

Gaslight Gazette Chapter VII

Games Gauds and Raree Shows.....

Although Charles Strutt sounded forth in his most priggish and sanctimonious style on the frivolities of public pleasures when the populace would be better employed improving their minds and bodies, the majority of mid-Victorian amusements were strongly laced with instruction and lectures and exhibitions far outnumbered entertainment for its own sake. Nevertheless Strutt was not going to let people like Mr Dickens get away with encouraging the provision of Bread and Circuses (bread they were already rioting about) after all, Mr Dickens was in the entertainment business and would benefit from such a policy. ' No doubt amusements are necessary to Mr Dickens' said Charles Strutt ' Mr Punch et hoc genus omne (and all those like him) Let the demand cease and where would be their vocation and profits ? '

The 1850s saw the height of Charles Dickens' theatrical activities although he had not yet started his public readings , except for charity. The amateur company in which he was a leading light had been flourishing for many years numbering among its performers such famous literary and artistic personalities as Mark Lemon, John Leech and Douglas Jerrold from ' Punch ' , presenting brilliantly successful productions to raise money for various good causes. Audiences not only including leading members of society but the Queen herself and the Prince Consort , who saw their ' Everyman in His Humour ' at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket . The company then went on tour in grand style giving lavish receptions and collecting large sums for charity. This was followed by performances in country houses culminating in another great Royal Command Performance at Devonshire House.

What Dickens had said recently to inspire the Strutt editorial he does not make clear (although he had written on ' Amusements for the People in ' Household Words ' in 1850) and certainly the novelist's work never missed an opportunity to air his love of all things theatrical. Astleys Amphitheatre, a great circus and theatrical performance had received a long article in ' Sketches by Boz ' and was attended by characters in ' The Old Curiosity Shop ' and ' Bleak House ' and the author's own excitement in such occasions shines through the description ' all the paint, gilding and looking glass, the vague smell of horses suggestive of coming wonders, the clean white sawdust, ..the company coming in and taking their places, the fiddlers looking carelessly up at them while they tuned their instruments ...the curtain which hid such gorgeous mysteries ...feverish excitement when the bell rang , and the music began, everything delightful, splendid and surprising.

These were not the words to encourage the masses to serious instruction and educational pursuits and Charles Strutt 'respectfully addresses their kind friend and champion' on October 25 1855

'Are we Austrians? Are our labourers and mechanics serfs and proletarians that a paternal government must keep them in a good temper and mental imbecility by games and gauds and raree shows? The people of this country can amuse themselves or know where to find speculators to do it for them for such a consideration as they can afford. The business of government and society should be rather to curb the licentiousness of pleasure and prevent festivities from degenerating into orgies than to promote pleasures themselves. The love of amusement is a plant that grows already too luxuriously in the natural soil of the human heart.'

Although believing it was no part of the government's duty to please the people as children, Strutt was in favour of it 'seeking to improve and elevate them as men and women' providing museums and supporting edifices of historical and architectural excellence, or collections of plants 'as at Kew'. But 'Mr Dickens, naturally enough an advocate of amusements for the people has made the discovery that the multitude was in perfect humour during the performances of a military band on Sunday, just as long as the people are entertained and tickled they are good and responsible citizens.'

'We like amusements as well as most of our readers' says Mr 'Starchy' Strutt, unbending just a little 'we have often been known to laugh outright, seriously as it may be supposed to affect our editorial dignity'. He added that he did not even mind seeing others laugh 'as long as they are not laughing at us.'... (Oh dear!). And he concludes 'If people can be induced to seek their amusement in the direction of their duty and in the improvement of their worldly means, the care of their health and culture of their minds, they would then need no contrivances or direct contributions to their entertainment.'

Certainly the majority of advertisements for entertainment in his 'Gazette' should have met with his approval, one could hardly consider illustrated travel lectures to be less than mind-improving and 'The Funeral of the Duke of Wellington' may have been an awe-inspiring sight but still a very sobering experience. This was the subject of a magnificent Diorama produced by two artists, M. Desvignes and Mr Wilson, the scope of which would have had to be seen to be fully appreciated. Such performances were achieved by the use of various optical tricks, lighting and stereoscopic effects requiring dozens of pictures.

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' The painter has reproduced these grand and touching scenes with peculiar power,' Strutt wrote in June 1854, announcing this production of Wellington's Funeral Procession and Entombment now open daily at 3 and 8 o'clock at St George's Gallery, ' the great Diorama of London showing the whole of the scenes connected with this magnificent pageant and ceremonial. Admission one shilling, front seats two shillings, stalls three shillings, children half price '.

' Not only is the metropolis shown on the morning of November 18 1852 but the prior particulars of the great act are delineated. The illustrations begin with a view of Walmer Castle which is succeeded by a spiritedly drawn interpretation of the Duke's chamber representing the hero in his last moments surrounded by his medical attendants and members of his family. Then we have a view of the funeral procession leaving the castle by torchlight, a distant view of Canterbury as it passed on the way to town, a capital sketch of the river and the crowd as the procession passed over Vauxhall Bridge at three in the morning.... succeeded by an admirably executed reproduction of the lying in state in the hall at Chelsea Hospital. '.

The ambitious diorama continued with the arrival of the cortege at St Pauls and finally the lowering of the coffin into the crypt.

The inventor of the Diorama as an entertainment was Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre, a scene painter whose experiments in fixing images on metal plates pioneered photography...Daguerreotypes. One of the earliest Diorama buildings was that built by Nash south of Regents Park in 1823 and all that is left of it today is the shell and the cogwheel, which turned the seating platform as the audience viewed the pictures. After it closed in 1851 it became a Baptist Chapel, a rheumatism clinic and in present times part of Bedford College, currently there is a scheme to develop the building into a complex of luxury flats.

Also in Regents Park, the Colosseum, described as ' the original Panorama ' designed by Decimus Burton, could also boast a Hall of Mirrors, a Gothic Aviary and a model Swiss Chalet in addition to

a panorama of Mont Blanc. This Swiss theme had a serious rival in the descriptive lecture on the Ascent of Mont Blanc which Mr Albert Smith was giving to enthusiastic audiences in the centre of London at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly. On October 2 1854 the 'Gazette Supplements' Mirror of the Month' announced that this popular entertainment had just closed having been exhibited 838 times and receiving nearly 300,000 visitors.

At the concluding performance Mr Smith had addressed the audience attributing the success of his undertaking to 'the unusual forethought and liberality manifested by him in the internal arrangements made for the convenience and comfort of the spectators.' He also announced his intention of immediately starting for Mont Blanc taking a new route which on his returning 'would be pictorially produced for the gratification and instruction of the sightseeing community.' He apparently lost no time in doing this as by December 2 the same year he was back at the Egyptian Hall drawing in the crowds !.

These intrepid travellers, safely seated on their revolving dias, could continue their travels at the Royal Panopticon of Science and Art in Leicester Square, which advertised in the 'Gazette' magnificent dioramic views of a ramble through Venice plus lectures and demonstrations. The Panopticon eventually became the Alhambra Theatre of ballet fame, burned down in 1882 but rebuilt later and surviving until ?

The Cyclorama, in Albany Street consisted of a colossal moving Diorama of the City and Bay of Naples, Mount Vesuvius and Pompeii showing the great eruption of '79 and the present state of the excavated city painted by J.R Nevern from sketches by himself. At 14 Regent Street, the Royal Gallery of Illustration brought events right up to date with a Diorama presenting events of the war with Russia, plus a lecture by Mr J. H. Stocqueler, this was updated in April 1855 with additional pictures of the Great Storm in the Black Sea, the Cavalry Charge at Balaclava and the Battle of Alma.

Wylde's Globe also had a topical attraction with dioramas and a model of Sebastopol to interest visitors in its 'four large rooms'. It was situated in Leicester Square opposite another of the most popular entertainments, Mr George Payne's 'Night in the Lands of Gold', a panoramic tour of Australia, America and California interspersed with a variety of songs by Mr Henry Russell'. It was announced in the 'Gazette' that this was to close for the season on Tuesday December 21 1854 on which occasion Mr Payne would take his benefit and present upwards of 400 valuable gifts to the audience, gratis. The show opened again, this time at the Queens Theatre, Tottenham Court Road, in March 1855, where it was reviewed by Charles Strutt who described its four sections depicting the life of a Digger, from St Louis and the Great Desert in the West to the Rocky Mountains, 'ending amongst the diggings or "ranches" and the very primitive system of society which distinguished the last of the United States'. Upon the way there were 'visits from the grisly bear, the wolf bays the moon and the Red Man lurks in the unfriendly vicinity. Mr Payne accompanied with a spirited lecture and Mr Russell was at hand with a lively air and cheerful ballad. By these most instructive exhibitions a vast

amount of knowledge is conveyed to the most listless Spectator.

Knowledge was also being conveyed by the free museums, those listed in the 'Gazette' including of course the British Museum recently rebuilt at a cost of £1,000 000 and the very latest Museum of Practical Geology, opened in 1851 by the Prince Consort, in Piccadilly (although the entrance was in Jermyn Street). This was to prove the forerunner of all the great museums and colleges in South Kensington the original still remaining until 1935, the site now being occupied by the store, Simpsons. Other smaller free museums included the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the nucleus of which was the huge anatomical collection of the famous John Hunter, a Missionary Museum, in Bloomfield Street, Moorfields, Savill's Museum in Aldersgate and the Royal Military Museum at Woolwich.

The Oriental and Turkish Museum at St George's Terrace, Hyde Park Corner, was not free and obviously cashing in on the British alliance with Turkey in its presentation of 'the manner and customs of the Turkish nation past and present'. It was advertised as 'this extraordinary and unique collection of life-size models executed so as to defy imitation, illustrated by original and authentic costumes as well as buildings, such as the Harem the Hamman, (bath) and the Kahve with carriages and cattle, presented with every minute detail to render all the groups strictly correct and natural.' Admission was one shilling, Saturdays half a crown.. Strutt thought that ' independent of its interest at the present time it was invaluable in affording the student of mankind a faithful representation of the Musselman manners while to the pleasure seeking population its extreme singularity and gorgeousness must give simple satisfaction and command frequent visits. '

Such exhibitions did not have emigration in mind as did a one-off cultural event which took place at the Kings Arms Hotel, in Kensington, when under the patronage of the Duke of Argyll, Dr Welch lectured on 'The Manners Customs and Peculiarities of the Americans,' enlivened with anecdotes and sketches.

Prince Albert was listed as a patron of the Royal Polytechnic Institution at 309 Regent Street, which under the direction of J.H. Pepper advertised 'continued improvement, increased attractions and fresh decoration, re-lighted under the patent of Mr John Leslie Esq.' The Polytechnic was also open on Saturday evenings for an American entertainment and Mr Ward's band.

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Such seriousness deserved a little light relief, and there was nothing instructive about Mr W.S. Wood's Olio of Oddities which could be seen at the Polygraphic Hall in William Street every night . Other than an Olio being a medley or Pot Pourri there is no indication of what form this entertainment might have taken , although it is more than likely to have pandered to the Victorians' interest in such things as hairy ladies or deformed animals for ' freak shows ' were extremely popular. There is a tale of Pig-faced lady who proved to be an unfortunate bear with face and paws shaven dressed in a bonnet and gown who joined the giantesses, living skeletons , two-headed dogs and other unfortunates, both human and animal. Sometimes it was sufficient just to be a foreigner, and at Leicester Square 'a group of Aztecs and Earthmen, the first of other race to be seen in Europe' apparently either persuaded or forced to come to this country , were exhibited daily to curious crowds, from 3 to 5 p.m and 7 to 9 with lectures at 4 and 8p.m. with vocal and instrumental concerts in between as an added attraction.

Madame Tussauds' Waxworks had been an established entertainment in London for over fifty years , after its success in Paris in the 1780s moving to the Lyceum in 1802 before being set up at the Baker Street Bazaar . The current attractions advertised in the ' Gazette' in 1854-1855 were Lord Raglan ' the hero of Alma ' , the Sultan of Turkey, the Emperor of Russia and the Queen of Spain in addition to the ' magnificent Golden Chamber ' and the Napoleon Room for which an extra sixpence was charged for admission. The exhibition was open from 10 a.m to 10 p.m every day.

Well outside the realm of family entertainment was the rather dubious sounding Dr Khan's Anatomical Museum open daily for gentlemen only from 11 30 a.m to 5 p.m and from 7 to 10 p.m. at 4 Coventry Street . It promised upwards of 1000 superbly executed models and why well have been entirely innocent and instructive , were it not for the Victorians' extraordinary appetite for ' underground ' pornography. The Museum also offered an ' entirely new series of highly interesting lectures given every day of the week by Dr Sexton ' as well as a descriptive catalogue and price list of wax models of every description . Admission ' to none but adults ' was one shilling.

This is the nearest the ' Gazette ' ever gets to any entertainment of an even faintly titilating nature although Victorian London could literally shock the pants off any voyeur of today's permissive society.

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Sexual exploitation, perversion and deviation existed in every imaginable form, made even more squalid by sordid surroundings. Haymarket may have presented a garishly lurid and glossy promiscuity with its ladies of the town and bawdy houses run by madames in a setting of candlelight and plush, but the back courts and alleys, especially in the vicinity of the new railway stations, were well populated by the pathetic dregs of the prostitution trade who driven by starvation would do anything for a little money.

Encouraged by the philanthropist, Angela Burdett Coutts, Dickens' sentimental heart was deeply affected by the plight of such women and he readily supported a scheme for a House of Rescue at Shepherd's Bush, where 'fallen women' were housed and taught domestic skills. But the real root of the evil was the terrible poverty and a man-made code where a pretty housemaid could lose her job if she failed to please the master of the house and lose it when she did, certainly if the result was a pregnancy. The Royal Academy and other art exhibitions were thickly hung with those magnificent Victorian 'story paintings' of unfaithful wives and betrayed girls, father or husband pointing to the door as some poor creature was driven out into the cold with her infant, and her subsequent progress through the workhouse or railway arches, to the river....

This was one subject upon which Strutt and his family newspaper never touched, except perhaps to hint that it had a connection with his real bete noir, drink.

Wives and mothers in happier circumstances, the plush curtains neatly and tightly drawn against the outside world, their daughters by their sides, pretended at least to know very little of this squalid world. Men would be men, they knew, but not their men, so the lamps were lit, the fire well stoked by the skivvy, the well-polished piano lid lifted for an evening of musical entertainment. Pianos cost from as little as £ 2.10s for a square piano by Broadwood to a 7 octave Piccolo piano for £ 15, prices rising to about £20 or £ 25 for the very best quality (and that of course was a considerable price, when a servant's wages could be £10 a year).

Improvements in printing had brought music into mass production and new songs were being produced daily by hundreds of aspiring writers, much in the same way as today's 'top of the pops' and with the Victorians these were either intensely sentimental or patriotic.

Among the latter was ' A New Nation ' by Mr Augustus Duke which Mr George Tedder was now singing with the most distinguished applause at musical festivals and concerts ' The ' Gazette ' advertisement quoted ' The Morning Chronicle ' having reported that ' HRH the Duke of Cambridge had requested an encore and all present allowed that since the days of ' Nelson ' Mr Duke's song surpassed any composition of the kind both for vigour and heart-thrilling melody ' .

The Queen and Prince Albert had fallen in love with Scotland and all things Scottish early in their marriage and had acquired Balmoral Castle in 1852 so everything North of the Border was fashionable, especially songs, so Mr Crawford's appearance at the Regent Gallery / 69 The Quadrant, Regents Street (with ' completely fitted new stage stalls and cloakroom ') was bound to be a success, especially when, on Saturday nights, he appeared in full Highland costume to sing his celebrated song ' Draw the Sword for Scotland. ' .

Among other songs which combined both patriotism and sentiment was ' Astore Machree ' by W.R. Braine—' the Irish Soldiers Farewell ', price two shillings ' One fond embrace and then we sever, for glory calls me far from thee.... ' . Other ' newest music ' advertised included ' Footsteps of Angels ' by Longfellow and ' Far Away at Sea, ' both by W.J. Hobbs, the latter, a new ballad, being acclaimed as ' a familiar subject treated with novel effect..all Mr Hobbs' melodies have a touch of soul in them ' . ' Smiles and Tears ' , by W.J. Wrighton, ' cheering to find a charming melody united to words such as these ' and ' I heard thy fate without a tear... ' ' the music has a religious solemnity. ' . Also on a serious note was John Bishop's modern and improved arrangements of ' The Messiah ' and ' Excelsior, as sung by Miss M Lindsey. ' ' Shaste and simple ' said ' The British Banner ' ' by the same authoress as ' The Lord Will Provide ' and ' England and Englands Queen ' .

Such music would doubtless have been performed by the Musical Amateurs of Notting Hill Gate who were invited in a ' Gazette ' advert. to devote one or two evenings a week to the practice of music . The gentleman (or lady ?) who had inserted the advertisement said he or she (initials G.A.E.) would be willing to receive a few gentleman at their residence, or mutually join others at theirs, having a piano, harmonicom, concertina and flute. Sing song evenings of a rowdier kind were popular in pubs and beer houses, Although a license was required in an effort to curb drinking, an easy way round the law was to provide both the entertainment and the drink in easy proximity. A Harmonic Evening Meeting ^{was} held every Monday at The Three Pigeons, Ledbury Road, Notting Hill, by Mr G. Morgan

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(a Welshman no doubt) late of The Pineapple in Portman Market. Among the higher class ' music halls ', as they soon began to be called, was the famous Canterbury Hall in Lambeth, a huge place which attracted the better class ' mechanics and operatives ' and their wives (previously such places had been very much ' men only '). At the other end of the scale there were these frequented by the Costers, such as the Coburg, with a gallery that held nearly 2,000 people packed in like sardines, making more noise than the performers the penny gaffs, such as the Rotunda, in Blackfriars Road, and at the bottom of the heap, converted shops such as that which Henry Mayhew visited in Smithfield, and which that broadminded and seasoned reporter of his times described as presenting the most obscene thoughts and the most disgusting scenes, ... forcing into the brains of the childish audience ... thoughts that must embitter a lifetime and descend from father to child like some bodily infirmity.

Of a far more genteel nature than such rowdy dives was the Trevor Arms Music Hall, opposite the Barracks at Knightsbridge (although soldiers were not regarded as among the best behaved audiences). The proprietor, Mr T. R. Street, ensured that ' the crowds nightly flocking to this acknowledged first class place of amusement, the marked respectability of the visitants, the attention of the entertainers and the general order and good humour prevailing reach the most sanguine expectations. '

A one-night stand entertainment at Sidney Hall, Pond Place, Chelsea, followed the music hall pattern but was also as refined as the Trevor Arms purported to be, although admission was only sixpence. Unprecedented success by crowded and delighted audiences attends this entertainment on each representation ' the advertisement promised and on Wednesday August 29 1854 Mr. G. R. Meagreson (of the Theatre Royal, Sadlers Wells) offered his ' Sketch Book and Portmanteau ', This consisted of ' Fine specimens of the West and Rough Specimens of the East of mighty London, sudden entrances, peculiar situations, alarming exits, interspersed with some anecdotes of sea and land. Imitations of popular actors such as Messrs Phelps Morton, Dean, Hosking Bennett, Wright, Harley and Mellon etc. with illustrations of the characters of everyday life in appropriate costume. ' Items in the programme included ' Kensington Gardens featuring a song by Augustus Lounge ' wishing to make an impression on the fair sex', Jolly Jack, a sailor looking for his Nancy ' and Sambo ' a gentleman of colour who will just come before you and sing a little song? :

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Needless to say, middle class families did not approve of such places of entertainment for their offspring, who were encouraged to find their amusements at home. Those who had a limited stock of sheet music but an appetite for playing the piano, as well as learners needing encouragement after the tedium of scales and 'easy pieces', could engage in an amusing card game based on permutations of musical phrases called The Polyharmonic or Royal Musical Game, invented by a Mr P. Ezekiel Van Noorden, of 115 Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury, 'Two thousand polkas for 3s 6d' ran the 'Gazette' advertisement 'I might say 20,000 but I fear many unthinking persons may charge me with exaggeration' said the inventor, who described his system as 'a way of tricking people into acquiring knowledge of musical theory.' The Illustrated London News gave the game a favourable report 'To fabricate such an endless number of tunes and then to play them on the pianoforte is a delightful amusement calculated to keep a young person's attention constantly alive. The game consists of cards bearing a number of musical phrases of two bars so constructed that when arranged continuously in various orders of succession every arrangement will give an air, forming a polka in the key of G, modulating to D and closing in the original key.' Apart from his Polyharmonic Mr van Noorden had also produced a number of songs such as 'Wellington's Funeral March' and the 'Drinking Song of the Alma.'

Surprisingly perhaps, the rather straight-laced Strutt with his severe views on pleasure, welcomed the news that the sombre atmosphere of a London Sunday in the 1850s was to be enlivened by music in the park. 'Her Majesty has given permission for the Band of the Life Guards to perform in Kensington Gardens on Sunday afternoons from 5 to 7 p.m. he announced in August 1855. (Band performances were already being given on week days from 4 to 6 p.m. every Tuesday and Friday 'playing selections by the most admired composers including overtures quadrilles and polkas'. The Sunday performances, said Strutt, were an innovation in London and a welcome one 'For there has long been what has been truly described the bitter observance of the Sabbath, the same stricture being unknown elsewhere, and the London Sunday standing alone this side of the Tweed for its monotonous and pharisaical dullness.'

But his anticipation of the event as a pleasurable occasion was somewhat dampened after witnessing the performance. 'At five o'clock Kensington Gardens was thronged by a most miscellaneous audience who listened in perfect silence and decorum and with wonderful patience to a band of the Life Guards which performed in the most dreary

manner the most dreary pieces of music that could be selected , They apparently did not approve the innovation and succeeded admirably in giving a penitential effect to every piece of music they attempted. It should be suggested to the Minister of Works (Sir Benjamin Hall), said Strutt, that 'his good intentions would be better carried out by one of the German bands to be found every week day in the West End but who were doomed to silence on Sundays they would discourse much better music and in much greater abundance than the red-coated gentlemen who favour the public with the echoes of their own dissatisfaction....'.

German bands were a familiar sight on the London streets and others hired themselves out for parties. Mayhew interviewed a member of , such a band ' a flaxen-haired fresh-coloured young man of twenty who had come to England when he was fourteen and described the life as a good one, the bandsmen earning about six shillings a day. When they played at dances they got sixpence a dance to share between seven of them. 'We play cheaper than the English' he said and were abused for it by their rivals, but he ate well, found the English beer good and was saving up his money to return to Hanover.

The dreariness of the military band's performance in Kensington Gardens was not the only complaint , some of the visitors, especially the ladies, also protested about smoking among the audience , particularly in the immediate neighbourhood of the band and on the verandah of the refreshment room. The Office of Works had therefore decided to put up notices prohibiting the practice, reminding anyone who might object that Hyde Park was open to smokers and ' the whole of Kensington Gardens is equally at their service, so gentlemen are requested not to smoke in the vicinity of the music platform and in the refreshment room '.

A musical entertainment which gave much greater pleasure, despite its amateur nature , appears to be that performed by five young ladies and seven young gentlemen of the neighbourhood for the pleasure and edification of the Working Men's Association at Stormont House, Kensington. ' Never was an audience more grateful or amused runs the report. ' So many young persons of respect coming forward to amuse and encourage the working men showed a benevolent disposition and all uniting in a practical knowledge of glees, duets, trios and ballads, proved a refined taste, social feeling and neighbourly traits. The ladies departed themselves with becoming modesty which characterises their walk in life and sang with taste and judgement. The gentlemen amateurs were also well-skilled in music and gave utmost satisfaction and all their efforts were applauded by the working men to the very echo.'

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Efforts to improve the tastes of the lower orders and keep them out of the pubs and beer houses usually met with very limited success. In Leeds in 1853 a Rational "recreational Society" was presenting Saturday night concerts with seats from threepence to a shilling but they were not very popular. 'The taste for good and refined music has not yet reached the operative classes to any considerable extent' it was reported. 'And it may be doubted whether the attendance at the lowest places of entertainment has been appreciably diminished. When there is a circus, however, or any popular spectacular entertainment, the beer house keepers are loud in their complaints of the serious damage done to their receipts.'

Upper class home entertainment included regular 'Routs, Balls, and Dinner Parties' for which Hope's Warehouse, at Rathbone Place, Oxford Street 'established for more than half a century' would provide, on hire, Rout seats and cushions, chairs with silk cases, rout tables, ormolu chandeliers, brackets and branches, and lamps as well as china, glass, plate and table ornaments and a glazed cloth for dancing, to prevent the trouble of taking up carpets. The term 'Rout' which now has unfortunate military associations of a disorderly defeat, was commonly used in Victorian days for a large social gathering or party. In legal terms it is 'an assembly of three or more people doing some act towards a violent and unlawful purpose to the terror of the people'.

The Queen was known to be extremely fond of dancing, despite her numerous pregnancies, and also very good at it, thus giving the practice a special social status and respectability. Popular dances were the polka, with its hop skip and jump movements which must have placed an enormous physical strain on the tight-laced crinolined ladies, as well as the old fashioned 'set' dances such as the Lancers and quadrilles. The Viennese Waltz had only recently been introduced, (the Queen considered her husband to be a beautiful waltzer) and although at first thought to be highly improper, quickly caught on. Just after Christmas 1854, Mr King and Miss Clark announced in the 'Gazette' that their classes for dancing, deportment and Calisthenic exercises had been re-assembled for the season at their residence, Belmont House, 74 Queens Road, Bayswater. But dancing was not only enjoyed among the upper classes, Mayhew described the twopenny hops held in the back rooms of pubs or other drinking places. Here the dances were more likely to be jigs, hornpipes and country dances or complicated step dances between patterns of clay smoking pipes laid out on the floor.

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Dancing was also part of the entertainment at the pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall, the last of those surviving from the previous century which having acquired a disreputable reputation was to close before the end of the decade, despite valiant efforts to present more respectable attractions such as ballooning, firework displays and tableaux. Cremorne Gardens, the newest of such entertainment centres, at Battersea, was not really fashionable, but fairly respectable, at least early in the evening and was a popular place with visitors to London who could record their attendance with a photograph at one of the booths in the ornamental grounds.

Louis Daguerre's Daguerreotypes had been followed by another process called the Callotype, which produced a softer image but by 1851, the years of Daguerre's death, both methods ^{which} were slow and tedious and with human subjects necessitated a long posing period, gave way to the wet plate with a glass negative coated with chemical solution. This cut the time of exposure, although still requiring an enormous amount of equipment. When Roger Fenton, the great pioneer war correspondent photographer went off to the Crimea he needed a wagon to transport his 80 pounds of apparatus.

Daguerreotypes still existed and in the 'Gazette' Williams Portrait Rooms, in Allsop Terrace, New Road (seven doors from Upper Baker Street) offered to take these daily, promising them to be bold, sharp and brilliant due to the excellent light, the glass room facing the clear air of Regents Park. The colour was applied by a new process perfectly resembling a first class painting in enamel, prices commencing at 5s 6d.

The 1851 census showed only fifty one professional photographers in the whole country (a number which multiplied rapidly in the next decade) but many amateurs were enjoying experimenting with the new medium and advertisements for cameras and photographic equipment abound in the 'Gazette' columns. Photographic studios one hopes produced better results than the street booths and fair ground photographers, such as those described by Mayhew.

Those living in the West End of London had little idea of the number of such photographers who existed in less fashionable areas, he said, places such as Bermondsey, the Cut or Whitechapel Road, where you could not walk fifty yards without passing some photographic establishment offering to take your likeness for sixpence, framed

and glazed. One such was a booth built out of old canvas erected on a piece of waste land next to the proprietor's yellow caravan. The tent was only just high enough to allow a tall subject to stand in it without his hat and had a small glazed roof to let in the light. The camera was operated by the man's wife, people preferring, he said, to be 'took by a lady'. After the portrait had been taken Mayhew found it to be no bigger than a visiting card and drab looking, with a light background where the figure rose from the bottom of the plate as straight as a post and in the cramped and nervous attitude of a patient in a dentist's chair. Another Photographic Depot not far away produced a portrait that was as black as the other was light, plus an argument with the customer over the price, twopence being added for 'a patent American preserver'.

No wonder many people felt that they could do as well themselves with Mr. W K Birman, Photographic Chemist, of 14 Archer Street (now Westbourne Grove) offering to teach the art thoroughly in six lessons for one guinea, although if you preferred not to have to take the trouble he would take portraits, in a case or frame, for two shillings and sixpence. Those who availed themselves of his tuition could have purchased a complete set of Daguerreotype Apparatus for taking pictures $4\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{1}{4}$ inches and under from Hardings in Church Street, Kensington, this also included a double automatic lense, beautifully mounted in brass, with rack work and pinions 'warranted to produce as perfect portrait as that by the most costly instrument'. The bargain was completed by a walnut camera tripod stand with brass top and screw, scales and weights and all the necessary chemicals in stoppered bottles.

The advertisements for such preparations displayed the same casual attitude towards dangerous substances as those for patent medicines, the most lethal of which, Potassium Cyanide, was sold for fourpence an ounce at W. Pay, 8 Dorcas Terrace, Hammersmith Road, and other chemicals included Prepared Collodion for photographic purposes, Iodising Salts, Gallic and Pyrogallic Acid and Nitrate of Silver.

Although 'Punch' was deriding the whole business of photography as late as 1847 by the time of the Great Exhibition it had progressed to the extent where stereoscopic cards and viewers were among the novelties which aroused great interest and greatly amused Queen Victoria. Those held in the hand allowed the viewer to see a three-dimensional image and provided a pleasant parlour diversion which required no setting up, which the magic lantern demanded, making it more suitable for

communal performances ,whether with one of the comparatively simple machines lit by a single wick lamp or by the more sophisticated and potentially dangerous oxy-hydrogen burners. Magic lantern slides and dissolving views 'any subject painted to order,' were supplied together with every article connected with the magic lantern, by Mr J. Greenhead, of 3 Munden Street, Hammersmith.

The popularity of photography must have caused some anxiety in the art fraternity, particularly portrait painters. On May 24 1854, Charles Strutt reviewed the Royal Academy Summer Show which he considered decidedly inferior to the previous year 'with a remarkable absence of good pictures', Landseer's being unfinished and unsatisfactory (this could have either been one of his deer pictures or 'The Twins' a picture of two lambs , the 'Children of the Mist' had been shown in 1853) and Stanfield's will not bear comparison with his naval epic last year. Knight sends ' Our Two Boys ' and yards of space are accordingly occupied by a pair of unintelligent gawks. Callcott Horsley could find no better subject than a juvenile rustic nursing a pet donkey. The Pre-Raphaelites do not shine, Hunt's 'Light of the World', despite the crotchety criticism of Ruskin, is a sorry exchange for The Order of Release (this was Millais' painting acclaimed in 1853) and the other picture bearing his name, an evidence of bad taste and worse composition ' (This was certainly the famous 'The Scapegoat', Hunt's allegory using the Jewish custom from the Book of Leviticus to symbolise the Crucifixion and Christ's bearing of the sins of the world .)

Strutt nevertheless gladly hailed the presence of works which though less lofty in aim and character still provide a lot of pleasure. He particularly admired William Frith's 'charming piquant picture full of life as seen on Ramsgate beach' (This was the first of Frith's three great panorama paintings , it was bought by Queen Victoria for 1 000 guineas and continues to be one of the favourites of all Victorian paintings) Strutt described it as being 'full of godsipping and gaiety, mountebanks and married folk , all rendered with such humour and pleasant satire ... '. Other pictures that caught mention by his pen were 'the spirited view of the Battle of Hyderabad with Napier leading on the victory, by Jones, while Grant (Sir William Grant PRA) had produced 'a very admirable portrait of Macanlay'

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The sculpture did not impress him ' with very few exceptions it may be said that the sculpture is worthy of the cellar it inhabits and the cellar worthy of the sculpture, for our own part we would desire that the marble affairs be turned adrift and the place converted into a refreshment room, the public really needs that and is quite indifferent to those polished inanities which our sculptors are so fond of '.

In the light of those scathing remarks it is rather surprising to find him a year later recommending the introduction of statuary into Kensington Gardens to 'greatly add to its beauty and interest,' although although realising the 'extreme costliness of sculpture this might consist of composition figures as a substitute for marble.'

Kensington Gardens was being much improved after the removal of the Crystal Palace at the end of its 5½ months season in 1851, and in June 1855 Strutt had to concede in an editorial that whatever the general censure for maladministration in the conduct of the war the present Ministry merited approval for their government of the parks and Kensington Gardens in particular. 'Perhaps their ability is greater in the cultivation of a grove rather than the choice of a commander. '

His commendation of their horticultural abilities included the improved drainage (parts of the park were previously impassable in wet weather) and the ornamental water in front of the palace (the Round Pond) had been ' well defined with a gently sloping bank of stones.' 'An admirable gate has been constructed fronting the new church just created on the late Flora Tea Gardens and the gates on the south side of the park which had formed such striking and handsome objects in the transept of the Crystal Palace rebronzed and regilt '.

Strutt's ulterior motives show through towards the end of his editorial when he he says that the improvements would attract more visitors to Kensington, including 'thousands of sickly persons from various parts of London who may be induced to seek a dwelling nearby to derive advantage from the purer air and benefit trade...' (and advertising !)

The ' Gazette ' may have been published over a century and a quarter before television violence but it did not stop the blame for the bad behaviour of the young being laid at the door of undesirable entertainment. In the winter of 1855 Charles Strutt got out his editorial broom for ' A Slight Sweep on a Foul Stage '.

' The advocates of the stage as a moral teacher of ethics are in great peril of their cause ' he wrote in November ' with one or

more of the minor theatres of London gratifying their audiences by scenes and histrionic representations of a footpad and a murderer. (This was doubtless the dramatisation of Harrison Ainsworth's novel on the notorious 18th century highwayman, Jack Shepherd) ' Surely it cannot be urged in defence of such pernicious entertainments that the morals of the community are in any way improved or its intelligence heightened by personations of vulgar violence. To the permission of such immoral performance may be traced much of the irregularity of conduct exhibited by the young of our day who are dwelling in the denser districts of the capital !

Attending such plays, he considered could only lead to the young people finding themselves ending up in prison or the hulks. If such anomalies cannot be suppressed by law it is at least the duty of every lover of his kind to check the fascination of so hateful and ruinous a haunt as the play door. Parents mindful of their offspring will prohibit their attendance at such places and employers regardful of their own and others' interests will reprobate the visits of those under them to these ruinous resorts '.

Strutt was anxious to make it clear that he was not deprecating the legitimate stage and by this one assumes he meant the West End theatres, such as Drury Lane, which enjoyed state visits from the Queen and Prince Consort, the Theatre Royal and Her Majesty's in the Haymarket (where Jenny Lind made her London operatic debut), then there was Charles Kean's great season of melodrama and Shakespeare at the Princess Theatre, Oxford Street and the marathon at Sadlers Wells where Samuel Phelps was to continue presenting Shakespeare for nearly two decades.

The stage had only just emerged from centuries of restriction with the Theatres Act of 1843 before which only the privileged few licensed houses in the City of Westminster were allowed to present dramatic productions, the only requirement being that their performance should not offend the interests of good manners, decorum and the public peace. Some of the ' penny gaffs ' and other crude entertainment in the poorer areas of London might well have been considered to do just that, Henry Mayhew describes lewd scenes in some of these that would more than have justified Charles Strutt's fears, but there were popular lurid domestic melodramas with a heavy moralistic tone, preaching against drink, loose living and gambling to which he might have given full approval. However, he considered it would be as beneficial to society to dramatise the deeds of Sir John Dean Paul and his guilty partners.

in order to expose and correct their crimes as it is decent and elevating to amuse our population by depicting a rascally highway man of the last century '.

Kensington's only theatre had closed nearly ten years earlier it was the Royal "ent opened in 1831 and had a chequered career having failed to obtain a licence at its opening and having to be run as a club, productions in the next 17 years included classics such as 'The Beggars Opera' as well as Shakespeare. The theatre usually opened at 6.30 p.m but there was also admission for late comers at reduced prices at 8.30 p.m. and the programme was arranged so that they saw at least one of the plays but as many of them were pretty drunk by the time they arrived they probably did not know or care what they were seeing as long as it was colourful and noisy. In 1838 the theatre had been the scene of a publicity stunt attempting to bring in bigger audiences, a balloon ascent from the roof, but the place was plagued with failures, including an uproar when the performers, having not been paid, decamped with the takings after the first act, the furious audience breaking up the seats and smashing the windows. When it re-opened in 1841 the new manager was at pains to re-assure the public that he had no connection with the previous proprietor and promised that police constables would be present in every part of the house to prevent disturbances.

Batty's Hippodrome, a form of circus and horse show had run in Kensington for two years from 1851 to 1852, situated in Kensington Gardens opposite the present site of ~~the~~ Palace Gate it was described by 'The Ladies' Newspaper' as being the most exciting subject of contemplation in or near London with its displays of horsemanship and chariot racing. Other attractions included ostriches ridden by two young arabs as well as ^{Mr} Hampton ascending in his magnificent balloon.

Before his censorious editorial on Mr Dickens' views on the amusement of the people, Charles Strutt had seen the novelist and his friends performing at Campden House, the stately home up the hill from the Church Street printing works, in one of their amateur productions for charity, a melodrama by Wilkie Collins called 'The Lighthouse'. Dickens played the star role of Aaron Gurnoch, the head lighthouse keeper, and according to Strutt gave 'some really fine acting especially in depicting that temporary derangement consequent upon want of food ..and his ungovernable voracity of appetite on obtaining it after the famine was horribly realised.....
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Wilkie Collins who is probably now best known for his 'Woman in White' considered to be the first detective story, had met Dickens a few years earlier and was to become one of his closest friends.

The play was given in aid of the Sanatorium for Consumption and Diseases of the Chest at Bournemouth, a branch of the Consumption Hospital at Brompton. Campden House had once been a rival to Kensington Palace and Holland House as one of Kensington's most splendid mansions when it was the home of Baptist Hicks, a wealthy city merchant and money lender whose philanthropy founded the Campden Charities which still exist today. At the time of Dickens theatricals it was occupied by a tenant, a Colonel Waugh, and it is interesting that Strutt gave over half his lengthy report to the splendours of the house, which visitors were allowed to view before the performance in the 'neat theatre somewhat to the rear of the residence'.

'Being well filled with the brilliant audience, but not inconveniently so the theatre presented a fine sight' said Strutt 'When the curtain rose it exhibited a scene which deserved and elicited general applause, representing the Eddystone Lighthouse during a storm. painted by Mr Stanfield RA (William Clarkson Stanfield landscape painter who was also particularly renowned for his sea scapes.) Wilkie Collins played the lighthouse keeper's son and other parts were taken by Mark Lemon, Augustus Egg and Miss Dickens (Dickens' eldest daughter, Mary) 'whose elocution was careful and pure and accompanied by chaste acting'. She was also called upon to sing 'The Song of the Wreck' which she did sweetly he said, and was loudly encored. Another female part was taken by Miss Hogarth (Dickens' sister in law, Georgina) whose fine and delicate acting was also warmly applauded.' The second half of the evening was taken up by some lighter entertainment, a comic drama by Charles Dance.

'It was a late hour when the interesting proceedings terminated' said Strutt 'and it is hoped and believed that the excellent institution in whose interest it was orientated will be largely benefitted, as the company was numerous and of high social position many members of our noble families being present.'.

Melodrams featuring highwaymen and murderers were not the only entertainments which aroused the Editor's concern, he was not too sure about Mr Punch!

A Punch and Judy man had told Henry Mayhew that he could vary his show according to his audience, making it wither comic or sentimental the latter with no ghost, no coffin and no devil, although he did not approve of this watering down of the melodrama and blamed it on ' the march of intellect '. Mayhew described him as a dark, pleasant-looking man dressed in a very greasy and shiny green jacket who said he had bought his show from an Italian called Porsini, considered to be the father of the trade, who had eventually died in the St Giles workhouse poverty-stricken and blind (historical records however chronicle Punchinello puppet shows in London in the late 17th century).

The characters in the Victorian show consisted usually of Punch and his wife, Judy, their baby, the Beadle, Scaramouche, Nobody, Jack Ketch (the hangman) the Grand Senor, the Doctor, the Devil, Merry Andrew and the Blind Man. The Dog Toby used to be a stuffed animal but lately operators preferred to use a real dog and ' make much of him '.

The puppets' heads were carved out of wood and could cost about five shillings each, then there was the costume, as well as the booth and the scenery. It took six months to learn the ' calls ' Mayhew was told these being the various voices which the operator produced by holding a metal plate in his mouth. It was a hard life, he said not only acting as a showman but collecting the money and carrying the heavy booth and all his equipment about. He explained some of the patter which he said was broken Italian ' Bona Polare ', Yeute Muntjar (no food) and Yeute Bivare ' (no drink).

This Punch and Judy man believed Punch had killed his wife by accident ' He doesn't intend to do it for the Act of Parliament against husbands beating their wives was not known in his time. A most excellent law that for it causes husbands and wives to be kind to each other. ' He also said that Punch needed a drop of spirits before he performed ' where teetotallers is he plays very mournful, pump water give a person no heart '.

Charles Strutt certainly shared this Punch and Judy man's sentiments about his hero's wife-beating activities saying that ' having stood and mingled with the juvenile and adult crowds watching the drolleries of our ancient and pugnacious friend and several stages of the veteran's career passing before him, he got to the point where with the introduction of Judy on the stage she immediately became the butt of Punch's brutality and ultimately the victim of his fatal ferocity.

' The fellow was condemned to death for his crime but through cunning, and dexterity he managed to escape by hanging his intended executioner. It is the old story we all know, just as it survives today, but Strutt may have been thinking of news items he saw often in his own paper and others, one such having appeared the week before when a ' verdict of wilful murder was recorded against Daniel Lordon who murdered his wife on Tuesday September 18 1855 at his lodging at Parliament Court, Artillery Lane, Bishopsgate Street. '

' It forcibly struck me that public morals are greatly injured by such frequent mimic exhibitions of violence ' he wrote, ' and I can hardly persuade myself that much of the wife-beating and killing daily brought to our notice in our police courts does not indicate the effect of Punch's inhuman example. Every drunken savage who unfortunately owns a wife seems to look upon her as his Judy for his fiendish sport '

Strutt does not use the phrase ' who owns a wife ' lightly, for men indeed did ' own ' their wives. Her personal and real property belonged to him and she could not even make a will without his permission and agreement. Her husband could lock her up, compel her to return if she ran away, divorce could be allowed for cruelty or adultery but only through a special Act of Parliament.

When Strutt launched his ' Gazette ' the great Crystal Palace in Hyde Park had already been removed for over a year and transported for reconstruction at Sydenham where it was now open six days a week at admission charges of one shilling on week days and five on Saturdays (a prohibitive cost for workers who would be unable to visit it on any other day). Special cheap fares were offered from London Bridge 2s 6d 2/- and 1/- first, second and third class respectively. Those who could not hope to make the journey could at least see what they were missing from a distance as the ' Gazette ' had discovered a certain point on Campden Hill where on a clear and sunny day the palace was clearly visible its long vitreous roof sparkling in the distance.

The ' Palace ' had changed the character of Kensington for ever, transforming the sleepy and insalubrious village of Knightsbridge which was little more than a staging post with numerous inns and taverns for travellers, and the Old Court Suburb, almost overnight. Once the initial opposition to the use of the park for the Great Exhibition of the Works and Industries of All Nations had been overcome. All the usual objections had been raised, the trees would be destroyed

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the new suburb of Belgravia built by Thomas Cubitt would be inundated by undesirables, not to mention Tyburnia on the north of the park already threatened by the ruffians building the railway at Farringdon but in the end (and that with only a few months to go) the scheme had gone ahead to designs submitted by Joseph Paxton . The seventh son of a poor farmer he had been a gardeners boy to the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth and first created wonders with his green houses there before coming to London and greater marvels. The Exhibition had opened on a dazzling Spring Day in the presence of the high and mighty of the land, thousands of the Queens loyal subjects and the Duke of Wellington, now 82, who had been born before Watt invented the steam engine.

Prince Albert had written to the King of Russia that he could not guarantee against the forebodings of critics of the project that the building would blow down in the first gale, the galleries would collapse, there would be a food shortage in London and the influx of foreigners could bring in the Black Death, but in the end the Exhibition did really prove to be as Albert had dreamed it would be in his speech at the inaugural banquet ' a true test and living picture of the point of development at which the whole of mankind has arrived ' .

The cheapest of all the entertainments listed in the ' Gazette ' (apart from the free museums) was the Thames Tunnel, admission one penny . The idea of a Thames Tunnel was in the minds of progressive engineers at the end of the 18th century and in 1805 a Thames Archway Company was incorporated to construct it but lack of financial support postponed any practical work until three years later when it began under the leadership of the steam power pioneer, Richard Trevithick, with a work force composed of Cornish miners . Despite many problems due to quicksands they progressed to 1000 of the total 1200 feet in six months before an abnormally high tide flooded the pumps and they were lucky not to be drowned . Nothing more happened for 15 years until Marc Isambard Brunel, father of the more famous Isambard Kingdom, took up the challenge again, choosing a new site some distance upstream between Rotherhithe and Wapping. and using his new tunnelling shield.

Where Trevithick's problem had been quicksand, Brunel's was the solid London clay and water began seeping into the workings, Nor was it clean water, being polluted with sewage as was the rest of London's river, and the workmen began going down with ' tunnel sickness ' .

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This did not deter the young Brunel from going down and working with his father's gangs, any more than it did the shilling a head sight seers. Brunel senior was not so confident, he knew that above the shield there was 600 tons of subsoil and his forebodings were justified in May 1827 when a huge wave swept through the workings. Young Isambard and the labourers managed to scramble to safety and no lives were lost, but this did not stop the curate of Rotherhithe warning that the disaster was a just judgement on the presumptuous aspirations of mortal man.

Undeterred, the Brunels came back for more, supported by their loyal navvies and in November of the same year the resumption of work was celebrated with a great banquet in the workings lit by gas chandeliers with the band of the Grenadier Guards playing suitably watery selections. The rejoicing was shortlived, for in January 1828 the river overwhelmed the tunnel again this time young Brunel having an even narrower escape from death but breaking his leg.

Work ceased on the Tunnel for many years after this but in 1835 it was resumed and despite more floodings and set backs, on August 13 1841 Isambard Kingdom Brunel (who in the meantime had gone on towards the even more ingenious projects of his remarkable career, building bridges, railways and great ships) was able to walk through the Tunnel which had been his father's dream and which was formally opened to the public in 1843. It continued as a thoroughfare and a sightseeing curiosity until 1866 when it was converted to a railway track by the East London railway and is still used by London Transport, on the East London section from New Cross to Shoreditch, proving it to be a magnificent engineering feat withstanding train vibrations for over a century.

Steam-driven craft of various kinds had quite revolutionised the public attitude to the Thames, which having been previously entirely utilitarian had now become a source of pleasure, (although the descriptions of its smell, which continued for a decade or more after "Mr Strutt's ' Gazette ' , makes one wonder how excursionists got any pleasure from their trips), Nevertheless, in July 1854, Mrs Davis who ran an Academy at Grove Place, St Johns Wood, advised her pupils and friends that her third annual Aquatic Excursion would take place on Thursday July 6 to Twickenham Ait and back. She also had pleasure in announcing that the favourite boat, The Curlew, had been re-engaged under the command of Captain G. Sharplin. There would be accommodation for dinner and tea at a moderate charge and refreshments of every description would be provided on the Ait, whilst lovers of quoits, cricket, skittles and boating would find ample accommodation. *cut*

There was also to be dancing on board and in the Temple of Terpsichore on the island for which an 'efficient band' was engaged .

Another boat trip was organised by the Notting Hill Philanthropic Society , a pleasure excursion to the Nore and Sheerness in July 1855. ' There are few amongst the trade and commerce and our productive operatives who will not once visit the seaside this summer season ' ran the announcement (which indicates the growing popularity of trips to the coast made possible by rail travel as well as steam boats) ' It is needless to urge that such a change of scene and air, however brief, is of great benefit to the health ' . The craft engaged for the trip was ' The Petrel ' which was to leave Waterloo Pier at 9 a.m. stopping on the way at Gravesend to allow the passengers to spend a few hours at the beautiful gardens at Rosherville . An added attraction on arrival at the Nore was to inspect ' that splendid 3-decker 120 gun guardship H.M.S. Waterloo . The return fare for double tickets was five shillings.

Later a report appeared of the event which had taken place on a remarkably fine day terminating in a wet night, ' but that certainly did not spoil any of the fun. ' The arrangements on board were ample with the utmost harmony prevailing throughout the day dancing being maintained with the aid of an effective band. ' The only criticism was that the MC, a Mr Pollet, could have exercised a little more control in preventing the most attractive ladies being allowed to monopolise the dancing partners . The visit to the ' Waterloo ' was highly appreciated ' particularly the assent of the ladies from the steamer to the lofty porthole of the vessel which was greatly appreciated by the male portion of the excursionists and the tars and middys on board . ' After more dancing being permitted on the deck the departure caused equal merriment ' at the expense of the fair in the awkwardness of their descent ' The whole event ended with three hearty cheers from both sides and the playing of the National Anthem.

The absence of any horse-racing information in the ' Gazette ' is not surprising considering Strutt's non-conformist background and the shortlived Hippodrome Racecourse on Ladbroke Hill had ceased to exist some fifteen years earlier , the site now being covered by houses, but the turf was immensely popular, especially among the better off, the poor being discouraged as much as possible by the law against off course betting in 1853 to which Strutt could not resist adding his own homily in April 1855 at the opening of the racing season. ' (cut)

' The suppression of betting shops does not necessarily constitute the suppression of betting ' he wrote ' although it may be a great discouragement The vilest sink of speculative iniquity is the turf the honourable exceptions are so few as to be worth little notice the whole system is a complicated aristocratic and exciting swindle.

Although gardening had been popular with the aristocracy since Georgian times where it consisted more in employing the services of landscape gardeners and architects such as Capability Brown rather than actually dirtying ones own hands, the new suburbs were encouraging the middle classes to take a practical interest in the patches of ground in front of and behind their new villas. On April 14 1854 the 'Gazette' carried the announcement of the first issue of a new 'Horticultural and Cultural Journal and Farm and Garden Advertiser' stamped threepence and available from F Dillon at 14 York Street, Covent Garden. Packets of assorted seeds in thirty choice varieties could be obtained price 3s 6d from E. W. Frasers Nursery, at Westbourne Grove near the Royal Oak as well as all kinds of trees, shrubs and roots.

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There is little mention of football or other sports in the 'Gazette' although skating which was popularised by the cold hard winters of the 19th century, the Thames being frozen over on several occasions. In December 1855 the 'Gazette' recorded that 'a great part of the Serpentine was not frozen over on Thursday morning but during the day a portion became covered with ice yet exceedingly dangerous and not fit to bear. Mr Williams, the Superintendent, placed men along the banks to keep people off but a number of lads ventured on the edge and several immersions took place but not of a serious nature.' Fishing does not receive much editorial mention either but there was an advertisement for the Kingsbury Fishery on the Edgware Road 'within five miles of Marble Arch and two miles of Kilburn Station, well stocked with Jack and Perch.'

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Until the elevation of respectability of team games by their introduction at the new public schools, Cricket had been a very unrefined affair with uncertain rules and consisted of hefty hitting on rough grounds and equally rough spectators. The grounds had been improved by the introduction of lawn mowers and the MCC was established early in the century with headquarters at Marylebone but the bats kept a sweeping curve until being moderated into something resembling the modern cricket bats by about 1825. Round arm bowling began in 1830 but took about thirty years to really catch on but by 1846 Zingaris' Amateur and All England team, consisting mainly of professional players was touring the country playing exhibition matches. The emergence of first class amateur players was undoubtedly due to the young men leaving public schools, the famous W.G. "race" being an example of middle class participation.

The one and only mention of the game in the 'Gazette's two years of recorded existence was a very interesting match played at Holland Farm in 1855 between an eleven chosen by H. Prinsep Esq (father of the artist Val Prinsep) of Little Holland House and one recruited by Mr Tisdall of Holland Farm which came off the winners by 32 runs, Val Prinsep, in a batting partnership with his father, was said to have put up a very admirable performance.

The report includes an account of a curious incident when the 'worthy bowler, Mr Smallbone, being come into the field quite lame from a bruise he had received under his knee and being under medical advice, was allowed to have a man to run for him, but no sooner had he hit the ball, such is the exhilaration of the game, that his lameness and the doctor were quite forgotten and he started running and arrived at the opposite wicket before his deputy.' Lame or not, the worthy Mr Smallbone continued his enthusiasm and managed to take no less than seven wickets of the gentlemen's side in the two innings. A return match was said to be contemplated when the gentlemen players will be in better practice!

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