

Pen and Print.

It is highly unlikely that the steam power which Charles Strutt extolled so eloquently in his editorials had much to do with his 'modest enterprise' as he pleased to call it. Those 5,000 copies were more likely to be laboriously churned out by hand in the basement of his shop in Church Street, with his team of printers slaving away at their frames in the back room, out of sight of the little office where his advertisers and printing customers came to place their orders, with Mrs Strutt probably sitting behind the counter and keeping the books.

He was constantly placing advertisements for apprentices in his own journal, whether he was steadily expanding, finding those he did engage unsuitable or there was a shortage of manpower in the rapidly developing district, is a matter of conjecture. The Strutt family, living over the shop, would have still looked out on a comparatively rural scene, the kitchen gardens or 'forcing grounds' of Kensington Palace. Although a scheme had already been mooted to use the site for a new barracks nothing had yet come of the plan. Among those who strongly opposed it was John Loudon, architect and landscape gardener with conservation ideals far ahead of his time, who had the dream of extending Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens across into Holland Park. (The barracks were eventually built in 1856)

The village of Notting Hill, extended by the discovery of mineral qualities in its gravel pits during the fashion for 'taking the waters' in the 18th century, had taken a downward turn and a collection of tenement terraces was being built on the brow of the hill. The old village was now sandwiched between the building developments to the south and north, and only the pastures of Holland House farm and the grounds of the lesser stately homes around it, were holding back the tide of bricks and mortar.

However much the older folk may have lamented the passing of the gentle country ways, for the young it was a time of excitement and ambition. Charles Strutt was thirty two when the 1851 census recorded his residence at 16 Church Street with his wife, Sophia, four years his senior, and four children, Josiah, aged ten, Charles, eight, Edgar, six, and baby Catherine. Another son, Henry, was born in 1854 and Edith, the youngest of the family was not born until 1859.

The Strutts neighbours in the terrace of three storey houses included a tailor, a pork butcher and a dressmaker, the floors above the shops appearing to have been in multi-occupation, although it is very unlikely that the apartments would have been self contained and they would have certainly have shared what ever sanitary facilities were provided . The terrace still stands although the numbering of the street has been changed (in the 1850s the even numbers were on the west side and a hand drawn map stuck into the fly leaf of the bound copy of ' The Gazette ' marks the Strutt home and printing office at No 16 in the terrace now between Holland Street and Dukes Lane. (probably the present No 25). Also in the ' Gazette ' volume is a crayonned drawing by ten years old Josiah Strutt, of Kensington Gardens, showing the Palace and passers-by, an old lady in a crinoline and shawl, carrying a parasol, and a boy in a ' stove pipe ' hat bowling a hoop, dated 1852.

The growth of London in the mid nineteenth century was akin to a rash rather than an inflammation, building development extended outwards around a central point but also straggled here and there patchily, attracted by some focus or event, such as the Great Exhibition of 1851 which completely transformed all the areas surrounding it.

Over a century and a half earlier, the conversion of Kensington's Nottingham House into a palace by Dutch William and his Queen Mary, had attracted the Court to Kensington Square and its immediate neighbourhood. Now the straggle of shops and houses along the old High Street was being smartened up and joined by a splendid new Vestry Hall (which Charles Strutt obviously regarded as a gross extravagance). The parish church, also built in the days when Kensington was the Court centre, was beginning to show its age (less than twenty years later it was declared positively dangerous, its walls bulging with the weight of the congregations in the galleries on Sundays).

Church Street, leading from the church to the Vicarage some 300 yards northwards up the hill , was only a third of its present length, becoming little more than a footpath, called Love Lane , until it joined Silver Street, its counterpart at the Notting Hill end, passing the 'country ' mansions of Gore House, Campden House, Bullingham House and Sheffield House.

Almost opposite the Strutt's Church Street home there were two smaller late 18th century buildings, York and Maitland Houses the occupants of which had included George III's daughter Princess Sophia and James Mill and his son, John Stuart Mill, who had later moved to Kensington Square.

As Kensington pushed northward towards Kilburn and Farringdon, and west to Hammersmith, the rural byways were fast disappearing under terraces and tenements. Not the least of such developments was the growth of the ambitious Ladbroke Estate north of Notting Hill Gate. Here the speculative builders had decided that despite the squalor of the nearby neighbourhood of 'the Dale' they might repeat the successful developments in Brompton and South Kensington, a vain hope which led to spectacular bankruptcies.

Mid-Victorian London was not an attractive place and far removed from the Pickwickian scenes depicted on Christmas cards.

Its streets were usually dirty, thick with mud in winter and dust in summer and fouled by hundreds of tons of horse droppings (the celebrated chronicler of the times, journalist Henry Mayhew, in his 'London Labour and the London Poor' calculated that one horse could produce 41 pounds of manure a day!).

Traffic jams may not have involved today's discharge of carbon monoxide fumes but they certainly existed, especially on the few bridges and at busy cross roads, with carriages, carts and horse buses literally nose to tail, moving, if at all, at a snail's pace. The vehicles also had to compete with crowds of people most of whom walked to their place of work because their homes were only a short distance from their employment and in any case they could not afford the fare.

The condition of the streets as well as fashion discouraged colourful clothing, most women, especially the elderly, wore black or dark clothes, the men also favoured black or grey cloaks or coats with high black 'stove pipe hats' The poor wore anything that would cover their backs, usually old and dirty, so the general street scene was of a moving mass of sombre pallid people and not the jolly, bonny rosy-cheeked characters shown waiting for coaches in picturesque innyards exchanging Yuletide greetings.

In the suburbs, which began only just west of Hyde Park Corner, and north of Marble Arch, the epidemic of building, plus the construction of sewers, laying of gas pipes, and in some places such as Paddington, the new railway, reduced the whole area to one of a great dreary construction site, akin to that of a modern motorway.

Charles 'Paker Strutt had been born in 1819... the same year as Queen Victoria and in the year of the Massacre of Peterloo when the rebellious people of Manchester, assembling in St Peter's Field to hear radical speakers, had been mown down by the cavalry with the loss of eleven lives. Too young, of course, to know of such events, he might, however, some years later as a ten year old boy, have well-recalled the bonfires lit to celebrate the Coronation of George IV's sailor brother, William, even if the politics of the time were of less interest to a little boy than the tiddlers he fished in the streams near his home in the village of Kilburn.

It is not known whether he was related in any way to antiquary, author and engineer, Joseph Strutt, certainly he was to become far more than the craftsman-artisan, printer of cowkeepers' bills and labels for patent medicines. The man who founded 'The Kensington Gazette' in 1853 was a philosopher as well as a poet and political commentator in an era when it had only just become respectable, not to say less dangerous, to follow the craft of journalism.

Charles Strutt's vehemence may have been directed at Drink rather than Drains (which claimed as many or more lives) and if there was a hint of self-satisfaction in his writing he must be forgiven, so much that was happening was promising and exciting, as the Great Exhibition had so recently demonstrated. Here was the brave new world of railways, the electric telegraph, steam-powered machinery and gas lighting (even if it did still cause the occasional explosion). It did seem as if God was in His heaven, and if everything was not quite right with the world, it very soon would be.

Charles Dickens portrayed a less optimistic picture. A journalist before he was a novelist, there may have been those who thought this gave him a tendency towards sensationalism, but others well knew that the picture painted by him in 'Bleak House' and 'Hard Times' was not exaggerated in any way, although some of his contemporaries such as the ageing Leigh Hunt might have us think ^{low} otherwise.

In his ' Old Court Suburb ' Leigh Hunt describes ' the beauty and salubrity of Kensington ' where he and Charles Strutt both lived, as a place ' where the fresh air salutes you from healthy soil free from anything repulsive , unless it be for one hidden spot which new improvements will remove ' (Did he have an inkling of the filthy slums of Notting Dale less than a quarter of a mile north of his home in Phillimore Terrace ?)

Charles Strutt was apparently blinkered to the festering sore of the Dale, although ready enough to condemn ' putrid pools ' and stinking sewers when they offended nearer home and eager to establish Christian standards in the tenements and rookeries where the poor huddled in their misery , in the pious hope that Godliness might lead to cleanliness . He was not alone, many of those cosily ensconced in their newly built villas in the suburbs of Clapham, St Johns Wood , Fulham, Paddington and Putney, and other parts of the outskirts of London as well as Kensington, had no contact at all with the poor, other than their servants with whom they seldom conversed . Even those living in central London only touched the surface of squalor in the streets they frequented , which would never include the foetid yards and alleys out of bounds to ladies and gentlemen of any sensitivity . Only progressive doctors who were involving themselves in the new science of public health, the police and the clergy in poorer livings had any idea of the conditions in which most of the poor dwelt.

Charles Strutt was unlucky to have been born in an era of great literary talent . What chance had a moderately talented journalist-poet against such as Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Leigh Hunt , Alfred Tennyson, Charles Kingsley, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and other giants of the mid 19th century literary scene ? Some were even his neighbours in Kensington and nearby Chelsea, may even have had his modest little free sheet stuffed through their basement letter boxes. Was he aware of his own comparative pettiness as he laboured in Church Street over his editorials and poetry between overseeing his printers at work on the cowkeepers' bills and the medicine bottle labels as well as 'The Gazette' ?

Thackeray lived only yards away from 16 Church Street in the bow-fronted Georgian house which still stands in nearby Young Street overpowered by the commercial monument of Barkers' store.

Thackeray's daughter , Anne Thackeray Ritchie (Lady Ritchie) recorded her memories of the house where her father used to write in the study at the back, overlooking the garden. ' The vine shaded his two windows which looked out on the medlar tree and the Spanish jessamine of which the yellow flowers scented the old brick walls. I liked the top school room the best of all the rooms in the dear old house , the sky was in it and the evening bells used to ring into it across the garden..... When my father had done his day's work he used to drive into town on the top of an omnibus, and sometimes in a brougham, very often he used to take us with him by hansom on long expeditions to Hampstead, Richmond or Greenwich '

It was at this house in Kensington that Thackeray was visited by Charlotte Bronte , as Anne Ritchie recalled ' a tiny delicate little person, pale, with fair straight hair , steady eyes, dressed in a little barege dress with a pattern of faint green moss. '

While Charles Strutt was busy with the launching of his 'Gazette,' Thackeray decided to leave Young Street , friends having persuaded him that it would be to the advantage of his daughters, Anne and Harriet (' Minnie') now they were growing up, to live in the more fashionable new district of Brompton. In May 1855 the household moved to Onslow Square (Mrs Thackeray had become mentally deranged after Minnie's birth and lived in seclusion with a companion) The new home in South Kensington was said by Anne to be a ' pleasant bowery house of green carpets and curtains with windows looking out on the elm trees of the square... '

Anne Thackeray Ritchie left a book of sketches of her new home which gives some idea of the kind of setting in which Strutt and his family may have lived , although doubtless on a more modest scale. Anne's sketch books show that even Thackeray with his artistic ability could not prevent ' the hideous fashions of the day invading his drawing room ' says his grand-daughter , Hester Thackeray Fuller in her recollections of Anne Ritchie.

' A sociable takes up the middle of the room and a big round walnut wood table stands in the window upon which is placed a gigantic pedestal paraffin lamp with a white ground glass globe. A trellised wallpaper, glazed chintz curtains with a pattern of green leaves and red flowers are held up with violet ribbons and wool work , bell pulls are on each side of the mirror over the mantelpiece ,

Thackeray was later to move again, to Kensington Palace Gardens in the last years of his life, but that was after Charles Strutt had moved on to live in Villiers Street, off the Strand.

Although Charles Dickens never lived in Kensington it was at Campden House, just up the hill from Strutt's printing shop, that he and his friend, Wilkie Collins, appeared together in the latter's play, 'The Lighthouse', which Strutt reviewed in 'The Gazette.' in July 1855, Was the young Strutt jealous of Dickens? It would be understandable, only a few years separated them in age. Dickens, seven years Strutt's senior, was already a national figure, founder of a newspaper, author of several novels (' Pickwick Papers ' had made his name when he was only 24) A few months after his review of ' The Lighthouse ' Strutt took Mr Dickens to task in an Open Letter editorial for his pandering to the pleasures of the people when they should be more seriously engaged in improving their minds.

Dickens had been a parliamentary reporter before he was eighteen, founded a newspaper, ' The Daily News ' when he was thirty-four and a periodical, 'Household Words ' three years later. He paid himself £ 2000 a year as Editor of ' The Daily News ' , although he spent only three weeks in that position before falling out with the proprietors who considered he overpaid his staff (drawn mainly from his personal friends , including Douglas Jerrold, Leigh Hunt and Mark Lemon, and also his less brilliant relations. (His father was in charge of the reporters and his father-in-law was the music critic)

Dickens was certainly not afraid to dirty his own hands and found time to oil the machinery on Christmas Day 1845 in preparation for the first issue in January. In that respect Strutt may have had a lot in common with Dickens, for it is very doubtful that the Editor of ' The Times ' John Delane, had ever been called upon to oil the machines, although he was only twenty three when appointed in 1814. Even in those days ' the Thunderer ' could boast no less than three presses and employed 62 composers. Delane, a year older than Strutt, might deservedly aroused emotions of envy in the small time printer/journalist who criticised 'The Times ' for complaining that the removal of the stamp duty might offer them

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unfair competition , which in the words of John Bright had 'sent them howling and splashing about like a harpooned whale ' .

Leigh Hunt was a tamed, if not a shabby tiger when he left Kensington in 1853 to live in Hammersmith. The old rebel who had been imprisoned with his brother for two years in 1813 for a libellous article on the Prince Regent, in their radical journal ' The Examiner ' , was now a grand old man remembered more as the friend of Keats, Shelley and Byron and in receipt of a civil list pension of £200 a year.

In 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, he had moved from his previous Kensington home in Edwardes Square, where he had lived for ten years, to a house in nearby Phillimore Terrace (now Allen Street) off Kensington High Street, but had only been in his new home a few months when his youngest son, Vincent, who had been his constant companion, died after a long illness. Leigh Hunt, partially to change the scene from this unhappy association with his bereavement and also as an economy, moved to a smaller cottage in Hammersmith at Cornwall Road (now Rowan Road) , and it was here that he wrote ' The Old Court Suburb ' .

Charles Strutt was not afraid to patronise the old lion, now seventy to Strutt's thirty four years. ' Although the name Leigh Hunt is associated with a period of domestic history which gives us no pleasure ' he wrote (referring to Hunt's past radicalism) ' we are very pleased with the two volumes before us and sincerely congratulate the author, they evince he is enjoying a green old age.

Thomas Babington Macaulay who had been a frequent visitor among the illustrious band which attended the ' court' of Lady Holland at Holland House, was about to move in to Holly Lodge on Campden Hill where he spent the last years of his life. The first two volumes of his ' History of England ' published in 1848 had sold 13,000 copies in four months and when he added a third and then a fourth volume in 1855, 26,400 sold in ten weeks.

Rival historian Thomas Carlyle had been living in Chelsea since his marriage in 1834 and it was shortly after his arrival there that the great drama occurred when the manuscript of his ' History of the French Revolution ' was accidentally burned. Carlyle had given the MS to John Stuart Mill to read and Mill's parlour maid

finding the papers lying on a chair in drawing room of his house in Kensington Square used them to light the fire. Mill gave Carlyle £100 in compensation and the historian valiantly started all over again.

Sharing the birth year of 1819 with Queen Victoria and Charles Strutt was another neighbour in Chelsea, John Ruskin, the wine merchant's son who inherited his father's fortune as well as making his own from his writing and giving most of both away or lavishing it on fruitless social experiments. Gaining his early reputation as an art critic, Ruskin was just attaining the height of his career in the years of 'The Gazette', his 'Stones of Venice' and 'Seven Lamps of Architecture' having just been published. Rejecting the technical and material adulations of his time, Ruskin sought to counteract them through craftsmanship, the beauty of art and architecture and religious ideals.

Even in the more frivolous world of the novel the ^{proliferation} ~~proliferation~~ of talent was quite formidable, 'Jane Eyre', 'Vanity Fair', 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Dombey & Son' had all been published in one year, 1847, when Trollope's first novel had also appeared although his real success was not until the 1850s, starting with 'The Warden' and 'Barchester Towers'. It was the custom of the day to publish these lengthy works in serial form, either in separate parts or in instalments in a weekly periodical such as Dickens' 'Household Words' in which 'Hard Times' was serialised. Thackeray's 'The Newcomes' came out in monthly parts and 'David Copperfield', 'The Old Curiosity Shop', 'Bleak House' and 'Dombey and Son' were all produced in the same serial form, bringing them within the reach of those who could afford the few pence for a periodical compared to the cost of a book (which could equal that of a child's coat).

No wonder that Charles Strutt felt compelled to include in his 'Gazette' serials such as 'The Widow's Kitchen, a heart-rending story of two orphan children, an Irish tale' 'The History of Paddy Golightly, and quite inexplicably, the biography of Henry II. Paddy's story was undoubtedly intended to be comic, although it managed to slip in some popularly unflattering descriptions of the Irish, Paddy being described as 'loose, heavy and scattery in his figure' and his sisters 'thoroughly disguised by their neglect of soap and water'. This story peters out in midstream around the 81st issue with the proud announcement of better things to come.

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This was the commencement of a new serial ' an entirely original tale of great worth and strictly moral character, religious sentiments and displaying throughout fine traits of practical Christianity. ..' The Widow's Kitchen ' or ' The Tears of ant and the Triumphs of Labour ' a tale for working women by the author of ' Jesuit Executorship' which has had an extensive circulation in England and America and been favourably received by the periodical press of both countries '.

Charles Strutt was also in the enviable position of being able to publicise his own verse, inspired by a variety of subjects and sentiments from his own domestic events to those of national importance. Although poems do appear under other names such as Estellina and Sigma one has the suspicion that they were his pseudonyms, and he was later to invite subscriptions to a bound volume of his verse entitled ' Lays of Kensington '.

This is how he celebrated the Queens Birthday on May 24 1854

Charge the cannon ! Let it bellow
Where our flags of trade are seen,
Glad Britannia bids them greeting
On this birthday of her Queen.

Rouse the beffries ! Let the steeples
Carry on the journeying joy
Till their maddened walls stand rocking
With their unrestrained employ.

Let the young rejoicing children
Knowing what the anthems mean,
Dance delighted at the pealing
And respond ' God save the Queen ; '

England's blessed domestic Sovereign
With maternal pleasures sees
All her royal offspring round her
Like a banded Pleiades .

Hated despots look bewildered
To this land their hearing lean
Locked in walls of steel, they envy
Albion's heart-environed Queen .

Ancient long-abandoned Erin
Sees dark centuries of wrong
Melting fast like mists at morning
From her land renowned in song.

Listening history holds her volume
Writes these deeds in lines of gold
That this reign in radiant letters
Earth's bright future may behold.