Designed in 1823 by Robert Smirke, the British Museum’s Georgian buildings originally consisted of four wings containing galleries set around a large rectangular courtyard. Since then, the courtyard became filled with extension buildings, including the circular Reading Room and adjoining book stacks (1854-57).

Smirke’s stone clad museum quadrangle and iron framed Reading Room are now Grade I listed buildings.

The historic Reading Room is now the centre piece of the largest covered courtyard in Europe. The 6,700 m² (92 x 73 m) courtyard – a little bigger than the size of a football pitch – is enclosed by a spectacular glass and steel roof, a hub at the centre of the museum complex providing new modern galleries, and education and visitor facilities including, shops and a restaurant.

The ground breaking lattice roof which covers the central courtyard of the museum is made up of intricate steel and glass lattice work, which creates a delicate and unobtrusive canopy that does not necessitate supporting columns. A number of restrictions made this challenging, however the end result is both highly attractive and complimentary to the Grade I listed buildings surrounding the courtyard. It is also highly practical, allowing maximum natural daylight without solar glare, through the use of neutral-tint glass.

New exhibition spaces have been created under the glazed roof as well as generous circulation spaces and a café.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II GREAT COURT, THE BRITISH MUSEUM
LONDON, UK

CLIENT
Trustees of the British Museum

ARCHITECT
Foster + Partners

DURATION
Completed in 2001

SERVICES PROVIDED BY BUROHAPPOLD
Structural engineering, building services engineering, fire engineering, geotechnical engineering advice, planning supervision, geometry of the roof grid using sophisticated nonlinear form finding methods

AWARDS
2002 ISTRUCTE Special Structural Award
2002 CIVIC TRUST AWARDS

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