that the books in that of the British Museum are found by certain references, Press-marks, or symbols, by which each work is identified with the corresponding entry of its Title in the Catalogue. The Title of a work marked in the Catalogue with, for instance, 500 *a*, means that the work itself is in the press which is numbered 500, and on the shelf of that press which is distinguished by letter *a*; if the mark be 500 *a* 2, the meaning is that the work occupies the second place on that shelf; and if marked 500  $\frac{a}{6}$  2, that it is the sixth article in the 2nd vol. on shelf *a* of press 500. A book being wanted,

the shortest way by far is generally found to be (and in the greatest number of cases it is the only one) to search the Catalogue, find the Press-mark, and look for the book accordingly. In 1836, at my suggestion, an alteration in the then prevailing system was adopted, which the Committee of the House of Commons on the British Museum, then sitting, considered an improvement, and so it was universally pronounced to be. The question put to me on the subject by Lord Stanley, as well as my answer, are here inserted.

“ Will you state what improvement has been recently adopted in the New Transcript [of the Catalogue] with regard to reference ?”

“ In the Catalogue of the British Museum, the one which we keep for the use of the Library, there are certain references given, or symbols, to know exactly where to find a book. In the Reading Room Catalogue those symbols were not put; I thought, and Mr. Baber thought also, that it would be an evident improvement to have in the Catalogue for the Reading Room, the same references as in the Catalogue of the Library, because the reader would have only to copy the title of the book as well as the reference, and instead of his ticket going to one of our men, who is obliged to look over the Catalogue inside to put the reference, the attendant would go direct with that ticket to the place where the book is, and carry it to the Reading Room immediately. It would be an economy of time for the readers, consequently an economy of time for our men, and consequently a saving of expense in the number of men. But there are other advantages attending this system. Often the readers come to ask for a book which was never printed, or which, if printed, is not in the Library, or they write down the title as they have seen it elsewhere, not correctly quoted, and give it to one of the attendants. The attendant begins to look over all the Catalogues, and cannot find the book; he is afraid of being in the wrong; he loses a great deal of time,

“and the consequence is, that all the readers who have written correct tickets are kept waiting, by the fault of him who has written an incorrect one. By the new system, a person will be obliged to look in the Catalogue in order to put down the reference; he will therefore ascertain whether we have the book or not, and not give us less trouble, and to the injury of other readers. Having given that reference, if it be wrong, it may be wrong because it is incorrectly put, and then we must answer for it; but if it be the fault of the reader, although I could find the book, I would, on principle, return the ticket, because all the other readers are inconvenienced by the carelessness of this one, and the returning the ticket would be the best mode of ensuring attention. By this means we shall save much time, and remove much of the inconvenience now complained of by the readers.”

It was found, however, that some readers, who neglected to comply with these rules, hindered the ready supply of books to those who did comply with them; and when, in 1837, I succeeded Mr. Baber as Keeper of the Printed Books Department, I thought of suggesting printed tickets or formulæ, according to which books were to be asked for by merely filling them up. The following is an exact specimen of these tickets:

Press Mark.	Title of the Work wanted.	Size.	Place.	Date.

(Date)

(Signature).

Please to restore each volume of the Catalogue to its place, as soon as done with.



On the reverse it is as follows :

READERS ARE *PARTICULARLY* REQUESTED

1. Not to ask for more than *one work* on the same ticket.
  2. To transcribe *literally* from the Catalogues the title of the Work wanted.
  3. To write in a plain clear hand, in order to avoid delay and mistakes.
  4. Before leaving the Room, to return the books to an attendant, and to obtain the corresponding ticket, the READER BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BOOKS SO LONG AS THE TICKET REMAINS UNCANCELLED.
- N.B. Readers are, under no circumstances, to take any Book or MS. out of the Reading Rooms.

Can any one say that to request readers to fill up such a form *correctly*, and to comply with these rules, is giving unnecessary trouble? My suggestion was approved of by Sir H. Ellis,—under whose especial control the management of the Reading Room is placed,—and who, moreover, proposed that the same system should be adopted for MSS. ; which was done accordingly with the concurrence of Sir F. Madden, and the sanction of the Trustees. It has continued in operation ever since for both departments ; but no attack has been made upon any one but myself for this scheme. The improvement was all but unanimously acknowledged to be very great ; and no one rendered more justice to its merits, to the motives which led to its adoption, and to its beneficial results than Sir N. Harris Nicolas, who, having heard that a reader had expressed some dissatisfaction, addressed to me the following letter :

"Torrington Square, 20th October, 1837.

"MY DEAR SIR,

"HAVING heard to-day, with great surprise, that a Reader of the Library of the British Museum had expressed dissatisfaction at the new regulations which you have introduced for obtaining Books, I take the liberty of offering you the opinion of a person who has constantly used the Library for sixteen years, and who, perhaps, is not very likely to be suspected of bestowing indiscriminate or venal praise.

"The great object of a Public Library is *dispatch* in procuring books. This can only be secured by *perspicuity* in describing them.

"In my humble judgment, no better mode could possibly be devised for immediately obtaining any particular work, than the printed tickets you have suggested. By specifying the Titles from the Catalogue, and copying from it the *Press-marks*, the applicant can at once identify the particular edition, or copy of an edition, which he requires. The importance of this to a critical student is obvious; and I cannot shew the utility of the *new* system more forcibly, than by saying that I have often, formerly, been assured that a book was not in the Museum, though I had myself referred to it only a few days before. The requisition to insert the Titles and *Press-marks* on the tickets is not merely reasonable, but it is indispensable, if the Library is to be conducted with satisfaction to the Public and to the Librarians. If people will not take the trouble to comply with rules, which, so far from being vexatious, are absolutely necessary for their own comfort, they can have no right to complain. The fault is *theirs* if mistakes or delay ensue; and it is as absurd, as unjust, to impute the effect of their own ignorance or carelessness to the Officers of the Museum.

"The only thing I can suggest about the new tickets is, that the *Press-marks* should be made more *simple*; but this is so manifest, and is so entirely dependant upon the re-arrangement of the Library, that it would be ridiculous to say another word on the subject.

" As to *dispatch* in procuring books. Not only does my  
 " own experience convince me of the great improvements  
 " which have taken place since your last appointment, but  
 " such is the opinion of every one whom I have heard  
 " speak of the Museum; and I have long had daily op-  
 " portunities of witnessing your courtesy and earnest desire  
 " to render your Department as beneficial as possible to  
 " the Public. To point out a defect, or to suggest an im-  
 " provement, is to secure your attention; and, as a matter  
 " of common justice, I anxiously bear testimony to the  
 " change which has taken place since your promotion.  
 " You have done wonders in a few weeks; and I pray you  
 " not to allow the caprice or folly of individuals to affect  
 " your exertions.  
 " Believe me, with great esteem, my dear Sir, very sin-  
 " cerely yours, &c."

This letter stated almost all that could be said in  
 favour of the plan: it seemed to express opinions  
 maturely considered; I was therefore unprepared to  
 hear condemned, as unnecessary and vexatious, (See  
 No. X.) what had been pronounced by the same  
 writer, as not only not vexatious, but absolutely ne-  
 cessary. The plea, that "he usually writes and  
 "speaks from the impression of the moment," may as  
 easily be alleged in defence of his present as of his  
 former judgment, and lead people to trust neither.  
 But although that letter sets forth what can be said  
 in favour of the plan which it praises, it touches but  
 slightly on those hindrances, which carelessness or  
 malice can alike produce to defeat its success. Any  
 person, who, from either cause, gives wrong references,  
 who writes illegibly, who misdescribes a book, who  
 misspells the name of an author, who asks for a large  
 number of books at the same moment, who will not take  
 the trouble to deliver his tickets to the proper person,  
 but leaves them about to be lost or mislaid, who has