

## **A New Market**

### **Public and Private Collections in the Early 19th Century**

In the wake of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, merchants and manufacturers increasingly bought art. Their grand homes often housed impressive collections, helping to reinforce a rise in social status.

As the middle classes entered positions in public life they also acquired art for important civic buildings, including town halls and the Houses of Parliament. Other bodies, such as the Royal Manchester Institution, were founded for the promotion of science and the arts. The RMI was funded by public subscription from 1823 and along with its collection was based in this building. Its holdings and the Gallery were given to the City in 1882.

Boosted by national pride through export and empire, the new patrons preferred contemporary British art. This represented a shift away from 18th-century taste, which had been led by the aristocracy and gentry and mainly favoured continental old masters.

Seriousness and morality remained important in art and painters continued to adopt Grand-Style subjects derived from biblical, historical and classical sources. They inevitably responded to popular demand, however, and often strayed into sentimentality and eroticism.