

In November 1855 Charles Strutt launched forth in one of his regular verbose ( and often vitriolic ) editorials on the scandal of spending money on an elaborate gas chandelier to light the new Vestry Hall , which he called the ' Palace of Palaver ' , when so many people were going hungry owing to the high price of bread.

" We feel afraid to look at these brazen gee-gaws ' he writes, ' At a moment's glance they bud with bread , while beneath stand a thousand families holding forth a forest of fingers for food. Before them hangs three tons and a half of bread , nearly 2,000 loaves at the present famine price of that staff of life. Good God ! Their food is turned to brass and lacquered ornaments stoop in mockery over their pallid brows ; ' If the solemn services of religion conducted in a district church could require only a pittance of money for lighting, he continues ' surely a dozen mortals might have been content to sit under plainer and cheaper chandeliers for the auditing of upholstery bills and scavenging accounts ! ' .

Despite recent announcements of the reductions in the price of bread it was still a very expensive item for poor families, a large loaf costing nearly a shilling when a labourer's wage could be twelve shillings a week, or less. Many luxuries could be bought for such a sum in what the ' Gazette ' called the ' shilling age ' when that coin was the ' key to a thousand wants '. ' For a shilling one can traverse and return through the metropolis like a weavers shuttle or call the Crystal Palace our own. ' A shilling would buy a hundredweight of coal, or half a pint or more of gin. A reduction a month later in December 1855 ' by several bakers in the north eastern districts & reduced the price of a four pound loaf, second quality, from tenpence to ninepence halfpenny, household bread to ninepence and country bread, ' unweighted ' to eightpence halfpenny a loaf. Charles Strutt commented ' This reduction has been effected in consequence of the labouring classes having had recourse to rice, beans and potatoes instead of consuming bread '. There were also reductions in the prices of sugar . ' many families having in consequence of the high prices refrained from the use of that article or limited its consumption to the smallest possible quantity. The retail grocers , throughout the metropolis have reduced the price by fully ½d a pound Brazilian Sugar which had cost sevenpence a pound was to be reduced to fivepence halfpenny and West Indian to sixpence.

Whether it was high bread prices or a more progressive attitude to diet, 'Gazette' readers were informed in October 1855 that 'operatives' (the 19th century term for workmen) in Cornwall considered ripe apples nearly as nourishing as bread. 'This fruit has not hitherto been sufficiently estimated in this country' the report continues. 'Besides contributing a large proportion of sugar, mucilage and other nutritive materials, it contains a fine combination of vegetable acids, extractive substances and aromatic principles as to act powerfully in the capacity of refrigeratives, tonics, and antiseptics. When freely used at the season of ripeness by agricultural labourers, they prevent debility, strengthen digestion, correct putrifactive tendencies in nitrogenous food, avert scurvy and probably strengthen and maintain the pursuit of productive labour. (almost as good in fact as Francis' Samaratin Oil and some of the other patent medicines mentioned earlier ! ).

Henry Mayhew took a detailed interest in the feeding habits of the London Poor, quoting diets which were heavily weighted in favour of beer and other forms of alcohol rather than bread, and completed by stodge, with an almost complete lack of any kind of vegetable other than potatoes. Even these were under threat, since the potato blight in Ireland in the middle of the 'hungry forties' and this may have inspired the horticulturalists to look for an alternative and in one of the earlier issues of the 'Gazette' Editor Strutt had reported 'Our old friend the potato, companion to chop and steak, is threatened to be supplanted by a new esculent. In the gardens of the Horticultural Society at Chiswick are growing two plants of Chinese Yam which is expected to become naturalised and prove an excellent substitute for potatoes', He was not to know that it would be a century at least, plus an influx of West Indian immigrants, before yams would be seen in any numbers in the shops and street markets of English cities.

The 'Gazette's' household tips do nothing to improve the picture of Victorian culinary pleasures. Take for instance that for the Preservation of Butter. 'Powder finely and mix together two parts of best salt and one part loaf sugar and one part of nitre ( salt petre or nitrate of potash used in making gunpowder ! ). To each pound of butter, well cleansed from the milk, add one ounce of the compound. It should not be used under a month. An additional tip is ' it may be useful to know that the butter having an unpleasant flavour may be improved by the addition of two teaspoons of

bicarbonate of soda to three pounds of butter . Its <sup>c</sup>turnipy flavour could also be prevented by only feeding the cows with turnips immediately after milking them.' If it appears strange that an urban newspaper should be giving advice on cow feeding one has to realise that milk was only just being transported into towns since the construction of the railways and many cow keepers still kept beasts in back yards or even in cellars .

Mayhew noted that during the summer months milk was sold in Smithfield, Billingsgate and other markets and on Sundays in Battersea Fields, Clapham Common, Camberwell Green and Hampstead Heath . The sellers were men who wore smocks and carried the milk in pails, hung from a yoke, as did the usual street sellers. The milk they sold was skim and even then was watered down still further to increase their profit on a halfpenny for a half pint . Milk was also sold as a novelty straight from the cow in St James Park where there were usually eight stands with cows in the summer but only four in winter

Whether the butter sold at the West End Provision Warehouse in Dorville Road, Hammersmith, had a turnippy flavour or not, it cost tenpence a pound or 1s 3d for 'the very best Aylesbury' which one also hopes did not contain ingredients such as saltpetre . Mr William Wells, the proprietor, in his 'Gazette' advertisement acknowledges the 'very liberal patronage he has received' since his acquisition of the business there and also announces prices of a shilling a pound for coffee and fourpence for raisins.

A tax made tea very expensive and even the good news of 'Fourpence more off tea' still brought the price of 'fine pearl leaf gun powder' to four shillings a pound at Nicholas Hall & Co 135 Edgware Road.

Meat was comparatively cheap compared to some other commodities, Wendalls Provision Store, at Notting Hill Gate had Hartmoor Forest Mutton at 6½d a pound and Dairy Fed Pork legs or Prime Ox Beef Sirloin or Ribs for 8d a pound. Most meat was brought into London 'on the hoof' and the animals slaughtered in the backyards of butchers' shops with all the attendant unpleasant sights, smells and sounds. The recent health legislation had included slaughter houses but they were not very strictly enforced any more than those on butchers shops, which may have presented a favourable front to their lady customers and cooks but where unmentionable things went on in the backrooms and cellars. The sausage did not get its bad name for nothing !.

The Brompton Road, now one of London's smartest thoroughfares, was anything but that when          Mr Charles Henry Harrod opened a grocery shop there at No 8 Middle Queens Buildings in Knightsbridge Village in 1849. Harrod had been a wholesale grocer and tea merchant in Cable Street, Stepney and it may have been the cholera outbreak in that year that encouraged him to take over a business which had been run by his friend, Philip Burden, in healthier Brompton, which might not have been very fashionable but was at least on the edge of town.

Although several of Charles Strutt's advertising clients had their businesses in Queens Buildings, Harrod was not one of them, perhaps his success was already such that he did not need to spend money blowing his own trumpet. Market barrows added competition to the shops in Brompton Road on Saturday nights in those days when North Street, and other side turnings now covered by the Harrods site, were slum lanes (the former said to be 'a mass of filth from end to end'). Portobello Market had not yet come into existence in North Kensington but it is more than likely that casual stalls and barrows would have done business, at least on Saturdays, in the vicinity of the Rookeries in Kensington High Street, with their large populations of poor people.

Such markets are described by the novelist and Anglican clergyman Charles Kingsley in 'Alton Locke', the story of a poor working class poet in London. 'It was a foul chilly, foggy Saturday night, from the butchers and greengrocers' shops the gas lights flared and flickered, wild and ghastly over haggard groups of slip-shod dirty women bargaining for scraps of stale meat and frost-bitten vegetables, wrangling about short weight and bad quality. Fish stalls and fruit stalls lined the edge of the greasy pavements sending up odours as foul as the language of the sellers. Blood and sewer water crawled from under the doors and out of spouts and reeked down gutters amid offal, animal and vegetable, in every state of putrefication. Foul vapours rose from the cowsheds and slaughter houses and the doorways of the undrained alleys where the inhabitants carried the filth on their shoes from the backyards into the courts, and the courts into the main street.'

Nearly every Saturday market also did a trade on Sunday morning, owing to the habit of paying workmen on Saturday night, the recipient usually proceeding straight to beer house or gin palace, where unless he was apprehended by his wife on the way, or caught inside, would spend a great deal of it before it reached her purse, and often did

          
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not come home until the market was shut. On the Sunday morning the wives and mothers would salvage what they could from his night's carousing and see what was still to offer in the market which would remain open, selling the scraps and rubbish from the night before until driven to close by the local policeman as the church bells began to ring for morning service .

Mayhew's description of the markets was not as grim as Kingsleys', but then he was a journalist , not a clergyman. He gives a certain rowdy glamour to such places ' more the character of a fair than a market ' he says of those in places such as The Cut , where 'every kind of light from the new gas lamps to flares and candles made the street appear to be on fire'. Stalls laden with saucepans, crockery and glass, gaudy tea trays, cheap clothes, vegetables and fruit as well as sideshows, entertainers and patent medicine vendors, and over it all the ceaseless shouts of the traders, from the 'Buy ! Buy ! Buy!' of the butchers to the 'New Herrings Alive!' of the fishmongers.

Henry Mayhew collected statistics on amounts spent on food and drink by poor working people, among them the scavenger( a street cleaner ) who out of his fifteen shillings a week earnings spent 3s 6d on beer and gin. His food consisted mainly of salt beef, dry bread and pickles and no vegetables of any kind, except perhaps an onion or two a week. The really thirsty trades, such as the coal backers and coal heavers who shifted the coal from the ships to the railway waggons and were paid at the local pub, got through sixteen and a half pints of beer, with a pennyworth of gin in each, before breakfast every morning, although Mayhew does concede that they were usually ' an intemperate type of man '. The costermongers were also described as hard drinkers, ' it is not unusual for a costermonger in a good time to spend twelve shillings out of every pound on beer and pleasure ', but they did eat better, popular food included pies , both meat and fruit, saveloy sausages, and a good Sunday dinner once a week with ' plenty of taters '.

A large amount of food was sold in the streets, although this was unlikely to have been bought by the more genteel families to whom Strutt would have been directing his 'Gazette '. Among the healthier wares of the street sellers was watercress ( as long as it had not been gathered from polluted streams ) and one of the first cries to be heard in the noisy London streets in the morning was ' Fresh water creases! ' Many of the sellers were ragged children whose ricketty condition made it plain that they seldom partook of their own wares ,

Baked potatoes, cooked by a nearby baker were sold from handsome brass-ornamented cans containing a little hot water boiler heated by charcoal. Fruit and meat pies, pieces of plum duff, boiled currant pudding, buns, toffee and cheap sweets and of course wheelks winkles and shell fish were all sold in the streets either from pedlars' trays or barrows, mostly in the poorer areas or in markets. Muffins and crumpets were an exception as an upper class trade and a muffin seller told Mayhew that his best customers were the genteel houses. He liked wet days best because there were ladies who did not keep a servant and who bought to save themselves going out. Although Mayhew says that the ringing of the Muffin Man's bell had recently been forbidden by an Act of Parliament, it had been as inoperative as that which forbade the use of a drum by the costermongers and the 'muffin bell still tinkles along the streets and is rung vigorously in the suburbs' (as it was right into the next century).

Despite the maxim that a woman's place should be in the home, the standards of culinary expertise were generally abysmal, except in the aristocratic households where lavish entertaining took place. The middle classes were now able to afford servants but as such households were managed by women who had no training in housewifely arts the meals the 'cooks' produced were not likely to be of a very high standard and Mrs Isabella Mary Beeton, and others like her, were to provide as great a social service as many other less homely pioneers in improving standards of domestic living. Earlier in the century, Mrs Rundell, whose 'Art of Cookery' was published in 1806, lamented the scarcity of good butter, toast and coffee. Her book went into countless editions but up to 1833 she received no remuneration for it, although ultimately succeeded in obtaining 2,000 guineas. Eliza Acton produced 'Modern Cookery for Private Families' in the mid 1850s, the very title of which indicates the readership to whom it was directed, although she may have thought it would help the poor saying 'in our cottages as well as homes of a better order we are guilty of waste'.

Another writer of cookery books which one feels were not intended for cottagers was Alexis Soyer, a neighbour of Strutt's in that his Gastronomic Symposium of All Nations had been set up at Gore House, near the site of the present Albert Hall, during the Great Exhibition. Here he provided lavish menus in exotic and luxurious settings and at vast cost for those who could afford them, a surprising contrast to a/ later claim to fame, that of his pioneer work organising the food and cookery arrangements for the suffering troops in the Crimea, a task he carried out with extraordinary flair and enthusiasm, can

introducing cooking wagons and field stoves . He showed the same zeal in his attempts to improve the standards of working class food so it may be unfair to quote the famous 100 guineas dish which he produced for a banquet hosted by the Lord Mayor of York to ' propitiate the Great Exhibition ', everyone is allowed their publicity stunts ;

This incredible dish included in its ingredients turtles, capons, eighteen turkeys, and a number of other fowls, grouse, pheasants, partridges, pigeons, plovers, woodcocks and quails and six dozen stuffed larks .

Such experts may not have found the 'Gazette's' recipe for Blancmange very inspiring, although it employed isinglass, much favoured by Mrs Beeton. This form of gelatine, obtained from fishes, was used in later years for preserving eggs . Mrs Beeton's preference for it over the more common types of gelatine was probably because it was more tasteless than the product made from animal hides. Jellies became enormously popular during the Great Exhibition when they were served in the refreshment rooms. The huge amount of gelatine required to satisfy this new demand ( for jellies had previously only been served at rich men's tables ) encouraged the unscrupulous to use any old hides such as buffalo to make the glutenous substance, some even resorted to size and glues, so no wonder Mrs Beeton went to great lengths to describe a test which could be carried out to ensure that isinglass ( 'which should only be bought from the most reliable dealers' ) could be tested to distinguish it from 'the inferior sorts of gelatine from North and South America. '

The 'Gazette' blancmange had to be made by boiling  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce of isinglass in 16 fluid ounces of milk ( ' the old wine pint ' ) stirring it constantly until it boiled and then simmering until the isinglass dissolved, it was then strained, flavoured and put into moulds.

Apart from the backyard cows, most of the back streets of London greeted the morning with the sounds of crowing cocks, fowls being kept wherever there was a yard or so of space to accommodate them, and the 'Gazette' had regular advertisements for eggs for hatching ' prize black Spanish birds at 12 shillings a dozen or ' light coloured Cochins or Chinas for six shillings a dozen.' A rival supplier offered ' very fine hens and two cocks for sale cheap, of last summer's hatches all in good laying order at No 6 Young Street ( where Thackeray had been a neighbour ).

The delivery of flour to the home which sounds an unneccessarily cumbersome operation today, is explained by the low keeping time of the milled grain, which still contained the nutritious wheat germ, without any preservatives, causing it to go rancid or mouldy, this may also have encouraged even the working classes to prefer the new 'white' bread. Brewer & Son of Kensington Gravel Pits promised in their 'Gazette' advert to deliver flour ordered by 7 o'clock, the same evening to town and country households.

Experiments in bottling fruit had been carried out, as so many innovations often are, through the need to supply fighting men and since the French Navy had been issued with such preserves during the Napoleonic wars both bottling and canning were becoming more commonplace, although the latter could be attended with horrific dangers of food poisoning.

If cooking standards were not very high they have to be seen in the context of the many other household duties which had to be carried out with very basic materials and without any modern aids. In poorer families the mother was probably working a long day outside the home, either in factory, wash house or domestic service, and even middle-class housewives or their servants had to spend much more time on tasks such as building, tending and clearing fires, heating water and washing and ironing with primitive materials, as they did on the preparation of food.

Cooking often had to be done over an open fire on a trivet ( an iron stand which fixed to the front of the grate ) , small cooking ranges had a tiny oven and could never have accommodated even a moderately large size joint or bird, even if those who were using them could have afforded such a luxury . At Christmas time, or even on Sundays, families took their ' feast ' to the baker to cook ( as in ' The Christmas Carol ' ). In big houses there were complicated contraptions called ' closed ranges ' or Kitcheners , consisting of several ovens and hot plates, grids and trivets and even a back boiler which had to be filled by hand , to provide hot water. The temperature of all ovens was very difficult to control and needed constant attention if food was not be burned black or served up half raw.

The construction of the railways which used great amounts of coal also enabled the fuel to be brought into the cities such as London

and the ' Gazette ' carried numerous advertisements for coals from distant parts such as the Ince Hall Coal and Cannell Company ,  
' delivered directly from the collieries in Lancashire, Best Wallsend 25 shillings a ton , ready money only . ' A rival supplier announced that the South Yorkshire Railway now being unconnected with the Great Northern, coals of the district were being delivered within four miles of Camden or Aensington stations for 24 /- a ton , first class .

Gas was now a popular form of lighting in better class houses , at least in the main living rooms, but iron pipes rusted and burners blocked ( incandescent mantels were not introduced until much later in the century ) the light given was yellow and flickering and explosions were not uncommon. On August 22 1855 Strutt, in his guise of & ' the Inspector ' recorded in his Notebook that a ' great escape of gas had occurred in the main pipe in the road facing Allen Street and is noticeable by the passengers . This is not only extremely offensive but highly dangerous to health and should be at once rectified by the company. The inhabitants of Phillimore Place should look to the nuisance ' .

Every activity in the home had a myriad articles associated with it, such as the fire, with its coal box, fender, fire irons ( tongs poker and shovel ), oil lamps had to be cleaned and filled and their wicks trimmed almost daily, the mantelshelf was hung with a heavy pelmet of plush or velvet, collecting every possible atom of soot and grime , screens of all sizes helped to prevent draughts , walls were papered ( white wash was for hovels ) but paper hangings were not cheap ( about a halfpenny a yard ) in the currency of the time and paintwork was usually chocolate brown to compete with the foggy winter atmosphere .

The Victorians were in love with cast iron, ( they even used it to build churches ) and many homes proudly displayed furniture made of this cheap but solid and incredibly heavy and unsuitable material . A familiar name to twentieth century eyes is also found in the ' Gazette ' that of Heal's, established at 196 Tottenham Court Road , where they were displaying ' 100 different bedsteads, in iron, brass japanned wood, polished birch, mahogany, rosewood and walnut. At Queens Buildings, Brompton House, ' families furnishing who studied elegance with economy ' could buy a French polished mahogany Arabia bedstead for three guineas. One of the ' Gazette's ' rare illustrations features a bed, a throne like half-tester which was becoming more popular than

the four poster. This consisted of a high back, about eight feet tall from which projected an elaborate canopy, heavily draped and tasselled, with side curtains to keep draughts from the sleepers' shoulders. The footboard was only three or four feet high but lavishly decorated with scrolls and carving, as almost every article was in this decade of ornamentation ad nauseum.

Those with less expensive tastes, or less money, could buy a portable iron bedstead for as little as 9s 11d from R. M. Hutchinson & Co at 92 Edgware Road who also sold mahogany dining room chairs for ten shillings and a Rosewood Loo Table (Loo or Lanterloo was a card game) for £2 .10 s. It is tantalising to think what such items would fetch today in an auction of antiques. Huge seated chairs were needed to accommodate women with the enormous skirts of 1850s fashions, not to mention their equally enormous figures in their later years.

Big is beautiful could have been a Victorian slogan and the bigger was certainly the better when it came to furniture. Sideboards which had once been purely functional, drawered tables to provide a surface for extra dishes in a dining room, now assumed gigantic proportions to accommodate not only the spare food but all the spare ornaments, covered as was the whole of the rest of this and every room with a variety of ornaments from stuffed birds and animals, wax fruit and flowers, to boxes and containers of all kinds, china and glass. The poor, imitating the rich, followed suit with any little geegaw that could be picked up in a street market or by scavenging.

And all had to be frequently cleaned, polished, dusted by either housewife or servants. Before the introduction of stainless steel, cutlery had to be cleaned with Roby's plate powder 'guaranteed free from mercurial properties', stone steps needed whitening using hearthstone (a lump of soft stone and clay dipped in water and spread across the surface, also used for cleaning kitchen hearths). Laundry would usually be carried out with hard yellow soap but the 'Gazette' did advertise 'the new patent washing crystal as used in the Royal Laundry'. Sold in penny packets, an extract of Fullers Earth, it was manufactured by W. G. Nixey of 22 Moor Street, Soho, who also made Black Lead in solid blocks at a penny, twopence or fourpence, for polishing grates and ranges. Charles Dickens worked in a blacking factory at Hungerford Bridge when he was only thirteen and his father was in the Marshalsea gaol for debt. (cont.)

This must have been the young Dickens graduation in his education on the slums of London, he had already become familiar with places such as Soho, and Limehouse where he had relatives, to which he added his own explorations in Covent Garden and the Strand and best, or worst of all, Seven Dials. 'What wild visions of prodigies of wickedness, want and beggary arose in my mind out of that place' he said. But all this experience was as a spectator, now as a boy in a blacking factory he was part of it. The factory was at the foot of Hungerford Stairs, later to be demolished for the building of the Bridge and Charing Cross station. It overlooked the river and was filthy and rat-ridden, stinking of decay and rotten wood. 'My work' he wrote 'was to cover the pots of paste blacking, first with a piece of oil paper, then with a piece of blue paper and then tie them round with string'. At night he went home.... to the prison where the evenings were lightened by the tales his mother would tell him about some of the other debtors there.

And debt was a spectre that haunted many Victorian business men at a time when fortunes could be easily be made and lost. In his 'Prelude' Wordsworth described a city shopping centre early in the century as a 'monstrous ant hill, an endless stream of men and moving things, the quick dance of colours, lights and forms, the deafening din, the string of dazzling wares, shop after shop with symbols, blazoned names, and all the tradesmen's honours overhead.....'

Those tradesmen did not always have an easy time and the 'Gazette' makes this very plain with numerous advertisements for auctions of bankrupt stock and closing down sales, particularly among drapers which had proliferated with the enormous growth of the machine-aided cloth weaving industry and mass produced goods. Unfortunate traders unable to obtain tiding-over loans from banks were forced to turn to money lenders who under the current legislation could exact any interest they were able to squeeze from their desperate clients sometimes as much as 1300 per cent according to a Strutt editorial in 1855. 'We know public offices are beset by usurers who lend money from week to week to letter carriers, post office and other clerks. We have also noted instances of various charges up to 80 per cent per annum on loans made by persons who act in the capacity of land and house agents.'

The success of such money lenders Strutt considered was due to the Bill passed in 1837 that meant in effect that any amount of interest

could be charged on a Bill of Exchange not having more than 12 months to run, and the banks refused to discount a Bill unless for goods sold or delivered, this system of banking existed only for the wealthy, he said, and to the exclusion of shop keepers, victuallers and small manufacturers and the working classes generally.

This editorial proved to have an axe to grind the following week with the announcement that a prospectus was being issued for a new loan or banking company, the London Joint Advance Stock Society, which would grant loans from £ 20 to £100 and cash Bills for traders and other business men who required 'temporary accommodation.' This, said Strutt, was a death blow to the 'wretched and remorseless banditti of usurers who are a disgrace to the City of London'.

Shoppers also faced some hazards, but theirs were physical, apart from the crowded and dirty conditions of the street markets with pick pockets and beggars, even the most salubrious streets could have their dangers, according to an item in the Inspectors Notebook in the 'Gazette' in August 1855 when he reported that the shop shades at Nos 4, 5 and 21 Queens Road, Bayswater were too low. 'Passengers are often debonnetted as they pass by and a gentleman struck his hat against the iron bar and broke it... and his head was nearly broken too...'.

Traders who were prospering could protect their takings by investing in a Revolving Till patented by W. G. Nixey, of 22 Moor Street, Soho Square 'for the prevention of fraud and error and the detection of base coins. This 'simply constructed and elegant instrument retained in view simultaneously as many as five consecutive payments each giving conclusive evidence of the identity of the coin.'

A more unusual way to obtain goods of various kinds, with the added attraction of a gamble, were the Raffles and Lotteries or as they were often called 'Distributions'. These could vary from the simple and straightforward raffle for a six years old bay mare to take place on New Years Eve December 31 1853 at The George, Church Street Kensington, with 84 members at five shillings each, to Mr H.J.Hall's Distribution of 300 shares at 7s 6d each for the disposal of a Valuable Swiss Carving of the Lord's Supper and 299 other useful articles. This appears to have been something like a modern tombola. The draw was to take place on Tuesday March 21 1854 at 2 o'clock precisely when the Box containing the share vouchers would be opened and the subscribers receive their allotments, Persons wishing

to participate in this unusually valuable Distribution were advised to make early application for shares. Every subscriber would be entitled to one of the articles in the catalogue which could be had at Church Street where the property could be viewed.

Those who preferred a cheaper gamble could venture a shilling on a raffle for a splendid Town made Single Gun and Silver Watch at the Champion, Notting Hill, highest and lowest to be the winners.

For all their fabled prudishness these early Victorians loved a gamble and Henry Mayhew tells of the reckless gaming ways of London costermongers who would literally lose not only their shirts but their barrows, stock and all at 'pitch and toss.' Scouts would watch out for the police and favourite secret tossing grounds on Sundays were any of the unfinished railway station sites such as 'the fields around Kings Cross' or the shingle shore of the river between Lambeth and Chelsea. The venture of 7s 6d on a Distribution may sound harmless in comparison until the realisation that that sum could be a half of a normal week's wages, and some of the 300 lots were pretty trivial, including cheap brooches, tooth and hair brushes, a German toy, work boxes, combs and other 'lucky dip' and fairground rubbish which was being produced in large numbers by the new factory industries for a population which largely could not afford to buy them, cheap though they were by present day standards.

In his 'Letters from England' written early in the 19th century, Robert Southey invented a Spanish gentleman touring England whose correspondence enabled Southey to give vent to his own beliefs and opinions. In one of these he expresses his dislike of the big new manufacturing centres, their noise and dirt, although he was not insensible to the wonders of a city such as Birmingham. 'In no other age or country was there ever so astonishing a display of human ingenuity' he wrote. 'But watch chains, necklaces and bracelets, buttons, buckles and snuff boxes are dearly bought at the expense of health and morality and when it is considered how large a proportion of that ingenuity is employed making what is hurtful as well as that which is useless, it must be confessed that human reason has more cause at present for humility rather than triumph.'

It was not a view that would have been shared by the crowds at the Great Exhibition, or by Charles Strutt, who relied on some of those buckles, bracelets and buttons for his advertising revenue.