



# The Purpose, Impact and Legacy of the Great Exhibition of 1851

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is a product of my own work and abides by the University Handbook for Research Ethics.

The work presented in this thesis is entirely my own, unless stated otherwise through references. I agree that it may be made available for reference and photocopying at the discretion of the university.



Shauna Ralph

## **Abstract**

The Great Exhibition of 1851 saw the first world's fair organised by members of the Society of Arts (such as Henry Cole, and Prince Albert), who later formed the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851. In the six months of it being open, the event would attract over six million visitors who came to see displays of machinery, fine art, raw materials, and manufacturing. With over 13,000 exhibits and 100,000 items, those attending this event were able to see first-hand items from countries such as France, Germany, the United States, Russia and exhibits directly from Britain and the Empire. The event proved to be a huge success, with people coming from all over the world to see the Crystal Palace, and with a profit of over £180,000 as a result. With this profit, the Royal Commission set up educational institutions that still stand today (the Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum) demonstrating the long-lasting impact the Exhibition has had.

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## **Introduction**

The Great Exhibition of 1851 was a defining event for a move to a more industrialised society. Advertised as The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, it was the first world fair that sought to bring together inventions from all over the globe. Taking place in London's famous Hyde Park, it was housed in what quickly became known as the Crystal Palace between May and October 1851.

After attending the French Exposition of 1844, Henry Cole (1808-1882) began to plan a trade fair on a similar scale to be hosted in Britain. Unable to get many of the Society of Arts' members on-board, it was decided that the best plan of action would be to host a number of smaller-scale exhibitions in London, to try and get an idea of whether displays of industry would be popular in Britain as they were across Europe at this time. Therefore, the Society held such expositions in the years 1847, 1848 and 1849. Over time, they grew in popularity and the Society of Arts began to realise this was exactly what the public wanted to see, and the idea of holding one on a grander scale seemed much more achievable in the latter half of the decade.

Following the public's keen interest in these events, concrete plans began to be put in place for one on the same scale as the larger ones that had been taking place in France throughout the early nineteenth century. In order to do this, the Society of Arts felt that a Commission being formed specifically for the Exhibition would help solidify their plans and persuade the government to assist with their project.

In January 1850 Queen Victoria (1819-1901) set up the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851, with Prince Albert (1819-1861) acting as its President. With members coming from different sectors of industry, the Exhibition would be able to cover a broad range of areas in the six months it was open. It was divided into four



main categories: fine arts; raw materials; manufacturing; and machinery. With over 13,000 exhibits on display and over 100,000 items, the event was 'filled with objects significant in aesthetic, scientific, economic and cultural spheres.'<sup>1</sup> Running for six months, from May 1, 1851, to October 11, 1851, it was visited by millions including some public figures from the time such as Charles Dickens (1812-1870), Charles Darwin (1809-1882), and Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855). It put on show, to most of the world, the inventions of Britain and the Empire and encouraged friendly competition between them and countries such as France, Germany, Russia, and the United States. It would also go on to set the framework for expositions that would come to dominate Europe in particular in the nineteenth century.

The Great Exhibition is a complex event to study involving several interconnected avenues for research enquiry. This thesis explores a number of these such as planning and preparation, the theme of class and its connection to the event, the relationship of the Exhibition to the British Empire, and its outcomes and legacies.

The impact on the working classes as a direct result of the Exhibition is one topic this thesis examines in detail. The Great Exhibition differed from usual fairs as it lowered the ticket prices in order to attract the working classes. This study demonstrates the benefits attending this fair had on the labouring class such as the insight into the rapidly developing manufacturing sector; the increase in employment opportunities; the attempts by Prince Albert to improve the living conditions of the poor; along with their role in making this event such a monetary success through ticket sales and the rise of tourism via the increased use of railways.

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999) p. x.

Along with the direct impact on the working classes, by the royal family making the opening ceremony more accessible and attending the event several times with their children, this analysis highlights the growing relations between the monarchy and the people. By visiting the Exhibition and walking among them, the monarchy was showing themselves as a more relatable family – one that was simply out to appreciate the triumphant event of 1851. The fact Queen Victoria was so willing to mix with visitors shows that, unlike previous monarchs, her reign aimed to change the perceptions of this institution and allow it to be perceived as a monarchy for the people.

By analysing such topics, it becomes evident that this event also served as propaganda for an empire that simply was not a priority to the British people at this time. This research highlights the ways in which the organisers attempted to put on display the power of Britain and the Empire through adverts and newspapers, the domination of space in the Crystal Palace and through the order of the Official Catalogue for the Great Exhibition. Although such attempts to display the British Empire's superiority took place, the popularity of other countries exhibits hindered the Empire's reach and instead displayed the many strengths from the rest of the world.

## **Methodology**

This study uses a range of different methods to provide deeper analysis and understanding of the topic. The use of textual analysis can be seen throughout the project and it examines a mixture of letters, plans and newspapers from the time in relation to the planning of the Great Exhibition and public feelings on it. This study uses material from archives such as The National Archives, the London Gazette and

The Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in order to do this. Personal letters, plans and minutes of meetings through the Royal Commission demonstrate the detailed planning that went into the early development of the project, showing the communication involved and the individual intentions from those participating such as Prince Albert and Henry Cole. These materials provide a great understanding of the thinking behind the Exhibition, and the intentions of hosting it. Furthermore, the use of articles from the London Gazette helps to provide an insight into public relations and perceptions of the royal family. It also gives a further look into what was deemed as important enough in regard to the Exhibition to be published in the paper, thus giving further insight into the popular aspects of the event.

This project also uses a range of visual image analysis, including, for example, a mixture of paintings and photographs, many from the Victoria and Albert Museum, Royal Collection Trust, and the British Library along with cartoons from *Punch*. Images from the Royal Collection Trust and the British Library help provide a deeper understanding into the planning of the Exhibition. Sources such as the rough plan of the Crystal Palace drawn by Joseph Paxton along with the allotment of space once construction was under way help to emphasise that this was to be a significant event for multiple reasons. By using visual sources of the Palace itself, it will make it clear that this was going to be a large building to match the extent of international involvement. Furthermore, using sources showing the allotment of space also highlights the intentions of the organisers to have this as a British dominated trade fair. Nevertheless, sources such as the posters advertising railway tickets and excursions from The National Archives also present the reader with insight into the efforts that were made to get the working classes to London to visit the Great Exhibition.

As well as providing insight into the planning of the Exhibition, the use of visual analysis also demonstrates public feelings and the extent of xenophobia in Britain at this time. Cartoons featured in *Punch* highlight the feelings towards foreign visitors at the height of the Great Exhibition, displaying the cracks in international peace. These sources provide an awareness of how the Exhibition itself worked, demonstrating what people will have seen when they visited, and how people perceived the event. This therefore provides a deeper understanding of how the Exhibition was run and the ground-breaking inventions that were on display.

Finally, secondary source material is also referenced for background and context regarding the exhaustive planning that went into the Exhibition, both up to the event itself, and the long-lasting impact that it had. Works by John R. Davis and Geoffrey Cantor help to provide background context relating to the planning of the event and the intentions of the individuals involved. Additionally, when examining the impact during the event on the working classes and the British Empire, sources from Michael Leapman and Jeffrey A. Auerbach have proven most useful. These sources have helped to give a greater understanding of the significance of this event for the working classes and the efforts made to include them. It also highlights the fact that the British Empire did not have as big a role as the organisers had hoped it would when initially planning it. Secondary source material on museums and exhibitions have also been referenced for context in this study. Works by Tony Bennett and Robert W. Rydell have been most useful when considering the long-lasting impact of the Great Exhibition. These sources provide a great amount of detail into the formation of museums post 1851 and the links that tie them to the Exhibition, along with many examples of other exhibitions that took place across the world for the rest of the nineteenth century. By considering these sources, it helped to identify the

analysis that has already been done regarding these topics. The following works have influenced and informed the current project.

## Literature Review

Anetta M. Osborne (1892), Elizabeth Bonython (1995) and Geoffrey Cantor (2012) contribute to the literature which focuses on the planning of the Exhibition. These three works demonstrate that there are interconnected themes and all take different approaches to the same topic. Osborne's 'The First World's Fair' was published a century before the other two volumes and focuses solely on the origins of the Great Exhibition.<sup>2</sup> Osborne is unique in studying how the idea of such an event first came about with particular emphasis on the individuals responsible for the idea. This focus on its origins is crucial to understanding the context of the Exhibition, especially as 'it was a common thing in France and Germany to encourage native talent by means of exhibitions.'<sup>3</sup> Thus, Osborne provides insight into the influence from these other nations, highlighting the countries Britain was attempting to emulate when it came to demonstrating the greatness of their own industry.

Following on from Osborne's work, Bonython looks specifically at the individual involvement in the planning process in her article 'The Planning of the Great Exhibition 1851.'<sup>4</sup> In this study, Bonython focuses on the very early stages of planning and analyses the way in which key figures such as Henry Cole were able to encourage Prince Albert to become involved – an emphasis that is crucial when

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<sup>2</sup> Anetta M. Osborne, 'The First World's Fair', *The Journal of Education*, vol 36, no 14, (1892), p231 <<http://www.jstor.com/stable/44037153>> [Accessed 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020] p. 231.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Bonython, 'The Planning of the Great Exhibition of 1851', *RSA Journal*, vol 143 no 5459, (1995) pp45-48, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41376735>> [Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> November 2020].

understanding the fact that this idea was not originally his. Conversely, moving away from the more personal touches behind the planning, Cantor's article 'Science, Providence and Progress at the Great Exhibition' places an emphasis on how science and its advancement had a direct influence on the planning.<sup>5</sup> With direct quotes from Prince Albert, Cantor's article demonstrates how an exhibition was to be of vital importance for the advancement of science.<sup>6</sup> With his reliance on Prince Albert's speech at the Mansion House in 1850, in particular the section where he discusses scientific progress, Cantor highlights how the Exhibition was to be a 'showcase for the arts and manufactures and especially for recent innovations in technology, many of which were based on scientific principles.'<sup>7</sup> The Exhibition would highlight the ways in which science could impact and benefit future industrial development, by being able to compare the ways in which Britain and the Empire or other countries were rapidly progressing, providing the opportunities for scientific development in such places that were not as advanced. This was a time when Britain was rapidly becoming the industrial powerhouse of the world and they needed to make sure this event demonstrated that.

When examining the aims of the Great Exhibition, works such as those by Osborne and Bonython, focus on the origins of the event and the individuals directly involved but looked less specifically at the finer details such as Prince Albert's attempts to improve the living conditions of the working classes, including his contribution towards the Model Houses and how the railways helped encourage a mass of

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<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Cantor, 'Science, Providence and Progress at the Great Exhibition', *Isis*, vol 103, no3, (2012) p439, <[www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/667968](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/667968)> [Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> August 2021].

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

people to attend this trade fair. This is an angle, however, that this thesis examines in detail. Furthermore, while all three works do contribute significantly towards understanding the beginning process of this event, the fact that there is such a wide gap in the publication dates between these three works demonstrated the vital need for further research in this area. This thesis therefore takes an even more detailed approach and analyses the thorough planning processes behind the Exhibition and the intricacies of the specific aims of the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Another theme often highlighted when studying the Exhibition is the issue of class. Works by John R. Davis (1999) and Michael Leapman (2001) appear to be the most insightful regarding this topic. Davis' book *The Great Exhibition* concentrates in detail on the entire event, particularly the impacts it had on the working classes and London itself.<sup>8</sup> This greatly contributes to the topic as many works fail to put the event in the context of London and it is important to fully appreciate what this meant for the people living in the city at the time. One of the main reasons for its success was down to the fact that many working class families used excursion trains to visit London and the Crystal Palace, something which made the city much more accessible than it perhaps had been in the years previous. It is this emphasis on the railways in Davis' book that is highly significant when examining the role of the working class. Additionally, Leapman's book *The World for a Shilling: How the Great Exhibition of 1851 Shaped a Nation* also highlights the importance of working class involvement in this event.<sup>9</sup> Just as Davis touches on the importance of the

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<sup>8</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling: How the Great Exhibition of 1851 Shaped a Nation*, (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2001).

excursions for the working class, Leapman states 'it soon became apparent, though, that there was an enormous demand for special trains as the entry fee went down to a shilling in the last week of May.'<sup>10</sup> He also discusses the fact that if it were not for the people, it certainly would not have been such a success and cannot be analysed without focusing on these visitors. Two thirds (four million) of the overall attendance at the Exhibition was attended on shilling days, and it was these visits in particular that contributed both to its overall monetary success and general popularity.<sup>11</sup>

Another vital theme to consider when examining the Great Exhibition is the contribution and significance of the British Empire. John M. MacKenzie (1984), Bernard Porter (2004), Catherine Hall (2006), and Jeffrey Auerbach (2016) contribute considerably to the understanding of the Empire during this period and its role in the Great Exhibition. Auerbach's book *Britain, the Empire and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851* seeks to put the Exhibition into a global context.<sup>12</sup> By focusing on international themes, this book looks at the significance of the event for Britain and its Empire while also taking into consideration its relationship to the rest of the world. Here, Auerbach weighs up the overall contribution of the Empire to this Exhibition and whether it held significance in comparison to the 'rest of the world' at this event. The chapters in this book, therefore, seek to establish a link between British colonies and participating nation-states such as Greece, Germany and Russia by examining how they were able to cooperate during this event and the ways in

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Trevor May, *An Economic and Social History of Britain 1760-1970*, (London: Longman, 1987) p. 149.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *Britain, the Empire and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).



which they managed to put their countries' industries on show to the rest of the world.

Furthermore, Catherine Hall's book of collected works, *At Home with the Empire*, provides valuable insight when putting the Empire in context with the ever-changing industrial world.<sup>13</sup> In this volume, Hall seeks to answer the question posed in the introduction of this book: 'was it possible to be "at home" with an Empire and with the effects of imperial power or was there something dangerous and damaging about such an entanglement?'<sup>14</sup> As a result, Hall and the several contributors in this book (such as Laura Tabili, Joanna de Groot and James Epstein) seek to examine the links between the Empire, its colonies and those at 'home' and aim to prove that the Empire was perhaps 'taken-for-granted as a natural aspect of Britain's place in the world'.<sup>15</sup> There is no denying that the British Empire was very powerful, but the extent to which it was at the forefront of people's minds is unclear. It is evident that at this time there was a very clear link between the Exhibition and British superiority, but the extent of the Empire's direct impact on it and the public's willingness to attend is something that this thesis examines further.

When analysing the Exhibition, it is clear that in works such as *At Home with the Empire*, much emphasis is often placed on the British Empire's role, while failing to consider the significance of the other countries and their involvement in the event. For example, as one of the biggest competitors at this trade fair, France is often overlooked in studies and instead the focus is placed on the superiority of Britain. Hall's book contributes to the overall understanding of the part the British Empire

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<sup>13</sup> Catherine Hall (ed by), *At Home with the Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Catherine Hall, *At Home with the Empire*, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

played in a wider context during this period, and often highlights its direct contribution in relation to the British people rather than relating it to its direct role in the Exhibition and by extension the role of other countries. This thesis, however, goes further than the general studies and takes into consideration the significance and popularity of other countries' displays such as France and Russia, and how this had an impact on the Exhibition overall.

Porter's book *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* takes a different approach to studying the British Empire and highlights the fact that it simply was not a priority to the British people at this time, emphasising the idea that the Exhibition was a means of propaganda for an Empire that people perhaps did not care for.<sup>16</sup> He states that 'the general public seemed uninterested' and posed the question that 'surely they would have been more concerned, and the politicians more passionate, if the empire had been important to them?'<sup>17</sup> Britain's industrial superiority at the time of the Great Exhibition was clear and Porter's book demonstrates the reality of British society having other priorities in their day-to-day lives. This approach to the Empire is further reflected in John MacKenzie's *Propaganda and the Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960*.<sup>18</sup> MacKenzie takes a wider approach to the Empire and focuses in detail on the impact of it on Britons themselves. According to MacKenzie, 'the public's lack of ideological commitment was matched by almost complete ignorance of the territories of Empire.'<sup>19</sup> These studies, therefore, provide valuable insight into British society during this time and suggest that the Exhibition

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<sup>16</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

was used as a means to promote an Empire that wasn't part of public attachment, helping this thesis delve deeper into other focuses of the Exhibition instead such as the working classes and trade.

Additionally, another theme often considered by academia is the results and legacies of the event – something which we see discussed in the works of Hermione Hobhouse (1995), Sylvi Johansen (1996) and A. N. Wilson (2019). Arguably, Hobhouse's study 'The Legacy of the Great Exhibition' contributes the most significant understanding to this theme due to the article's sole focus on the legacy.<sup>20</sup> This article demonstrates the extent of the economic gain for the Royal Commission and what it meant for Britain both in its immediate future and for the decades which followed. This focus on the economic outcome is significant due to the fact that the profits were used to develop a new area of London that is still materially and culturally significant today – thus showing that the impact of the Exhibition can still be seen over 100 years later. In addition, Johansen's article 'The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Precipice in Time' places an emphasis on the impact that the Great Exhibition had on the country's reputation after the event had finished.<sup>21</sup> As Johansen points out, 'the values of the Crystal Palace became the values of the nation.'<sup>22</sup> The events of 1851 set the standard for a new and empowered Britain that had demonstrated their superiority. Johansen's article helps to clarify what the ending of this event meant for the future of Britain and the Empire.

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<sup>20</sup> Hermione Hobhouse, 'The Legacy of the Great Exhibition', *RSA Journal*, vol 143, no 5459, pp48-52, (1995), <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41376736>> [Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> November 2020].

<sup>21</sup> Sylvi Johansen, 'The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Precipice in Time?', *Victorian Review*, vol 22, no 1, (1996), pp59-64, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27794825>> [Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> November 2020].

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

While the two previous works focus on the specific themes of the results, Wilson's book *Prince Albert: The Man who Saved the Monarchy* focuses on how the legacy of this trade fair is linked directly to Prince Albert himself.<sup>23</sup> Stating that 'Albert's association with the Exhibition was definitive – of it, and of him', Wilson highlights the significance of Prince Albert's involvement both during and in the aftermath of it.<sup>24</sup> It is generally agreed that the Exhibition is one of Prince Albert's greatest achievements and Wilson seeks to put into context how the two intertwine. However, although works such as that by Wilson touch on Prince Albert's involvement in the Exhibition, they often fail to dig deeper into the topic, discussing the individuals involved rather than the rationale behind the event. This study goes further and considers in detail Prince Albert's own interaction with the Royal Commission who were at the heart of this project. The Prince took on his own personal ambition to improve the lives of the working class and this project places a specific emphasis on the impact on the labouring classes after the Exhibition rather than just the individual's involvement at the top.

Works by Nick Merriman (1991), Tony Bennett (1995), and Robert W. Rydell (2006) contribute to the overall understanding of the event's links to national displays and public heritage. Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum* explores the formation of museum's acknowledging that it 'acquired its modern form during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.'<sup>25</sup> Throughout his book, Bennett draws on key links between museums and exhibitions – in particular his section on 'The Exhibitionary Complex.' Bennett's research recognises that museums were set up with specific

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<sup>23</sup> A. N. Wilson, *Prince Albert: The Man who Saved the Monarchy*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995) p. 19.

aims and the displays, much like the way the Great Exhibition was ordered, were done that way to help reflect its educational purposes. Such research lends valuable insight into how the Great Exhibition of 1851 (along with many other trade fairs of the nineteenth century) shaped and developed museums throughout the world today.

Rydell's 'World Fairs and Museums' also seeks to tie a link between the Great Exhibition and national displays.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Bennett who explores the wider history of museums, Rydell places an emphasis on the direct links between world fairs and museums. In this study, he states 'by World War 1, few would have doubted the claim that world fairs had shaped both the form and substance of the modern world.'<sup>27</sup> Drawing on specific examples, he highlights the ways in which trade fairs have directly influenced the museum – helping to grasp a better understanding of the true legacy of the Great Exhibition. Furthermore, Merriman's *Beyond the Glass Case: The Past, the Heritage and the Public* also takes a wider approach to the study of museums and contributes further to the general understanding of the development of national displays.<sup>28</sup> In this volume, Merriman seeks to examine the accessibility of museums by the public by analysing their relationship with the past and the direct role that museums have in this. This thesis has built on this approach by looking at the direct impact the Great Exhibition had on museums with a focus on the institutions erected as a result of the event's success, and the educational role which the Royal Commission hoped these would have on the British society.

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<sup>26</sup> Robert W. Rydell, 'World Fairs and Museums' in Sharon Macdonald (ed by), *A Companion to Museum Studies*, (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>28</sup> Nick Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case: The Past, the Heritage and the Public*, (London: University College London, 1991).

## **Structure of thesis**

The first two chapters of this study examine the initial objectives of the Great Exhibition. They consider the purpose of this event and assess whether the intention was to benefit large groups of people, such as the working classes, or to promote the reputation of individuals such as Prince Albert. In order to be able to assess the intentions of the Royal Commission, these chapters analyse sources such as personal correspondences between Prince Albert and its members as well as records of meetings held regarding the planning of the Exhibition. It also considers the role of specific individuals in the planning process. This analysis demonstrates that Prince Albert and the Royal Commission had several complex objectives to meet in staging the Exhibition including enhancing Prince Albert's own reputation and power, promoting education among the people, and strengthening the Empire's trade and commerce.

Chapter three critically assesses the impact that the Exhibition had during the months it was open, between May and October 1851. Primary sources such as diary entries, letters, and newspapers enable the project to assess how people responded to the event at the time. As it led to an increase in tourism - with Thomas Cook, (1808-1892), for example, running special excursions specifically to go to the Exhibition - this chapter focuses on the contribution this may have made to potential job prospects during the time of the Exhibition, as it gave those living in rural locations easier access to London. It also helped provide insight into the rise of the industrial age and gave those people living in the countryside a chance to see what this rise in employment opportunities would have meant for the future of the country, particularly for those in areas which were slower regarding industrial progress. This chapter also examines the impact on trade relations, commerce and the Empire. To

achieve this, chapter three places an emphasis on the British Empire's domination at the event. Through the allocated space both in the Crystal Palace and the Official Catalogue, this chapter considers the true extent of the Empire's at this trade fair. It also touches on the impact of other exhibitors and their displays such as France and Russia, examining their popularity while also looking at the xenophobic tones presented in *Punch* to highlight the arrival of these foreign visitors at the Exhibition.

The fourth chapter discusses both the short and long-term legacy of the Exhibition and weighs up the extent to which the organisers met their own objectives. In order to do this, this thesis explores the immediate aftermath of the event by looking at its monetary success; the grant that allowed for the Royal Commission to continue working; the moving of the Crystal Palace and the future exhibitions at Sydenham; and the formation of museums in the 'Albertopolis' area of London as a direct result of the Exhibition. It also examines whether the event was a success or failure in terms of if it met the Royal Commission's goals in other areas – such as educating the working classes and spreading imperialist propaganda – and how this had an impact in the months following the closure. In order to determine if it was a success, this study investigates the benefit the event had on the working classes and whether the event had provided better opportunities for them in terms of living, working and leisure.

Finally, this study also focuses on the impact the Exhibition had on popular imperialism and imperial relations throughout the mid-Victorian period. Through the analysis of the impact of *Punch*'s cartoons in chapter three, chapter four considers the extent to which the British people truly supported the Empire, and whether propaganda during the event had worked. This chapter does this by examining the British people's feelings on the Empire, the lack of its presence at exhibitions that

followed the Great Exhibition of 1851 and conflicts that happened in the subsequent years. This chapter demonstrates, therefore, that the Commission's goal in spreading imperialist propaganda only highlighted the cracks that were beginning to show in the British Empire.



# **Chapter One: Early Preparations for the Great Exhibition of 1851**

The Great Exhibition of 1851 was a ground-breaking event for Victorian Britain. Not only did it lay the foundations for the way that future expositions would be held across the world, it changed the way in which industries, such as steel and iron, viewed both themselves and their competitors. Although the credit is often attributed to Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert, it was in fact the initiative of Henry Cole. Henry Cole was, according to Sally Mitchell, 'an art administrator, critic and designer.'<sup>1</sup> It was during this time that Cole was actively involved in the art industry and was especially concerned with its development. It will be demonstrated in this chapter that the early days of the preparation for this event, including the intentions to boost the industrial and educational sectors that Cole found himself so deeply involved in, were particularly challenging. It is this focus that will highlight why this type of event needed the endorsement of a figure such as Prince Albert.

## **Victorian Britain in the 1840s**

The Great Exhibition marked the start of a new decade. This was a time where society moved away from the hardships of the 1840s, such as political unrest and poor harvests, and people began to look to the future of a more modernised industry. In comparison to the previous 20 years, W. L. Burn notes that the 1850s were an

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Mitchell, *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopaedia*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011) p. 180.

'Age of Equipoise', a term used to reflect its seemingly social and political calm compared to previous years.<sup>2</sup>

The late 1840s saw the establishment of both railway and steamship networks, with the construction of railways stimulating 'demand for other products, notably coal, timber and building materials and engineering products.'<sup>3</sup> It was this expansion of British factories that signalled the shift to a more industrialised Britain. Furthermore, the broadening of free trade in this period also reflected positively on British society. Free trade did not begin to be fully embraced until the 1840s and 1850s and aimed to improve manufacturing at a time where Britain was at the heart of industrial power, with the British Empire dominating the world stage. This power provided Britain with the opportunity to showcase their industry around the world and encouraged the British people to hold their manufactures in the highest regard. It was also during this time that many other countries in Europe were attempting to put theirs on display, most notably the German states in which they were 'more educational, aiming to raise the standard of production of the state industries and agriculture.'<sup>4</sup> In an effort to claim global superiority, many countries began to compete in promoting their industry and manufactures through exhibitions.

### **Inspiration for the Great Exhibition**

During the 1840s, these trade fairs had been taking place all over Europe, but 'there was, astoundingly, nothing similar in Britain at this time.'<sup>5</sup> In this period, 'it was a common thing in France and Germany to encourage native talent by means of

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<sup>2</sup> W. L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise*, (London: Unwin University Books, 1968) p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Brown, *Society and Economy in Modern Britain 1700-1850*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

exhibitions' and the French Industrial Exposition of 1844 was one of the greatest of the decade, aiming to encourage improvements in agriculture and technology.<sup>6</sup> At this exposition, '3690 manufacturers exhibited their products', making it a relatively small but significant national event.<sup>7</sup> While this was strictly a domestic affair, celebrating French manufacturers and skills, it had largely encouraged the planning of something similar in Britain. Henry Cole had visited the Exposition and was inspired by what he had seen. Cole was aware that a national exhibition in Britain would have huge benefits for industry at a time when the country was the world's leading powerhouse. As a civil servant who often sought for a unification between art and manufacturing, the idea of a world fair was particularly appealing.<sup>8</sup>

After joining the Society of Arts in 1846, Cole attempted to convince its members that such an exhibition would 'be an advert not only for an economic system, but also a political one.'<sup>9</sup> The aim of this type of fair was to demonstrate what Britain and the Empire had available to trade around the world – such opportunities would help economically boost the country. Not only would it demonstrate what Britain had to offer, it would highlight the strengths of other countries and would entice further trade deals to take place. An advert of this kind would have been of vital importance for the reputation of the British Empire. This would provide Britain and its Empire the opportunity to disseminate their ideals across the globe as an Exhibition would bring in the perfect chance to compare and compete with other countries. As such an event would serve as propaganda for this Empire, they would be able to show off

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<sup>6</sup> Anetta M. Osborne, 'The First World's Fair', p. 231.

<sup>7</sup> David Nielsen, *Bruno Taut's Design Inspiration for the Glashaus*, (London: Routledge, 2016) p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> David Raizman, *History of Modern Design: Graphics and Products Since the Industrial Revolution*, (London: Laurence King 2003) p50.

<sup>9</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 113.

their finest inventions if it was to go ahead. Not only did he try to convince the Society of Arts, he also 'sought Prince Albert's support to stage a similar event in England.'<sup>10</sup> Cole was aware that the assistance of a figure as prominent as Prince Albert would add a significant deal of authority to his plans for an exhibition, and with contacts both in government and his direct link to Queen Victoria herself, securing the backing he required would seem more achievable. Unfortunately, he failed to get the backing of the husband of Queen Victoria so without Prince Albert and the Society onboard, he began to plan some smaller-scale exhibitions in London. It was these mini showcases that would allow Cole to gauge whether a potential event of grand size would be achievable and if there would be sufficient interest from the public.

### **Early exhibitions**

The proposal for the first Annual Exhibition of Select Specimens of British Arts and Manufacturers was put forward to be held in 1847.<sup>11</sup> However, before the event had even been allowed to take place, it became immediately clear that due to a lack of interest 'the exhibition was in imminent danger of turning out a total failure, and was only rescued from extinction by a couple of individuals making it a matter of personal favour.'<sup>12</sup> It was difficult for Cole to get people, especially those in government, involved with this idea in the latter half of the 1840s and as a result it was unclear whether it would successfully justify the plans Cole had for a bigger one. It was crucial at this time that he gained participation in this initial exhibition from the

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<sup>10</sup> Indian Innovators Association, *Andhra Entrepreneurs: Past, Present and Future*, (India: Notion Press, 2018) np.

<sup>11</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> John Scott Russell 'Handwritten Papers', RSA Volume 1, accessed in John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 20.

Society of Arts, without which he could not hope to pursue an event in size similar to the ones hosted in France.

The attitude and response shown by the members of the Society demonstrated that gaining essential support would be much more of a challenge than he had originally anticipated. As a result, Cole, John Russell (1808-1882) and Francis Fuller (1807-1887) took it upon themselves to travel around London to personally persuade manufacturers to participate in the exhibition they were planning.<sup>13</sup> Although 200 exhibitors planned to take part, members of the Society of Arts were fearful that it would be a failure, but visitor numbers peaked at over 20,000. So, ultimately, it was in this year that ‘the Society of Arts, with the Prince Consort as its President, put on a Trade Fair in London as good as the French Exhibitions.’<sup>14</sup>

It was this first exhibition that ‘represented a turning point in the development of British capitalism. It was around this time that manufacturers realized that they had to begin to create a market for their goods’ and so this encouraged a second to take place in the following year.<sup>15</sup> Given the success of the first one, the Society of Arts were now fully committed to the idea of holding a much larger event and talks began to try and obtain assistance from the government. Cole had once again attempted to gain the endorsement of Prince Albert – a necessity if Cole’s ambition for a future exhibition was to be realised. However, ‘there was still too little evidence of support for the Exhibition for him [Prince Albert] to be able to openly attach his name to the

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<sup>13</sup> George S. Emmerson, *John Scott Russell: A Great Victorian Engineer and Naval Architect*, (London: John Murray Press, 1977) p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> J. R. C. Yglesias, *London Life and the Great Exhibition of 1851*, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> John R. Bryson, ‘Industrial Design, National Competitiveness and the Emergence of Design-Centred Economic Policy’, accessed in, J. Bryson (ed by), *Industrial Design, Competition and Globalization*, (New York: Springer, 2009) p. 42.

project and informal enquiries had revealed the government unwilling to commit itself.<sup>16</sup> Another issue for getting him involved lay in the fact that this was a time where Prince Albert himself was still very unpopular with the public because he was German. This meant it would have been extremely difficult for Prince Albert to garner the support for an exhibition when he still faced the challenge of gaining the approval of the British people of his own presence in the country.

Nevertheless, by the time of the next planned exhibition in March 1848, 700 exhibitors and more than 73,000 people would attend.<sup>17</sup> Its success began to convince both the Society and the Board of Trade to publicly back Cole's idea of an even bigger exhibition such as those he witnessed in France. To solidify these plans a Committee for the Management of the Exhibition of British Manufacturers was founded with Cole as the chairman.<sup>18</sup> It was the formation of this new Committee that began to pave the path for a bigger and even more ambitious exhibition to take place in 1851 and for planning of an event like this to be taken seriously by the government.

### **Planning the Great Exhibition**

It was the popularity of both the 1847 and 1848 trade fairs that spurred the Society of Arts to take Cole's advice and approach the government for assistance for a national trade fair. These two events had 'demonstrated both the sagacity of John Scott Russell's plans of gradually building up exhibitions by educating the public and the astuteness of Cole's decision to exploit their economic potential.'<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, it was

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<sup>16</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Monte Alan Calvert, *American Technology at World Fairs 1851-1876*, (Delaware: University of Delaware, 1962) p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Russell's push for education and Cole's recognition of economic benefits that formed the underlying motives for these exhibitions and would also serve as the foundation for an even bigger event. If Cole's plans for a national, and possibly even international fair, were taken further, 'British producers would be pitted against those of the continent and elsewhere and their defects, as well as their strengths, could be highlighted while foreign goods might serve as an educative device.'<sup>20</sup> Not only this, 'national competition could be used as a spur to economic improvement.'<sup>21</sup> These earlier exhibitions highlighted Cole's ambition for an event that would help boost Britain and the Empire economically. If Britain was to host an exposition on a similar scale to those in France, they would be able to put on display their biggest and best items from the arts and manufacturing sectors.

Therefore, the Society began to work on their formal requests for government assistance (see figure 1, which shows the petition that was sent in an attempt to gain the crucial endorsement that was needed for a national event).<sup>22</sup> The Society requested the aid of the government, stating that an exhibition would be 'of the utmost importance to the growth of public education in Art, and to the progress of British Manufacturers' and it is this petition that ultimately highlights the motives behind the planning.<sup>23</sup>

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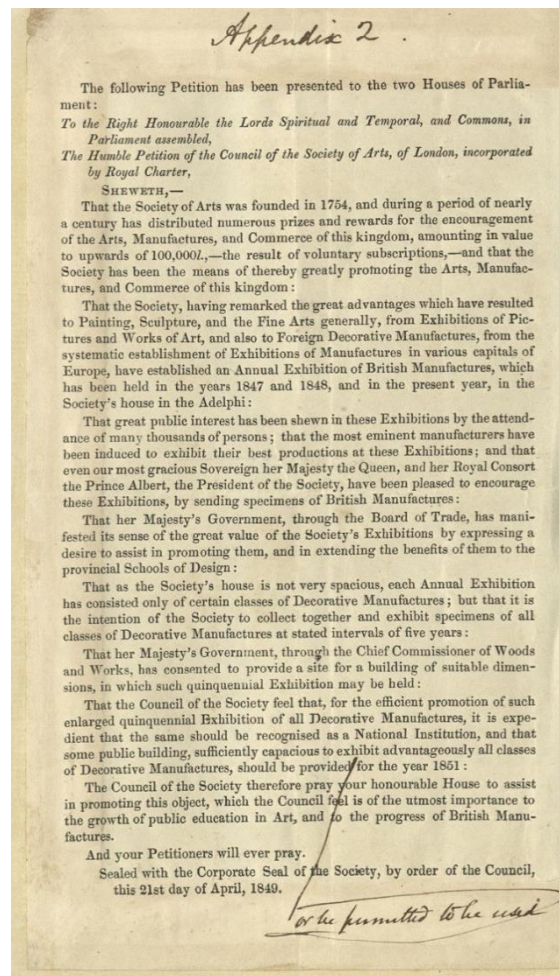
<sup>20</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/47, 21 April 1849 Petition to Parliament by the Society of Arts, <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers-1278>> [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021].

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Figure 1: Royal Collection Trust, 21 April 1849 – Petition to Parliament by the Society of Arts



Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/47, 21 April 1849 Petition to Parliament by the Society of Arts, (1849), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-Albert's-papers-1278>>

While the government's approval was crucial for this movement, so too was the endorsement of one of the Society's own members, Prince Albert. During a chance meeting, Fuller encountered Thomas Cubitt (1788-1855) who was currently working closely on a project with the Prince. This provided Fuller with the opportunity of attempting to get closer to Prince Albert, enhancing the possibility of gaining the help they needed. During this meeting, Fuller pointed out the significance of Prince Albert's potential involvement, and he claimed 'we could do much grander work in London by inviting contributions from every nation: and said, moreover, that if Prince



Albert would take the lead in such a work he would become a leading light among nations.<sup>24</sup> On 16 June that year, Russell announced that it was the Society's aim to hold a national exhibition, making them a quinquennial event, (similar to those in France), meaning the next major one would be held in 1851.

It was this announcement in 1849 that persuaded Prince Albert to become involved in the project and to hold a meeting at Buckingham Palace on 30 June. He invited key figures such as Cole, Russell and Fuller to discuss the possibility of an exhibition happening in 1851, and according to Davis, this was the moment that 'has been called the 'birth' of the Exhibition: it is often seen as having set the framework for what happened later.'<sup>25</sup>

As husband of the Queen, 'Albert held that while being apolitical a monarch should be engaged with the country and be seen to be doing something for the people'.<sup>26</sup> As it was his wife that had more power at the time, getting involved in this project was the perfect opportunity for Prince Albert to have some power and influence to help the people of Britain on his own. It was with this meeting at Buckingham Palace that foundations began to be laid for an exhibition that would bring together many sectors of industry in the country.<sup>27</sup> The first topic to be discussed was perhaps one of the most important for establishing how it would function. As shown in figure 2, it was during this meeting that Prince Albert proposed a division of four sectors: raw

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<sup>24</sup> Francis Fuller, 'A few extracts from the Diary of Francis Fuller, in May, 1886, Having Reference to the Origin of the Great Exhibition of all Nations held in London in 1851', John Russell Papers, RSA Volume 1, accessed in John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25-6.

materials; machinery and mechanical inventions; manufacturers; and sculpture and plastic art.<sup>28</sup>

These divisions would allow British manufacturers to display all aspects of industry and give them the opportunity to demonstrate their progress and growth as an expanding industrialised nation. These separate sectors meant that the exhibition provided 'an opportunity to publicize not only the physical advances of the new technology of the machine age, but the contribution of the industrial workers to this advance and their social maturity as well.'<sup>29</sup> As a result, Prince Albert and members of the Society of Arts were hoping to include people from all levels of society in this potential exhibition, making it a countrywide effort. Significantly, 'from the outset the Prince welcomed the participation of the working classes in Exhibition preparations', allowing for a wider range of public involvement.<sup>30</sup> Prince Albert's desire to have participation from labourers emphasised the role that he had taken on a few years previous and helped to make clear what he hoped to bring to an Exhibition. In 1844, he was appointed the role of President of the Society for the Improvement of the Condition of Working Classes.<sup>31</sup> By including this social class in the Exhibition, they would gain valuable insight into the rapidly developing manufacturing sector in the country and it would also allow them to play a part in displaying exhibits from their parts of the country. It was vital to include the working classes because they made

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<sup>28</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/15, 30 June 1849 Minutes of meeting at Buckingham Palace, (1849), (COPY), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers-1302>> [Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020].

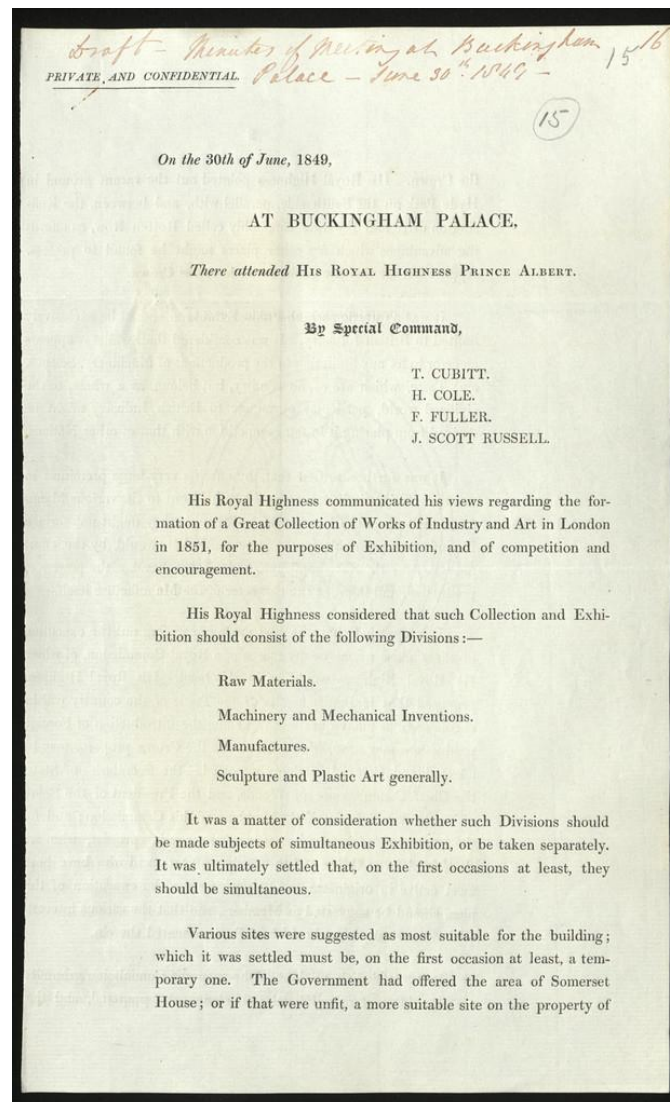
<sup>29</sup> Audrey Short, 'Workers Under Glass in 1851', *Victorian Studies*, vol 10, no2, (1966), pp193-202 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3825189>> [Accessed 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020] p. 193.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Wilson, *The Life and Times of Queen Victoria: Volume 1*, (London: Cassell & Company, 1891) p. 358.

up a large number of the working population in the manufacturing sectors. Thus, by including them and their variety of labouring skills, Prince Albert and the Society of Arts would also be increasing the number of exhibits on show.

Figure 2: Royal Collection Trust, 30 June 1849 – Minutes of Meeting at Buckingham Palace



Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/15, 30 June 1849 Minutes of meeting at Buckingham Palace, (1849), (COPY), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-albert's-papers-1302>>

Following on from the discussion of how a potential exhibition would function, another key topic at this meeting was the idea of offering incentives to those who agreed to put their items on display. It was suggested between Prince Albert, Cole,

Russell and Fuller that by giving out prize money, it would encourage the further development of manufacturing.<sup>32</sup> In other words, it would, 'by the effort necessary for their accomplishment, permanently raise the powers of production, and improve the character of the Manufacture itself.'<sup>33</sup> Acting as an incentive, the idea of monetary prizes for the manufacturers would generate more interest in the idea of the exhibition and would allow for a wider range of industry to be put on display. That it would generally help promote manufacturing is significant and demonstrates that the desire to boost the British economy played a huge part in the planning processes for the 1851 event.

Perhaps one of the most important elements to decide was where the exhibition was to be held. Initially, Prince Albert had considered the possibility of a building in Leicester Square but had been talked out of it by Cubitt who suggested 'if you build on a square in which the public has a moral, if not a legal right, you will do a great wrong, and set a bad example.'<sup>34</sup> This warning highlighted to Prince Albert the potential sensitivities involved in choosing an appropriate site for an exhibition. It was essential that Prince Albert began his involvement in this project on good ground and being aware of how to win and lose public support based on decisions he made would prove to be extremely important. Upon discussion, it was pointed out that there was vacant ground on Hyde Park, and with Prince Albert's participation, it was decided that the Society could apply to the Crown for possible use of this site.

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<sup>32</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/15, 30 June 1849 Minutes of meeting at Buckingham Palace.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Cole, *Fifty Years of Public Work*, (London: George Bell & Sons, 1884) p. 126.

Arguably, having Prince Albert as a member of the Society was one of their greatest assets as it would be easier for the monarchy to accept the idea of such an event.

Furthermore, another significantly vital part of planning an exhibition such as this, and the aspect that would set it apart from its predecessors, was the discussion of whether it should have a national or international focus. At this meeting, Prince Albert 'proposed that the Society should undertake the initiative in the promotion of the works of all nations.'<sup>35</sup> While Prince Albert is understood to have been the originator of the Exhibition, notes from this meeting show that he merely built on the proposals that were already being put into place by figures such as Cole and Russell. However, while it was agreed that this trade fair would be an international one, this was largely for the benefit of Britain and the Empire. As Sylvi Johansen emphasises, 'staging an international exhibition on that scale indicated Britain's high level of confidence in its own political and economic structures.'<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, by having other nations' achievements on show, it would provide Britain with the chance to see the progress of others, allowing them to have friendly competition with these countries.

Consequently, for this event to take place, 'it was settled that the best mode of carrying out the execution of these plans would be by means of a Royal Commission, of which His Royal Highness would be at the head.'<sup>37</sup> It was this meeting 'that settled its character as something more than a trade fair' and

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<sup>35</sup> Justin McCarthy, *A History of Our Own Times: From the Accession of Queen Victoria to the Berlin Congress*, vol2, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1879) p. 106.

<sup>36</sup> Sylvi Johansen, 'The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Precipice in Time?' p. 60.

<sup>37</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/15, 30 June 1849 Minutes of meeting at Buckingham Palace.

introduced a Commission that would see the Exhibition through.<sup>38</sup> This was a crucial development as the government would now begin to see Prince Albert and the Society of Arts as one working body. Not only this, if the Queen herself gave permission for such a Commission to be formed, the government would see that she endorsed the idea of this international trade fair and would be more inclined to view it favourably. Therefore, Queen Victoria's support in particular from this moment onwards, would prove to be a significant factor in the preparations of the Exhibition project.

This chapter has highlighted the complexities that went into the potential planning of an Exhibition on the scale of those in France. By hosting a number of smaller-scale expositions in the country's capital, the Society of Arts were able to gauge whether an even bigger one would meet their expectations in terms of popularity. As this was a period in which Britain was rapidly developing their industries, an exposition on a much bigger scale would be incredibly beneficial for the manufacturers of the country and would ultimately help improve trade both at home and abroad if it were to be a success. One of the vital moves made by the Society of Arts and Henry Cole in particular was to get the assistance of Prince Albert, whose endorsement would prove to be essential throughout the entire project. Once Prince Albert was actively contributing towards this project, the work began to gain the vital backing from those in government specially to allow for the formation of a Royal Commission to help exclusively with preparations of a bigger Exhibition. This chapter has demonstrated the overall focus on the power of individuals such as Henry Cole, and later on, Prince Albert in the planning processes. While this chapter has focused on the

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<sup>38</sup> Jonathon Shears (ed by), *The Great Exhibition 1851: A Sourcebook*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) p. 13.

potential of a Commission if the government and Queen Victoria were to back it, chapter two will move on to examine in detail the next moves to form a Commission, the in-depth role of Prince Albert and the planning of a much larger-scale event coming into motion.

## **Chapter Two: The Royal Commission for the Great**

### **Exhibition of 1851**

The requirement for setting up a Royal Commission had been recognised by Henry Cole early in the planning, and the first step towards its formation was to gain approval from those in government. In the mid-1840s, Cole had already begun to form connections with members of Parliament, and it was in 1849 that he began to push this one step further. In a letter to Charles Beaumont Phipps (1801-1886) in July of that year Cole had urged for the need to secure the participation of those in government, without which they would have to postpone an exhibition to 1852 and break the initial plan to hold the event once every four years. They felt that this carried the risk of the public losing enthusiasm, were this to happen. In this letter, Cole highlighted the fact that he had been in contact with ‘influential persons’ and that they too were ‘unanimously of opinion that it is very inadvisable to let the present time pass by without obtaining the Commission.’<sup>1</sup> It is clear through Cole’s letter, that he was attempting to drum up as much support as he could for the formation of a Commission.

The advantage of having a Commission such as this, according to Anton Howes, ‘would be to put potentially controversial aspects of its organisation above reproach, such as the allocation of exhibition space, the choice of a building and the choice of a jury to decide exhibition prizes.’<sup>2</sup> As the aim of the Society was to try and raise

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<sup>1</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/3, 16 July 1849 Henry Cole to Colonel Phipps, (1849), (COPY), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers-1314>> [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020].

<sup>2</sup> Anton Howes, *Arts and Minds: How the Royal Society of Arts Changed a Nation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020) p. 134.



funds for the exhibition, with the hope of promoting education particularly in science and technology, it was crucial for the planning to have the approval of the government and to have a commission to its name. However, Cole and Russell could not hope to gain help from the government solely by themselves. Many were aware of the growing importance of Prince Albert's involvement with the planning of this event, with his power and influence being a key factor in their desire for him to become involved. This is highlighted in Phipps' letter back to Cole in which he states, 'the Prince thinks that if the plan is to be matured under His Auspices, He must be the Person to treat with the Cabinet Ministers upon it', also believing that 'he must be guided by his own discretion' while still wanting both suggestions and advice from the members of the Society.<sup>3</sup>

While the Prince was not the originator of the idea of the Exhibition, there can be no denying that Prince Albert's contribution towards the project was to be a significant part of not only Victorian Britain as a whole, but his own legacy. Although he was initially hesitant to lend his support to the event, towards the end of the decade Prince Albert was invested and prepared to work with Cole and other members of the Society of Arts to make an exhibition of this kind a reality. As discussed in chapter one, although there had not been enough grounds to justify becoming involved in the Exhibition, it was with the successes of the smaller trade fairs held between 1847 and 1849 and the announcement of the plan to make these quinquennial events that had encouraged him to join the project. In August 1849, Prince Albert began to put the members of the Society to work and aimed to get a

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<sup>3</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/4, 17 July 1849 Colonel Phipps to Henry Cole, (1849), (COPY), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers-1313>> [Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020].

sense of public feeling on the matter. He gave permission to Cole, Fuller and Russell to ‘travel through the manufacturing districts of the country, in order to collect the opinions of leading Manufacturers and further evidence with reference to a great Exhibition.’<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the crucial years of planning and preparing for this Exhibition, ‘the Cole-Albert relationship was to be of great importance’, and it was clear that both their ambitions and goals were following the same course.<sup>5</sup> The aim behind planning such an event, for both men, was the desire to improve certain sectors of industry in the country, particularly advancing science, and the economy both at home and abroad. This was a shared desire that was reflected in their efforts to gain recognition for an event of this nature. Through this, ‘they hoped to uphold the virtues of skilled labour and to celebrate the glories of a moral marketplace.’<sup>6</sup> With such goals in mind, this Exhibition would highlight the essential development needed in science and give the country the opportunity to work economically through trade with the other countries that would potentially participate if enough support was given for a large event. The reason behind the tour from Prince Albert’s perspective was so that by the end of it he could have gathered together evidence to present to the government. As a result of the visits authorised by Prince Albert, a full report was provided by Cole and Fuller in October 1849 which detailed all the ‘promoters and subscribers’ who had signed up in each city.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/18, 1 Aug 1849 Authority to visit manufacturing towns, <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers-1299>> [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> May 2021].

<sup>5</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Lara Kriegel, *Grand Designs: Labor, Empire and the Museum in Victorian Culture*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007) p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/37, Oct 1849 Cole and Fuller Report,

This demonstrated to Prince Albert that the idea of a trade fair was popular amongst the people in the cities they had visited, and with this vital backing they would be able to go to the government with proof that a Commission would be an essential move towards this project. Figure 3 demonstrates that in Manchester and Birmingham alone there were several manufacturers that were willing to be a part of an exhibition should it happen.<sup>8</sup> With the initial success of the manufacturing tours in 1849, the Society now appeared to be well on the way to setting up the Great Exhibition.

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(1849), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers/oc-5>> [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020].

<sup>8</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/37, Oct 1849 Cole and Fuller Report, (1849), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers/oc-5>> [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020].

Figure 3: Royal Collection Trust, Oct 1849 – Cole and Fuller Report



Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/1/37, Oct 1849 Cole and Fuller Report, (1849), <https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-Albert's-papers/oc-5>

Although the Society had already spent months planning it, one decision began to damage their reputation and could have put a stop to further progress. In 1849, without a commission to plan the event, the Society of Arts were struggling to obtain

financial aid. As a result, they turned to a contracting firm, Messrs James and George Munday, to help with monetary backing. Their agent, George Drew (1790-1867), agreed to help with this. The Mundays, therefore, 'undertook to bear the risk of the preliminary expenses, and actually deposited a sum of £20,000.'<sup>9</sup> This was a substantial amount, worth £2,855,308.64 in today's money, emphasising just how significant the Munday's contribution towards the Exhibition project would be.<sup>10</sup> Drew agreed to this sum on a condition, which was that the Munday's would not only be paid back for the loan, but would also get a share of the potential profits that would be made. Although excited about the event, the potential of it happening and its overall success were still unclear and members of the society, including Prince Albert, began to question the effectiveness of this contract. This doubt was reflected by Cole, who stated 'at the very early stage of the business, I had felt the great likelihood that as the idea became understood, public opinion would prefer some other mode of carrying out the Exhibition than by contract.'<sup>11</sup> It was at this point that the most important change was made in the contract – a clause was added to allow termination of the agreement if this was something that individuals such as Prince Albert and Cole felt necessary.

The Society's popularity was already rapidly declining as a result of their links to the Mundays and at the end of November 1849, the *Daily News* reported that a contract had been signed between the Society of Arts and the Mundays. This contract was essential at the time 'as the public refused to allow any government support and

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Cole, *Fifty Years of Public Work of Sir Henry Cole*, p. 146.

<sup>10</sup> Bank of England, *Inflation Calculator*,  
< <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator> > [Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021].  
(Statistics for the year 2020)

<sup>11</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 30.

someone needed to carry the risk.<sup>12</sup> The issue was that the Society, while taking the private loan, had not informed the public and had continued to ask for voluntary donations to the project. Aware of the public's anger and the rapid decline of support, Prince Albert insisted with Drew and the Mundays that they should reduce the amount of the profit that the company hoped to gain from the event. It was with Prince Albert's insistence that 'Munday subsequently consented, instead of this division, to receive such part of the surplus only, if any, as after payment of all expenses might be awarded by arbitration.'<sup>13</sup>

It was then decided that the contract should be published in newspapers to show that the Society had not acted against their commitment to keep this as a publicly backed event. This did not, however, have the intended effect and many papers turned against the Society. At the end of December 1849, the *Patent Journal* printed a critique of both the Society and the contract. In this article, they claimed that 'in their eagerness to grasp the proffered bonus of £20,000, the Committee would appear to have been willing to make any sort of agreement.'<sup>14</sup> The article went on to state 'a Munday Exhibition it will be – MUNDAY prizes, and MUNDAY profits.'<sup>15</sup> It was clear, therefore, that the only way the Society could salvage their own reputation and the future of the Exhibition would be to either change or terminate the contract. Here, the formation of a Royal Commission was vital as it enabled the agreement to be terminated.

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<sup>12</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> George Virtue, *The Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue: The Industry of All Nations 1851*, (London: George Virtue, 1851) p. xiv.

<sup>14</sup> 'The Exhibition of 1851; Is It To Be Made A "Job"?', *Patent Journal*, 29 December 1849, np.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

In 1850, the *London Gazette* declared that ‘The Queen has been pleased to issue the following Commission for the Promotion of the Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations.’<sup>16</sup> The news was spread across two pages, (see figure 4), providing a large list of the people that would be involved in the Commission along with highly influential members such as Robert Peel (1788-1850) and William Gladstone (1809-1898).<sup>17</sup> While Peel was not actively involved in Parliament at this time, he was still regarded as a highly influential figure in British society and it was his active involvement in the project that gave it greater attention by those in government. It was during this time that Peel’s ‘support to the Prince upon the Commission for the Great Exhibition had been unflagging’ and would prove to be the most significant contribution to its overall success.<sup>18</sup> With the formation of a Royal Commission, and the active involvement of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria, it was hoped that it would be easier to put plans for the Great Exhibition into place.

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<sup>16</sup> ‘The Royal Commission’, *London Gazette*, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1850, in *The Gazette*, <<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/21056/page/23>> [Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020] p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Theodore Martin, *The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1880) p. 289.

Figure 4: 'The Royal Commission' *London Gazette*



*Whitehall, January 3, 1850.*

THE Queen has been pleased to issue the following Commission for the Promotion of the Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, to be holden in the year 1851, videlicet:

**VICTORIA, R.**

VICTORIA, by the grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Faith; to Our most dearly beloved Consort, His Royal Highness Francis Albert Augustus Charles Emmanuel Duke of Saxony, Prince of Saxe Coburg and Gotha, Knight of Our Most Noble Order of the Garter, and Field Marshal in Our Army—Our right trusty and right entirely-beloved Cousin and Councillor, Walter Francis Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, Knight of Our Most Noble Order of the Garter—Our right trusty and right well-beloved Cousin William Earl of Rosse, Knight of Our Most Illustrious Order of Saint Patrick—Our right trusty and right well-beloved Cousins and Councillors Granville George Earl Granville, and Francis Earl of Ellesmere—Our right trusty and well-beloved Councillor Edward Geoffrey Lord Stanley—Our right trusty and well-beloved Councillors John Russell (commonly called Lord John Russell), Sir Robert Peel, Baronet, Henry Labouchere, and William Ewart Gladstone—Our trusty and well beloved Sir Archibald Gallop, Knight Commander of Our Most Honourable Order of the Bath, and Major-General in Our Army in the East Indies, Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company, or the Chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company for the time being—Sir Richard Westmacott, Knight—Sir Charles Lyell, Knight, President of the Geological Society of London, or the President of the Geological Society of London for the time being—Thomas

Gibson, Esquire, John Gott, Esquire, Samuel Jones Loyd, Esquire, Philip Fusz, Esquire, and William Thompson, Esquire, greeting.

Whereas the Society for the Promotion of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, incorporated by Our royal charter, of which Our most dearly beloved Consort, The Prince Albert, is President, have of late years instituted Annual Exhibitions of the works of British Art and Industry, and have proposed to establish an Enlarged Exhibition of the works of Industry of all Nations, to be holden in London in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty-one, at which prizes and medals, to the value of at least twenty thousand pounds sterling, shall be awarded to the exhibitors of the most meritorious works then brought forward; and have invested in the names of Our right trusty and entirely beloved Cousin Spencer Joshua Alayne Marquess of Northampton, Our right trusty and right well-beloved Cousin and Councillor George William Frederick Earl of Clarendon, Knight of Our Most Noble Order of the Garter, Our trusty and well-beloved Sir John Peter Boileau, Baronet, and James Courthope Peache, Esquire, the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to be awarded in prizes and medals as aforesaid; and have appointed Our trusty and well-beloved Arthur Kett Barclay, Esquire, William Cotton, Esquire, Sir John William Lubbock, Baronet, Samuel Morton Peto, Esquire, and Baron Lionel De Rothschild, to be the Treasurers for all receipts arising from donations, subscriptions, or any other source, on behalf of, or towards the said Exhibition; Our trusty and well-beloved Peter le Neve Foster, Joseph Payne, and Thomas Winkworth, Esquires, to be the Treasurers for payment of all executive expenses; and Our trusty and well-beloved Henry Cole, Charles Wentworth Dilke the younger, George Drew, Francis Fuller, and Robert Stephenson, Esquires, with Our trusty and well-

'The Royal Commission', *London Gazette*, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1850, in *The Gazette*, <<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/21056/page/23>>

One of the first issues that the governmental secretary to the Commission, Stafford Northcote (1818-1887), dealt with was the Munday contract.<sup>19</sup> At the inaugural meeting of the Commission on 11 January 1850, it was agreed that rather than renegotiate the terms it would simply be terminated altogether. Freed from the damaging contract, the Commission could now move forward in planning the next stages of the Exhibition.

<sup>19</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 56.



At the Royal Commission's first meeting, two committees were introduced. The first, the Subscriptions Committee, was formed to help educate the public on the Royal Commission's plans for the Exhibition, and it was also tasked with setting up smaller local committees. The second, the Correspondence Committee, was set up to answer any incoming letters from local groups and it was headed by Cole and Charles Wentworth Dilke (1789-1864). By the end of March 1850, the Correspondence Committee had travelled around the country, visiting 200 towns with the initial aim to help increase the number of subscriptions that were coming into the Royal Commission. As a result of this, a campaign was set up in order to try and win over the public 'on an informal educational level.'<sup>20</sup> By mid-February, over 17,000 letters had been sent out to the public along with advertisements in newspapers, receipts as a reward for subscribers and 'important looking books for promising subscriptions.'<sup>21</sup> It was hoped, therefore, that by providing subscribers with rewards for signing up, it would generally encourage more people to get involved and would heighten the overall popularity of the upcoming event.

### **Prince Albert's Speech at the Mansion House**

In the course of this advertisement and propaganda campaign, the Commission made a significant breakthrough on 21 March, 1850, with Prince Albert's key speech at the Mansion House, in which he 'articulated his vision of scientific progress.'<sup>22</sup> As President of the Commission, 'the vast reach and importance of Prince Albert's conception, perhaps, first dawned on the country at large in 1850, when his famous

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<sup>20</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey Cantor, 'Science, Providence and Progress at the Great Exhibition', p. 439.

speech at the Mansion House was printed in all newspapers.<sup>23</sup> By this point, the Commission had recognised the importance of networking with local dignitaries as a means of securing support for the exhibition project. At this banquet, Prince Albert and other members of the Commission were joined by 140 mayors and other distinguished guests. It was this meeting that ‘demonstrated that an Exhibition “movement” was beginning to emerge, bound together by a rhetoric.’<sup>24</sup>

This rhetoric was evident before speeches even began to take place and was visible in the careful selection of decorations for the event. Celebrating unity above all else, the displays showcased elements of industry from both Britain and around the world. Above the table where Prince Albert was to be seated were two figures depicting Peace and Plenty, with ‘an immense globe of the world with a wreath of laurel.’<sup>25</sup> This perhaps reflected Prince Albert’s intention and hope that the possibility of an exhibition, which he aimed to secure backing for at this meeting, would ultimately result in the future unification and peace of countries all over the world. On the opposite side of the building, guests would see ‘a colossal allegorical figure of Britannia, holding in her hand a ground-plan of a building for the approaching grand exhibition.’<sup>26</sup> This image depicted four angels that would move to four parts of the world, suggesting that Britannia was willing to ‘receive the works of art and manufacture of all nations.’<sup>27</sup> Through making its focus international rather than

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<sup>23</sup> “Industrial Exhibitions – II”, Rev H.R. Hawkins, in *Pall Mall Budget*, v33, (London: 1885) p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>26</sup> 21 March 1850 Printed Report of Grand Banquet to HRH Prince Albert at the Mansion House, London in Honour of the Exhibition of 1851, ‘John Scott Russell Papers’, Volume II, RSA accessed in John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

national, the speeches were delivered in order to encourage participation from countries all over the world.

While the decoration of the building was significant in the imagery it portrayed, it was Prince Albert's address which would emerge as the highlight of the Mansion House banquet. When analysing the delivery of this speech in early 1850, it is important to consider that it needed to be delivered in a way which would convince the men in the room of the viability of the project. It was vital that he did all he could to boost not only the idea of the exhibition, but of the greatness of Britain's industry, extending this also to both the science and art sectors. He began his speech by recognising the monumental changes that were taking place in the country, stating:

I conceive it to be the duty of every educated person closely to watch and study the time in which he lives, and, as far as in him lies, to add his humble mite of individual exertion to further the accomplishment of what he believes Providence to have ordained.<sup>28</sup>

He went on to recognise that nobody in the room, and by extension those in society, 'will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end, to which, indeed, all history points – the realization of the unity of mankind.'<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, Prince Albert went into the Mansion House (and this speech) with high ambitions for where he believed British society could strive to be. The recognition of a rapidly modernising world would have had huge benefits for the progress, and cooperation, of countries all over the world.

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<sup>28</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RA VIC/MAIN/Z/271/13, Mansion house Dinner, (1850), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-archives/prince-alberts-official-papers/mansion-house-dinner>> [Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July 2021].

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, it was in this speech that Prince Albert highlighted the fact that ‘the distances which separated the different nations and parts of the globe are rapidly vanishing before the achievements of modern invention’ and that travel and technology were beginning to link these nations as never before.<sup>30</sup> It was, therefore, as Eric deMare states, a time which was ‘ripe for providing a huge shop window for the display of new skills and manufacturers that could capture the expanding mass markets.’<sup>31</sup>

In the second part of his presentation, Prince Albert proceeded to discuss the Exhibition movement. It was this proposed exhibition, he stated, that would ‘give us a true test and a living picture of the point of development at which the whole of mankind has arrived in this great task, and a new starting-point from which all nations will be able to direct their further exertions.’<sup>32</sup> Prince Albert was aware of the ever-changing society he was living in, and recognised the benefits of such an exhibition not only for the country but also for the relations between Britain and the rest of the world. As mentioned above with Eric deMare’s statement, this was a time where displaying the achievements of any country could benefit global markets significantly. It actively encouraged countries to demonstrate not only their strengths to put on the market, but how they could strike up deals with countries all over the world to boost their own economies. An exhibition on the scale Prince Albert was hoping for would benefit them at home but also abroad as it would, he hoped, help in the development of industries in all countries and lead to an improvement in global trade and commerce. As Geoffrey Cantor states, during this time ‘trade would

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<sup>30</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RA VIC/MAIN/Z/271/13, Mansion house Dinner.

<sup>31</sup> Eric deMare, *London 1851: The Year of the Great Exhibition*, (London: The Folio Society Ltd, 1972) p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RA VIC/MAIN/Z/271/13, Mansion house Dinner.

increase (aided by the elimination of trade barriers), prosperity would advance, science and manufacturing would make rapid progress.’<sup>33</sup>

Recognising the fact that so many local dignitaries were present, Prince Albert dedicated a section of his speech to expressing his gratitude to them for their willingness to put aside their local and political differences in favour of joint effort for the Exhibition. One thing they could all agree on was the fact that Britain was far more advanced in industry and manufacturing than most of the countries in the world at this time. It was this idea of national superiority that helped to convince the local dignitaries to lend their support to the project.

It was ‘at this close of his speech – which was received with an enthusiasm that supplied a new motive power to the work’, that Prince Albert was met with a new wave of support towards both him and the exhibition project.<sup>34</sup> The encouragement towards Prince Albert and the project was evident the day after his address, in the letters received by Queen Victoria. The Duchess of Sutherland (1806-1868) wasted no time in making her opinion known to the Queen, commenting that ‘I cannot resist saying to your majesty how much I admired the Prince’s speech – how entirely worthy I thought it of himself.’<sup>35</sup> There was a similar letter from the Duchess of Gloucester (1776-1857), who wished to ‘compliment you [Queen Victoria] on the very admirable speech dear Albert made upon the occasion and how sincerely I trust

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<sup>33</sup> Geoffrey Cantor, ‘Science, Providence and Progress at the Great Exhibition’, p. 457.

<sup>34</sup> Philip Smith, *The Popular History of England from the Earliest Times to the Year of 1848*, vxi, (London: Fullarton & Company, 1883) p. 98.

<sup>35</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/3/10, 22 Mar 1850 Duchess of Sutherland to Queen Victoria, (1850), < <https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers-1169> > [Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2021].

your wishes and his may be accomplished and succeed.<sup>36</sup> Prince Albert's speech at the Mansion House had a profound impact on those higher in society, and began to garner the crucial support required to make it a success. From this point on, Prince Albert and the Commission began to have an influx of local committees signing themselves up to the project that would prove to be a significant contribution to the event in terms of persuading local manufacturers to become involved which was one of the central aims of the speech.

### **Preparing the Great Exhibition**

While the Mansion House speech made public the intentions underlying the exhibition, it was from March 1850 that these ideals became much more pronounced. It was the progress made by the Commission after this speech that demonstrated to the public exactly what the organisers' intentions were regarding educating the working classes, how they aimed to boost the economy and the ways in which they could use the Exhibition to spread imperialist propaganda. Not only this, it was around the time of this speech that key decisions began to be made regarding the design of the building, demonstrating that the hard work was being put in by the Commission to make this a reality.

With the formation of the Royal Commission in January 1850, another sub-division was set up. The Building Committee was formed in February 1850 with the hopes of finding a suitable design for the building that would house the Exhibition.<sup>37</sup> On 13

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<sup>36</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/3/9, 22 Mar 1850 Duchess of Gloucester to Queen Victoria, (1850), < <https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers-1170> > [Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2021].

<sup>37</sup> Frank W. Thackeray, *Events that Formed the Modern World*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012) p. 137.

March 1850, just over a week before the Mansion House speech had taken place, the Committee announced that they were to hold a competition for the design of the Exhibition building. In this, the Commission had given seven specific instructions regarding what they wanted the designs of the building to consider, including: 'one main east-west avenue and a central cross avenue from the south entrance' and 'three entrances, with the southern most prominent, but many exits.'<sup>38</sup> The Commissioners had already discussed the ideal size of the building, and decided that for this Exhibition, they wanted Britain to occupy 400,000 square feet of whichever building would house it and that this needed to be equalled for the rest of the world. Thus, by providing those submitting entries for the competition with a clear idea of exactly how to accommodate both Britain and the rest of the world at this event, the competition got under way.

By April, the Committee had received over 233 designs for the competition.<sup>39</sup> However, in a meeting on 16 May, they had 'arrived at the unanimous conclusion that there was yet no single one so accordant with the peculiar object in view' and so had not been able to pick a design.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, just as with the Munday contract, the Royal Commission from this point made a decision that could have cost them their entire project. In June 1850, the Commission decided to publish their own proposal for a building for this event. This would be a brick building designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-1859), a prominent civil engineer. However, once it

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<sup>38</sup> John McKean, *Crystal Palace: Joseph Paxton and Charles Fox*, (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1994) p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Bruno Giberti, *Designing the Centennial: A History of the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia*, (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2021) np.

<sup>40</sup> Royal Collection Trust, (RCT), RC/H/1/3/84, 16 May 1850 Minutes of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Royal Commission, (1850), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers-1125>> [Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> July 2021].

was made public in the *Illustrated London News*, many people rejected the design, deciding to protest and start local petitions to not allow this to go through. As a result, Prince Albert wrote that ‘we [the Royal Commission] are on the point of having to abandon the exhibition altogether.’<sup>41</sup> This therefore highlighted the fact that the Commission had once again not taken public feelings into account and ran the risk of having to shut down the project. The Munday contract, as previously mentioned, had caused them to be unpopular as they continued to ask for voluntary subscriptions while taking a private loan. And just a couple of months later, they had advertised for the public to become involved by submitting entries for a competition in which such entries were completely dismissed.

Rapidly declining in popularity, and with only a matter of months until their original planned opening date, the Commission needed a design that would encourage the public to endorse the project once more. This significant contribution came in the same month that the Commission’s design was rejected by the public, through the work of Joseph Paxton (1803-1865). Paxton was ‘an untrained engineer and architect, half-amateur and half-professional’ who at the time was known mainly for his work at the Chatsworth estate including his famous glass greenhouses.<sup>42</sup> After having met with Cole, who had told Paxton that a new design would be considered if it had the guarantee of contractors, he visited the proposed Hyde Park site to grasp an idea of any way a building could be put there for the Exhibition. As a result, one of the most significant contributions to the Exhibition project came on 11 June. While presiding at a Midland Railways disciplinary, Paxton drew his first sketch for a

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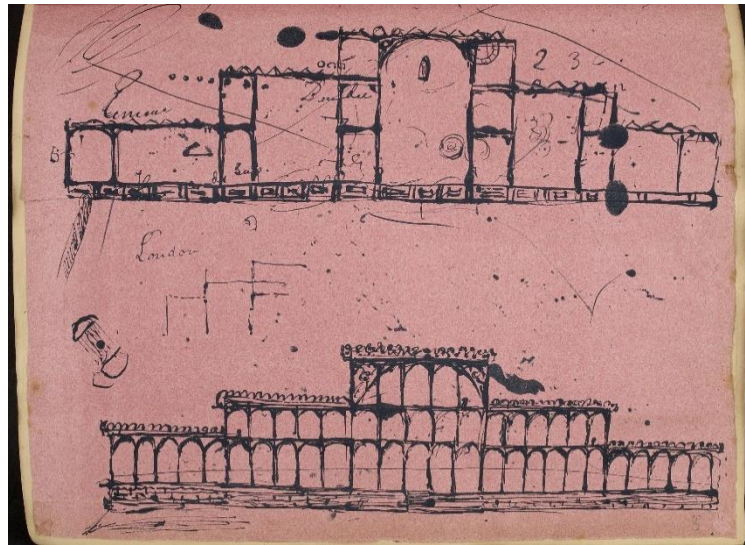
<sup>41</sup> Prince Albert referenced in John McKean, *Crystal Palace*, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Kate Colquhoun, *A Thing in Disguise: The Visionary Life of Joseph Paxton*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012) p. 5.



proposed building. The famous drawing (see figure 5), while being just an initial rough plan, remains to be one of the most important moves in the preparations for the event and the most recognisable feature of the Exhibition.<sup>43</sup>

Figure 5: British Library - Plan of the Crystal Palace



British Library, (BL), MS 35255, Western Manuscripts, Plan of the Crystal Palace, 1850, <<https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-great-exhibition>>

Following on from his initial sketch, work was put in by members of the Commission, notably Robert Stephenson (1803-1859) and Russell to convince other members such as Peel and Prince Albert to accept the design. Peel agreed, ‘recognizing that Paxton’s scheme is directly enabled by his own repeal of the tax on glass a few years earlier.’<sup>44</sup> With plans to have this building entirely made up of glass, it would have been simply impossible and far too expensive just a few years previously had Peel not repealed the tax on such material. However, Paxton was still unable to get the support of the Building Committee to agree to his design and the Committee

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<sup>43</sup> British Library, (BL), MS 35255, Western Manuscripts, Plan of the Crystal Palace, 1850, <<https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-great-exhibition>> [Accessed 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021].

<sup>44</sup> John McKean, *Crystal Palace*, p. 19.

were still going with their original plan that had been hugely unpopular with the public. This was, however, until 4 July when it was reported that, 'shocked by Peel's death [who had died following injuries from being thrown from his horse], the House of Commons finally turns; it supports the exhibition and approves the use of Hyde Park.'<sup>45</sup> It was Peel's death that had the most profound impact on the project – until this tragic event, the government had been unwilling to alter their plans to reject the use of Hyde Park and the Royal Commission were at a serious risk of having to, once again, think about disbanding the project.

Once the government had taken this turn after Peel's death, the plan for Paxton's building was published in the *Illustrated London News* and was widely accepted by the public. The Committee had still been unwilling to accept the design, however, and were hoping they could still go with their idea of a brick building designed by Brunel. Thus, after a few weeks of discussion they came to the realisation that Paxton's building was far more practical (it could be built in the timeframe they had, unlike the Committee's building made of bricks, and Paxton's glass building would be much easier to build and remove) and it was eventually given the go ahead. Construction began in the summer and proved to be incredibly beneficial for labourers. With just thirty-nine men employed in September, this number gradually built and by December there were over 2000, highlighting the employment opportunities this building and the Exhibition project in general provided the people of Britain.<sup>46</sup> The building grew in popularity as the construction developed further and

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<sup>45</sup> John McKean, *Crystal Palace*, p. 19.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

in November 1850, *Punch* famously referred to it as the 'Crystal Palace', the name it would go on to be recognised by from that point onwards.<sup>47</sup>

One of the first and most significant factors of discussion once the design and construction of the building was underway was the division of space within the Palace. This would be crucial in providing Britain the chance to display both their inventions, and also those of the Empire. Figure 6 shows the planned divisions for the Exhibition, and it is the manner in which this was carried out that emphasises the way in which the event (while claiming to be one for all nations of industry) was going to be a showcase of British achievements.<sup>48</sup> The building in which the Exhibition was to be housed was to be 800,000 square feet and it was the task of the Royal Commission to divide this between Britain and the Empire, along with participating countries. These included France, Germany, and the United States. Tellingly, Britain and the Empire secured 400,000 square feet in which to display their goods.<sup>49</sup> John Findling comments on this allocation of space, observing that 'half the space was given over to Great Britain and its colonies; half was allocated to foreign countries for their exhibits.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Terry W. Strieter, *Nineteenth-Century European Art: A Topical Dictionary*, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 1999) p. 50.

<sup>48</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/3/19, Allotment of Space, (1850), < <https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers/m-24> > [Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2021].

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> John E. Findling, *Events that Changed Great Britain Since 1689*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002) p. 97.

Figure 6: Royal Collection Trust - Allotment of Space

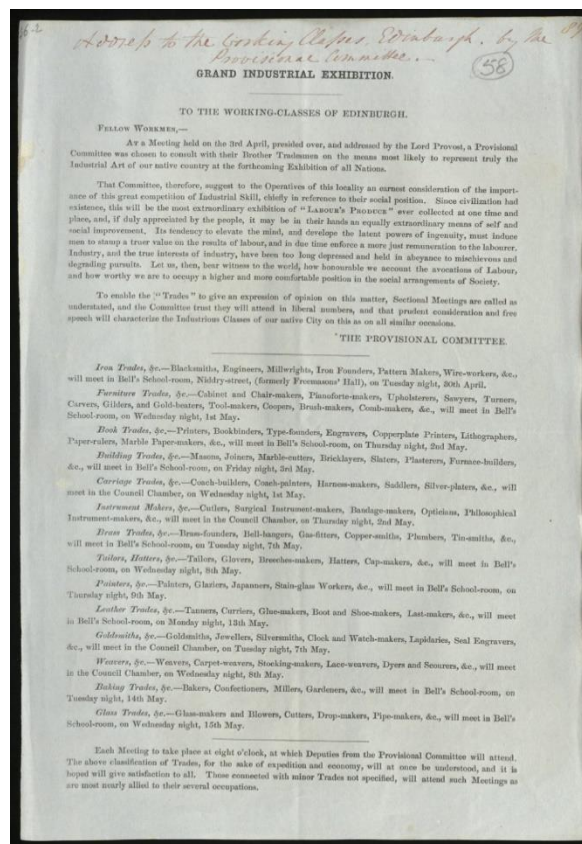
Allotment of Space to different countries		26
Total space for purposes of Exhibition		800,000
Great Britain and Colonial Possessions	400,000	
Foreign Nations		
France	100,000	
Germany	100,000	
Prussia 60,000		
Austria 30,000		
P. Germany 10,000		
Belgium	30,000	
Holland	10,000	
Denmark	5,000	
Norway & Sweden	5,000	
Russia	10,000	
Turkey	10,000	
Greece	2,000	
Egypt	3,000	
Italy	15,000	
Sardinia 5,000		
Venice 5,000		
Rome 2,000		
Naples 5,000		
Switzerland	5,000	
Spain	5,000	
Portugal	2,000	
Morocco	1,000	
Tunis	1,000	
United States	80,000	
Mexico	2,000	
Central America	2,000	
Brazil	5,000	
Western Africa	1,000	
Arabia	1,000	
Persia	7,000	
China	5,000	
Total, Foreign Countries	401,000	

Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/3/19, Allotment of Space, (1850),  
<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-Albert's-papers/m-24>

Furthermore, some of Britain's main economic rivals at the time were given the joint second largest amount of space. France, and Germany received 100,000 square feet of space each, which suggests that both of these countries in particular would have a vast amount to put on display, and that this would be a good opportunity to see what Britain's rivals were producing. This division of space will be explored in more detail in chapter three by focusing on materials such as a detailed floor plan which provides insight into how the individual countries used their space to display their items. As well as discussing the rest of the world at this Exhibition, another

important focus for Prince Albert in particular was the involvement of the working classes. The Commission's intentions in relation to the working classes began to truly manifest just one month after Prince Albert's key speech at the Mansion House (see figure 7 for an insight into the provisions being put into place to allow the working class some involvement in the exhibition).<sup>51</sup>

Figure 7: Royal Collection Trust - Arrangements for the Working Classes



Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/3/58, Arrangements for the “working classes”, (1850), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-albert's-papers/ap-3>>

It is in this image that fourteen different ‘trades’ are listed, each with a day that these particular trades will attend. This list was created ‘to enable the “trades” to give an

<sup>51</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/3/58, Arrangements for the “working classes”, (1850), < <https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers/ap-3> > [Accessed 27th August 2021].

expression of opinion on this matter', thus allowing them to make their voice heard regarding the Exhibition and their planned attendance at it.<sup>52</sup> It was crucial that the workers of these vital trades were so actively involved in the project, as they made up a large majority of the manufacturing sector in Britain. Further to this, throughout the year, the Commission made an increasing effort to ensure that the working classes would be able to attend the Exhibition. For example, in September of 1850, several meetings were held between members of the Commission with railway companies to guarantee that they could be used as a means of bringing working class people from out in the country to London for this event – something which would be a huge contributing factor to its success.<sup>53</sup>

Not only did Prince Albert want the workers actively involved in this way with the Exhibition, he also wanted the event itself to actively benefit the lower classes. One way he did this was through his work on model houses. As president of the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes, the need to improve living conditions was at the forefront of Prince Albert's mind when becoming involved in the Exhibition project.<sup>54</sup> Two model houses would hold four families and they were to be much better suited for the working classes at the time than previous living conditions, for example the numerous slums to be found in major cities. These model houses

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<sup>52</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/3/58, Arrangements for the "working classes".

<sup>53</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/4/128, 17 Sept 1850 Railway Directors Meeting Minutes, (1850), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers/-989>> [Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2021].

<sup>54</sup> John Tallis, *Tallis' History and Description of the Crystal Palace and the Exhibition of the World's Industry in 1851*, vol2-3, (London: John Tallis and Company, 1851) p. 109.

were to be built from hollow brick, and they would be significantly more economical to build at the time, also making them more affordable to live in (see figure 8).<sup>55</sup>

Figure 8: N/A, Model Houses for the Labouring Classes



N/A, *The Crystal Palace and Its Contents*, (London: W.M Clark, 1851) p. 81.

With the plan to have these on display outside Hyde Park during the months the Exhibition was to be open, Prince Albert's model houses would provide an example of the work that could be done to help improve the living conditions of these classes. It was after seeing these houses that work would potentially be started after the event to make these a reality for the majority of the poor living in Britain.

It was, however, not just Prince Albert that actively sought to help the working class people at the time of planning the Exhibition. As a means to make sure their participation would be given thorough attention, the Central Working Class Committee was formed. This committee 'included well-known writers Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray [1811-1863], Henry Cole [a key member of the Royal Commission and the planning of the event], the philanthropist Lord

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<sup>55</sup> N/A, *The Crystal Palace and Its Contents*, (London: W.M Clark, 1851) p. 81.

Shaftesbury [1801-1885], two preachers, four publishers, an industrialist, an editor and a few liberal politicians.<sup>56</sup> It was hoped that with this committee, attention would be brought to the many organisers of the event of the need to improve the living conditions of this class. The fact that Henry Cole would so willingly involve himself in a committee such as this demonstrated the fact that Prince Albert was not the only one planning the Great Exhibition that wanted to secure working class participation, and generally try to improve their situation in this period.

This was a crucial move when planning the trade fair as in '1838 several working men's organisations co-operated to produce a People's Charter demanding further reforms.'<sup>57</sup> This group, who became known as the Chartists, grew in number and began to protest for change over the following decade. For an Exhibition on the scale the Commission were hoping for, it was important for members of this working class committee to make sure that labourers were involved as much as possible in order to avoid further riots from the Chartists that had taken place all over the country throughout the 1840s and make their needs heard. However, as discussed in further detail in chapter three, this committee was unable to get the recognition from most members of the Royal Commission and were forced to disband. Prince Albert, 'who was personally keen that the committee should be effective, told Cole that they could say that they had the Commission's blessing and sanction.'<sup>58</sup> Although they chose not to proceed, this initial formation demonstrated the fact that there were still several individuals at the time who would seek ways to get the working classes involved and aim to improve both their living and working conditions.

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 62.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.



The remainder of 1850, October through to December, provided the Commission with the chance to cement their aims and intentions for the exposition and also allowed them to put in the work to ensure that it would be a success. With key decisions such as the building, allocation of space and those involved already largely underway, it was now time to discuss the finer details. One of the ways this was achieved was by hosting another banquet. This one was held in York in October of that year with the aim of gaining wider support for the Exhibition. In his address at the banquet, Prince Albert stated that 'from abroad, also, all the accounts which we receive lead us to expect that the works which are to be sent will be numerous and of a superior character', thus pointing out to those present the scale and potential success of the event.<sup>59</sup> As the world's first international trade fair on this scale, there was undoubtedly some scepticism as to whether it would be commercially beneficial, and in the remaining months until it opened the Commission worked hard to justify it. At the end of the speech, Prince Albert acknowledged the difficulties that the Commission were having and would still have to face but attempted to alleviate their fears, stating that 'having confidence in you and in our own zeal and perseverance, at least, we require only your confidence in us to make us contemplate the result without any apprehension.'<sup>60</sup> By April 1851, most challenges had been overcome, for example: the issue of securing land and the building that would house the Exhibition (including the lengthy process for the design competition, later abandoned for Joseph Paxton's 'Crystal Palace'), receiving the endorsement and participation of local committees and manufacturers and repairing their public image after it was

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<sup>59</sup> John Murray, *The Principal Speeches and Addresses of His Royal Highness The Prince Consort*, (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1962) p. 64.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

tarnished as a result of the troubles surrounding the Munday contract. Therefore, with less than a month to go until the event would open, the Commission then began to put in preparations for the opening ceremony that would take place at the beginning of May that year.

Chapter two has examined in detail the need of government backing for a Royal Commission and highlighted the significance of the process leading up to its formation by Queen Victoria in January 1850, along with the preparations for the event itself. This chapter has critically analysed key mistakes that were made under the Society of Arts, such as the Munday contract, and the measures to undo these once the Commission had been formed – which also provided them the opportunity to reorganise their aims and the way they would work towards their goal of an 1851 trade fair. This contributed towards the overall aim of this project to assess the intentions of the Commission and their individual members with particular emphasis on Prince Albert. This chapter and its emphasis on Prince Albert's goals of benefiting the working classes (with particular reference to his Model Houses) has demonstrated that this event's intention, from his perspective, was to benefit large groups of people rather than individuals. This has been highlighted by the correspondence between Prince Albert and other members of the Commission which has demonstrated the considerable work that went into the planning. With the vital preparations for the exposition covered in this chapter, chapter three will analyse the impacts the Exhibition had in the months it was open (May-October 1851) with a particular focus on the working classes, trade and commerce, and the British Empire.

## **Chapter Three: The Impacts of the Exhibition on the working classes and the British Empire**

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations opened its doors on May 1, 1851. When discussing the Crystal Palace itself, Michael Leapman notes that ‘in recognition of the year in question, Paxton had made [the building] exactly 1,851 feet long.’<sup>1</sup> The visible features of the palace would prove to be part of the attraction over the coming months. Figure 9 highlights the sheer size of the Palace along with the arched transept – one of the most defining physical features of the building.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 9: *Victoria & Albert Museum, ‘The Transept from the Grand Entrance, Souvenir of the Great Exhibition’*



J. McNeven, ‘The Transept from the Grand Entrance, Souvenir of the Great Exhibition’, [Colour lithograph], *Victoria and Albert Museum*, (1851), <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O85637/the-transept-from-the-grand-print-mcneven-j/>>

<sup>1</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> J. McNeven, ‘The Transept from the Grand Entrance, Souvenir of the Great Exhibition’, [Colour lithograph], *Victoria and Albert Museum*, (1851) <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O85637/the-transept-from-the-grand-print-mcneven-j/>> [Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2021].

In the run up to the event, individuals such as Charles Sibthorpe (1783-1855) were sceptical about the chosen location for this huge glass palace – fearing it would not only damage Hyde Park’s many trees but also attract unwelcome crowds to the relatively peaceful setting. These fears can be seen to be discussed in the satirical magazine *Punch*, (see figure 10) which referred to Prince Albert chopping down trees for the Exhibition, pleading with him to ‘spare those trees, mind where you fix your show.’<sup>3</sup>

Figure 10: *Punch*, *Albert Spare Those Trees*



*Punch*, *Albert Spare Those Trees*, v19, (London: Punch Publications Limited, 1850) p10

Sibthorpe, a well-known political opponent of Prince Albert’s, had made his views on the Exhibition public knowledge throughout the planning process in order to try to

<sup>3</sup> *Punch*, *Albert: Spare Those Trees*, v19, (London: Punch Publications Limited, 1850) p. 10.

derail the project. It can be seen that, 'in numerous speeches in the Commons, Sibthorpe raged against the Exhibition. His topics included protesting against the felling of any trees on the proposed site in Hyde Park.'<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, to ensure that the Palace neither offended or damaged its surroundings, the famous arched transept would solve such problems as 'three large elm trees were left to grow inside the building and the arched transept was built to cover them.'<sup>5</sup>

Finally, after a month of questions regarding what exactly would take place at the opening ceremony on May 1, the palace was opened by Queen Victoria. Those in attendance included a crowd of her subjects, members of the Royal Commission and their families, along with notable figures from the government. Initially, the Commission had planned for this to be a private event, an idea which had been very unpopular with many people. The *Northern Star* (a paper set up by the Chartists, an organisation that had a long-standing issue with the fact that the masses were often being excluded from events such as the theatre, and the Exhibition would not have been an exception) had reported on this issue on 19 April that year. In this, they stated that

the exclusion of the public, as proposed by the commissioners, will not only be an insult to the people of this country, but to the Sovereign herself, and an incident calculated to lower both her and the nation in the eyes of the world.<sup>6</sup>

As an event that would not have been possible without the contribution of the British people, it hinted at the fact that Queen Victoria herself may not have felt safe around

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<sup>4</sup> Chris Hopkins, 'Victorian Modernity? Writing the Great Exhibition' in Gary Day (ed), *Varieties of Victorianism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998) p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> C. H. Gibbs-Smith, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Commemorative Album*, (Ipswich: W.S Cowell Ltd, 1964) p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> 'Opening of the Great Exhibition by the Queen', *Northern Star*, 19 April 1851, p. 4

the general public. The report went on to comment that ‘whatever may be the differences of opinion in this country as to the operation of our political system, we believe that in no class of party does there exist any other feeling than that of high respect for the lady who now fills the throne of these realms.’<sup>7</sup> Having faced seven assassination attempts during her reign up to the Exhibition, it was clear why the Commission did not feel safe having the Queen so easily accessible to the public, but it did pose the question as to whether she trusted the people. Not only had she faced assassination attempts, in 1848 following a working class revolution, Queen Victoria was forced to flee to the Isle of Wight amid fears of her safety once again suggesting she perhaps did not feel safe around the people. This fear was reflected in her journal; on April 10, she wrote that she was ‘anxious for news from London.’<sup>8</sup> However, as a result of the growing public outcry, ‘the Prince gave in and arranged for an announcement in the national press that Her Majesty had graciously decided to permit the public to be present at the Opening Ceremony.’<sup>9</sup> With this announcement, the anticipation mounted and there was a surge of visitors to London. Towards the end of April, the city was ‘swelled by between 50,000 and 100,000 foreigners and out-of-towners who had arrived in the capital by train and steamer.’<sup>10</sup> This surge of foreigners was not only a positive reflection on the Exhibition’s popularity but would have also contributed significantly to London’s economy. The decision to have Queen Victoria at the opening ceremony was a monumental one. The opening ceremony was accessible to local dignitaries,

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Opening of the Great Exhibition by the Queen’, *Northern Star*, 19 April 1851, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Queen Victoria, *Queen Victoria’s Journals*, 10 April 1848, <[Queen Victoria’s Journals - Journal Entry \(queenvictoriasjournals.org\)](http://queenvictoriasjournals.org)> [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021].

<sup>9</sup> Audrey Short, ‘Workers Under Glass in 1851’, p. 195.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 113-114.

members of government, the Royal Commission and 25,000 season-ticket-holders.<sup>11</sup> These tickets cost three guineas and allowed the holder exclusive access on the first day, and entry for the remainder of it being open.<sup>12</sup> Figure 11 helps provide an insight into the opening ceremony by the Queen.<sup>13</sup> This coloured lithograph helps to highlight the fact that not only was this ceremony accessible to all, it also demonstrates that this was an incredibly popular event with the public, who can be seen throughout the Crystal Palace attempting to glimpse their Queen officially opening the Exhibition.

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<sup>11</sup> Hermione Hobhouse, *The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition: Science, Art and Productive Industry: The History of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851*, (London: A&C Black, 2002) p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> Pamela Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003) p. 153.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene-Louis Lami, 'The Opening of the Great Exhibition 1851', [Watercolour], Royal Collection Trust, (1851), <<https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/trails/the-art-of-monarchy/the-opening-of-the-great-exhibition-1851>> [Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2021].

Figure 11: Eugene-Louis Lami, The Opening of the Great Exhibition 1851



Eugene-Louis Lami, 'The Opening of the Great Exhibition 1851', [Watercolour], Royal Collection Trust, (1851), <<https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/trails/the-art-of-monarchy/the-opening-of-the-great-exhibition-1851>>

### **The Working Classes at the Great Exhibition**

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was intended to appeal to people from all spheres of society, both in Britain and abroad. While it had been Prince Albert's goal from the beginning to involve the working classes in this event, it still proved quite difficult to get everyone enthused. This was reflected by the fact that some working class groups were actually limited by the Royal Commission in terms of how much they could get involved with the project. Set up in early 1850, The Central Working-Class Committee's goal was to 'enable and encourage members of the working class to attend the Exhibition, organise and monitor cheap accommodation, and facilitate orientation.'<sup>14</sup> The Royal Commission refused to

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathon Shears, *The Great Exhibition 1851*, p. 144.



recognise their importance, however, and efforts to get the working class interested in the event were hindered.

The fact that members of the Commission were so unwilling to recognise the Central Working-Class Committee, therefore, began to make certain members of the working class feel as though their presence was not desired at the Exhibition and pamphlets began to be distributed that spoke specifically of the disadvantages of the event.

Audrey Short touches on one of these examples, stating that, regarding the Exhibition, '*Tracts for the Million* warned that only the bearded foreigner would benefit'.<sup>15</sup> Not only had these works been released to show the disadvantages of it, they also added to the confusion of how to include the working class. As many workers would be travelling from the countryside to visit the Exhibition, it was crucial that plans were put in place to accommodate this. Failure to do so could create chaos and discourage potential working class visitors.

However, many looked forward to the event as a symbolic shift in how the class was perceived in society at the time. It was this, argues Short, that 'would draw together classes who were always distinct and sometimes hostile to each other, since it would show the capitalist the importance of the mechanic and the artisan.'<sup>16</sup> For many of the manufacturing cities that had put forward items for display, the working class labourers were very much at the heart of this.

Initially, the event was not as popular as the Commission had hoped. During the first three weeks of it being open, the Crystal Palace was only seeing a daily intake of around 10,000 people and by the end of the month not even 200,000 people had

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<sup>15</sup> Audrey Short, 'Workers Under Glass in 1851', p. 195.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

visited.<sup>17</sup> This slow attendance could be a result of the high admission prices. For the first two days, it cost £1 per day, and for the following three weeks it was five shillings.<sup>18</sup> It was these prices that allowed for those of the upper classes to attend the event but kept the working class, who could not afford such prices, at a distance. In 1851, the average yearly wage was £29.04 for agricultural labourers, while it was £44.83 for those labourers that did not work specifically on farms.<sup>19</sup> This therefore highlights how difficult it would have been for the workers to spend £1 on a ticket to such an event as it was equivalent to a large portion of their salary.

In the months leading up to the Exhibition, the Royal Commission had made clear that education of the lower orders was one motivation behind the event and so 'attempted to facilitate learning by offering entry to the Great Exhibition for a shilling on certain days.'<sup>20</sup> This was one of the most significant contributing factors to the overall success of the Exhibition, and this educational aspect not only attracted people from all over the country but allowed the working classes the opportunity to see and learn about events and objects that normally only the upper classes would be permitted to see. From 23 May onwards, admission was reduced to one shilling on Mondays to Thursdays and Sundays, two shillings six pence on Fridays and remained at five shillings on Saturdays.

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 191.

<sup>18</sup> N/A, *The International Exhibition of 1862: The Illustrated Catalogue of the Industrial Department*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Peter H. Lindert, "Unequal Living Standards", in Roderick Floud et al (ed by), *The Economic History of Britain Since 1700*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 370.

<sup>20</sup> Kylie Message and Ewan Johnston, 'The World within the City: The Great Exhibition: Race, Class and Social Reform' in Jeffrey A. Auerbach (ed by), *Britain, the Empire and the World at the Great Exhibition*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016) p. 37.

The introduction of shilling days resulted in an influx of visitors, and it was here that larger groups of labourers began to gain attention, particularly from the media. Newspaper reporters were tasked with the challenge of writing daily reports of activity in the Palace, and on 13 June, a report appeared in *The Times* specifically focusing on such groups of labourers. In this report, those who were unable to attend were informed that ‘a remarkable feature of yesterday’s experience in the interior of the Exhibition was the appearance there at an early hour, of nearly 800 agricultural labourers and country folk...’<sup>21</sup> This group was ‘one of the first – and biggest – organised visits of labourers.’<sup>22</sup> It was with these organised visits by labourers that the Commissioners began to realise the importance of working-class attendance at the event.

Arriving in these groups meant that the Exhibition was providing these labourers with a better understanding of the manufacturing throughout the country, and it would highlight to them what rapid industrial development could ultimately look like and achieve. At the time, a department store manager William Whiteley (1831-1907) had visited the exhibition and was ‘so inspired by the glass building that he began to dream of large retail stores, “universal providers’ shops”, with plate glass fronts.’<sup>23</sup>

It was this event that had ‘created a space in which the representatives of the different English social classes could meet’, and in the end provided an opportunity in which the classes had a reason to mix together, to jointly marvel at the

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<sup>21</sup> ‘The Great Exhibition’, *The Times*, 13 June 1851, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Gurney, ‘An Appropriated Space: The Great Exhibition, the Crystal Palace and The Working Class’ in Louise Purbrick, (ed by), *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 116.

manufacturing of the world.<sup>24</sup> However, some were wary of the working class presence. As mentioned in chapter two, a working class movement named the Chartists had aimed to gain both political rights and influence for those in the labouring classes. They were most active during the years 1838 to 1848 with those in the upper classes growing fearful of what they viewed as ‘working class mobs’ and this alarm was still felt at the start of the Exhibition. This fear was reflected in the way the Home Office planned how the Exhibition would be organised. In a letter to Colonel Grey (1804-1870), Lord Granville (1815-1891) informed him of a letter from the Home Office with a report from the Police Commissioners requesting the need for ‘1000 men to the Metropolitan Police and the Home Office calls upon us for the means of organising this additional force at 500.’<sup>25</sup> The need for such a large police presence at the Exhibition reflected the concerns by many at the time that the working class would not behave in a respectable or lawful manner, and would, in fact, cause some form of disruption or chaos at the event. The feelings towards workers were also represented in John Leech’s illustration featured in the famous *Punch* magazine, the ‘Pound and the Shilling’ seen in figure 12.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Adina Ciugureanu, ‘Mediating between the Mass and the Individual: Punch caricatures of the Great Exhibition of All Nations’, *Journal of Theory and Criticism*, vol18, pp99-117, (2010), <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/267933515.pdf>> [Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021] p. 99.

<sup>25</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/5/54, 19 Nov 1850 Lord Granville to Colonel Grey, (1850), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-Albert's-papers/-948>> [Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021].

<sup>26</sup> Punch, *The Pound and the Shilling: Whoever Thought of Meeting You Here?*, Punch, London, (1851) <<https://Punch.photoshelter.com/image/I0000z8QaIOLG1fE>> [Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021].

Figure 12: Punch, *The Pound and the Shilling: Whoever Thought of Meeting You Here?*



THE POUND AND THE SHILLING.

“Whoever Thought of Meeting You Here?”

Punch, *The Pound and the Shilling: Whoever Thought of Meeting You Here?*, *Punch*, London, (1851)  
<<https://Punch.photoshelter.com/image/I0000z8QaIOLG1fE>>

The fact that *Punch* felt this mixing of the classes was shocking enough to merit an illustration depicting it is telling of attitudes at the time, and while at first this illustration seems to be a celebration of the mingling of both the upper and working classes, it must be remembered that especially at the beginning of the Exhibition, this magazine was very critical of the event. Therefore, it must be concluded that this cartoon is a pictorial representation of societal fears around classes mixing in this way. Adina Ciugureanu’s analysis of this illustration is essential when understanding how it demonstrated the fear experienced by the upper classes at the time.

Ciugureanu highlights that ‘there is the image of the lady, in the extreme right corner, who betrays fear and suspicion. Her counterpart in the cartoon is represented by the

funny caricature of a possibly drunken man.<sup>27</sup> So, while the Exhibition was supposed to be a celebration of the unification of the classes in the country, this ideal was largely 'counterbalanced by the two marginal individuals who reveal the real feelings of the two crowds: fear and suspicion on one side, cynicism and disbelief on the other.'<sup>28</sup>

It was the hope of Prince Albert in particular to use this event to benefit those in the working class, but it would not be that easy to eradicate the prejudices demonstrated above. Prince Albert 'saw that improvement of opportunities for education, health and working conditions would defuse social unrest' and the Exhibition was a chance for him and other members of the Commission to put in the vital work of improving both conditions and relations with the lower orders.<sup>29</sup> It was essential at the time of the Exhibition to try to improve workers' conditions as 'they remembered all too clearly what rebellion had done only three generations before to decimate the nobility in France.'<sup>30</sup> As mentioned earlier, Britain had faced Chartist rebellions only a couple of years before the Exhibition took place, and Queen Victoria and Prince Albert did not want to risk a revolution of disaffected labourers, as had happened on the continent. This, then, was a clear motive behind Prince Albert's insistence on improving the lives of the working classes.

Soon after the Exhibition had opened and Shilling Days had been introduced, it became clear that the working people were acting respectfully, something that was a shock to the middle and upper classes who had expected rough behaviour. As a

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<sup>27</sup> Adina Ciugureanu, 'Mediating between the Mass and the Individual', p. 107.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>29</sup> Harvey Eugene Lehman, *Lives of England's Monarchs: The Story of Our American English Heritage*, (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2005) p. 398.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 398.

result, 'many upper-class "pound" visitors chose to revisit on "shilling days" to meet the humbler visitors.'<sup>31</sup> As stated by Short, 'if officials were worried about working-class loyalty, the Queen had no such qualms. She was there on shilling days with Prince Albert and throughout the summer she brought the children.'<sup>32</sup> On 24 June, just a little over a month since the Exhibition had opened, Queen Victoria took a tour of the Crystal Palace to look, once again, at all of the items put on display. This was 'a key moment in relations between the monarchy and the people.'<sup>33</sup> The fact that, despite several assassination attempts and Chartist unrest over the previous decade, the Queen herself was so willing to walk amongst the people reflected positively on the general public. Here, they could see that Queen Victoria trusted the people and felt safe around them, and as a result people in the upper classes began to feel more comfortable with the idea of social mixing.

It was with this Exhibition, notes Catherine Bernard, that 'hundreds of workers moved from rural areas to big cities in the hopes of finding factory work. As a result, the social, economic and cultural landscape of the entire country changed.'<sup>34</sup> According to Amy J. Lloyd, 'during the nineteenth century, there was a high rate of internal migration in Britain.'<sup>35</sup> This was a time when the working classes began to move from the countryside in order to try and find better employment opportunities in the bigger cities. During the construction of the Exhibition, 2000 men had been

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<sup>31</sup> Chloe Jeffries, 'The Great Exhibition', *Historian*, no 82, pp12-17, (2004), <<https://search-proquest-com.glos.idm.oclc.org/docview/274947491?accountid=27114>> [Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> February 2021] p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Audrey Short, 'Workers Under Glass in 1851', p. 201.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 199.

<sup>34</sup> Catherine Bernard, *The British Empire and Queen Victoria in World History*, (USA: Enslow Publishers Inc, 2003) p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Amy J. Lloyd, *Emigration, Immigration and Migration in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, (Detroit: Gale, 2007) p. 1.

employed to work on it, and people began to view the Exhibition as an opportunity to seek different employment.<sup>36</sup> As a result, those in the working classes began to uproot their families so that they could head to the cities, and 'London was the most popular destination, gaining 1.25 million migrants between 1841 and 1911.'<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, by visiting the Exhibition, 'workers could improve their own skills and contribute to the excellence of national industry.'<sup>38</sup> By seeing the ways that industry was put on display by both their country and the rest of the world, manufacturers were getting a much better insight into the ways in which they could advance their skills from this point onwards. It therefore became 'a site for imagining the trajectory of progress into the future.'<sup>39</sup>

## **The Railways**

Improving transport links are a demonstrable positive outcome of the Exhibition. It was from the end of May 1851 that railway travel became an essential means for attendance at the event. Leapman discusses the significance of the railways, observing 'it soon became apparent, though, that there was an enormous demand for special trains as the entry fee went down to a shilling in the last week of May.'<sup>40</sup> However, with the introduction of the shilling days, the need for travel to London had intensified and the ever-expanding railway proved to be the most effective means of getting them there. Figure 13 highlights the fact that railway companies very quickly

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<sup>36</sup> Ed King, "The Crystal Palace and Great Exhibition of 1851", *British Library Newspapers*, (Detroit: Gale, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Amy J. Lloyd, *Emigration, Immigration and Migration in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, (Detroit: Gale, 2007) p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Michele M. Strong, *Education, Travel and the Civilisation of the Victorian Working Classes*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 7.



realised that this was one of the best ways of getting to London.<sup>41</sup> By providing affordable trains it would make the overall price of attending (with the admission ticket and cost of travel) significantly lower, allowing more people to make use of it. These cheaper tickets provided people 'with the option of Returning by any of the Excursion Trains, on any day not exceeding fifteen days from the date of the Ticket.'<sup>42</sup> This, therefore, gave people the opportunity to stay in London for at least two weeks and explore the city.

Ultimately, people began to see a visit to the Exhibition as a holiday – men began to take their wives and children as an opportunity to see their capital city. As Susan Barton states, 'saving clubs, large venues, major national and international events and also package holidays can be demonstrated to have their roots arranged [at the Exhibition].'<sup>43</sup> In order to garner interest in the event, these package deals were introduced to give the working classes in particular the best deals so that they could make the most of seeing the Crystal Palace and exploring London. Thus, the increase of tourists into London would have had a huge benefit on London's economy as this population would be spending money on accommodation, travel, food, and entertainment.

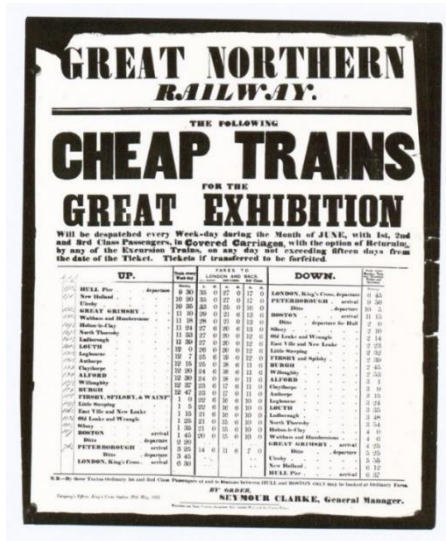
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<sup>41</sup> The National Archives (TNA), TNA: RAIL: 981/777, Poster for cheap trains to the Great Exhibition, 1851  
<[http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/victorians/05\\_great\\_exhibition.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/victorians/05_great_exhibition.htm)>  
[Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2021].

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Susan Barton, *Working-Class Organisations and Popular Tourism 1840-1970*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) p. 67.

Figure 13: The National Archives – Poster for cheap trains to the Great Exhibition



The National Archives (NA), TNA: RAIL: 981/777, Poster for cheap trains to the Great Exhibition, (1851) <[http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/victorians/05\\_great\\_exhibition.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/victorians/05_great_exhibition.htm)>

This expansion of the railways could be seen all over the country, and many began to take advantage of the easy and popular means of travel as a way of getting to London during this time. J. R. C. Yglesias states that ‘one very enterprising man, Mr Thomas Cook, had been at work months before the Exhibition opened in May 1851.’<sup>44</sup> Thomas Cook had been known during the 1840s for organising leisure trips, which he started in the summer of 1841, after organising a one-day excursion trip from Leicester to Loughborough for 500 people. In 1845, the country saw the birth of Thomas Cook & Son, and Cook began to organise trips all over the country. By May 1851, the company was a popular travel choice. The impact Cook’s excursions had on the Exhibition, therefore, cannot be ignored. These excursions ‘often included board and lodging in London and his firm sold 165,000 excursion tickets for the Exhibition.’<sup>45</sup> This was a huge number of people to transport from various parts of the

<sup>44</sup> J. R. C. Yglesias, *London Life and the Great Exhibition 1851*, (London: Longman Group Limited, 1964) p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

country to attend the Exhibition and highlights the significance of the railways' contribution towards the overall attendance of the Exhibition.

Figure 14 shows a poster from the time of the Exhibition advertising these trains from York to London for the Exhibition, with three different fares – 15 shillings for first class, 10 for second, 5 for third.<sup>46</sup> The three different prices meant that it was affordable across the classes, and inevitably would draw in different crowds. Within this poster it is advertised that 'first and second class tickets are available for returning any day' while the Exhibition was taking place, with third class tickets being returnable within 14 days.<sup>47</sup>

Figure 14: The National Archives – Poster advertising train journeys to the Great Exhibition 1851



The National Archives, *Poster advertising train journeys to the Great Exhibition 1851*, (1851), <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/pdf/happy.pdf>>

<sup>46</sup> The National Archives, (TNA) *Poster advertising train journeys to the Great Exhibition 1851*, (1851), <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/pdf/happy.pdf>> [Accessed 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021].

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

The use of the railways in the early 1850s was incredibly significant for demonstrating the mass development of railway transport happening in Britain and by extension, what would spread through the Empire. Jeremy Black argues that the Exhibition was a 'tribute to manufacturing skill and prowess, as was the evolution from the stationary to the locomotive steam-engine and the consequent railway revolution.'<sup>48</sup> It was this world fair in 1851, therefore, that helped to highlight to the rest of the world how rapidly Britain was modernising the country. As Jeffrey Auerbach states, 'there were only 3036 miles of railway track in 1846, less than half the amount that existed only five years later at the time of the Exhibition', highlighting the speed at which the railways were developing.<sup>49</sup>

### **The British Empire and the rest of the world**

Auerbach focuses further on the importance of the Exhibition in regard to the Empire stating that 'it promoted the Empire by introducing British men and women – producers and consumers, and most importantly future supporters and defenders of the idea of the empire – to the diversity and fascinating otherness of imperial territories.'<sup>50</sup> The Exhibition provided Britain and the Empire a chance to spread their Victorian ideals to the countries of the world from the central hub of their activity, London.

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<sup>48</sup> Jeremy Black, *A History of the British Isles*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996). p. 188.

<sup>49</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, 'The Great Exhibition and Historical Memory', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol 6, no 1, (2001), pp89-112, <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/250227599\\_The\\_Great\\_Exhibition\\_and\\_Historical\\_Memory](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/250227599_The_Great_Exhibition_and_Historical_Memory)> [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> May 2021] p. 102.

<sup>50</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, 'Empire Under Glass: The British Empire and the Crystal Palace 1851-1911' in John McAleer and John M. MacKenzie, *Exhibiting the Empire: Cultures of Display and the British Empire*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015) p. 116.

The Great Exhibition was providing many, notably the working class, the opportunity to see a variety of displays that would normally be inaccessible to them. For those in the country that had never left Britain before, this was a way for them to see the greatness of the British Empire, along with the rest of the world on their doorstep. Organised by those that hoped to have this event as a means of propaganda for the Empire, those visiting were given the chance to look at and educate themselves on the many strengths of Britain in particular.

Figure 15 helps give an insight into the way the Palace was divided by country and specific sectors at the Exhibition, and the way in which it was presented to the public.<sup>51</sup> As seen in this figure, the Palace was split into two parts – ‘the one being awarded to Foreign countries, and the other to British colonies and the United Kingdom.’<sup>52</sup> What is so interesting about the way in which these displays were divided was how differently Britain and the Empire were presented in comparison to the rest of the world. Britain and the Empire’s displays, demonstrated in figure 15, are listed under headings such as ‘carriages, mineral manufacturers, marine engines’, a clear display of their strengths in each individual sector.<sup>53</sup> In presenting itself in such a way, the public were being educated in regard to British success – here, they would see the best of the country that dominated half of this event.

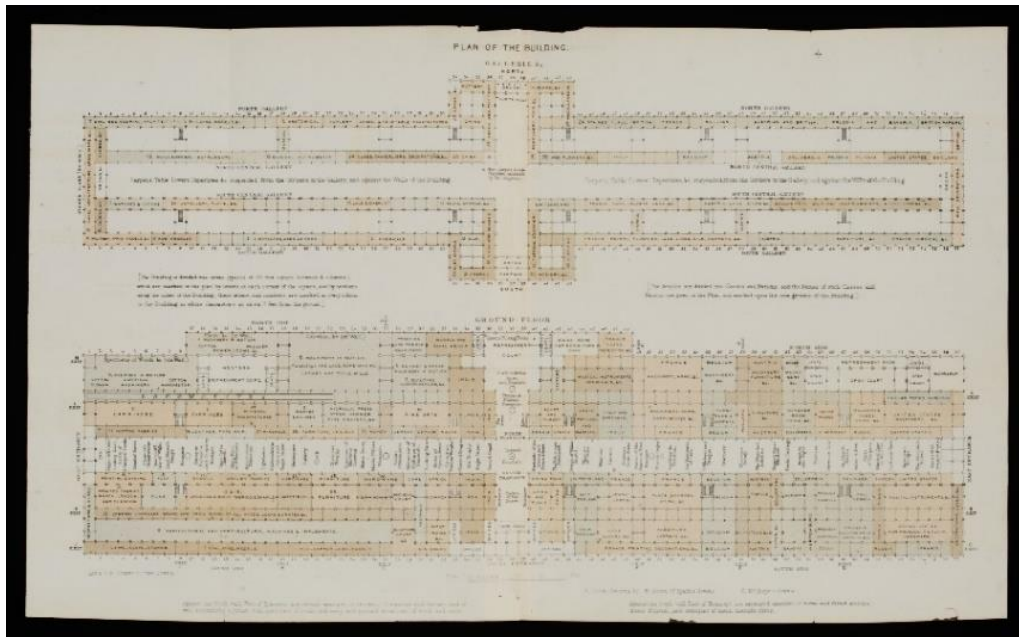
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<sup>51</sup> British Library, (BL), MS 35255, Western Manuscripts, Floor Plan of the Crystal Palace, 1850 <<https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-great-exhibition>> [Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021].

<sup>52</sup> Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, *The Industry of Nations, As Exemplified in the Great Exhibition of 1851: The Materials of Industry*, (London: Samuel Bentley & Co, 1852) p. 168.

<sup>53</sup> British Library, (BL), MS 35255, Western Manuscripts, Floor Plan of the Crystal Palace.

Figure 15: British Library, Floor Plan of the Crystal Palace



British Library, (BL), MS 35255, Western Manuscripts, Plan of the Crystal Palace, (1850), <<https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-great-exhibition>>

The Official Catalogue for the Great Exhibition provides insights into how many of its colonies were involved. Its contents page was split into three main sections – United Kingdom, Colonies and Foreign States and it is here that the true extent of the domination of the British Empire at this event can be seen in terms of exhibiting space. Colonies such as Jersey and Guernsey, Canada, Nova Scotia, the West-Coast of Africa, South and Western Australia and New Zealand are listed here and demonstrated to the other participating countries just how much Britain and the Empire had to offer at the time, as well as the size of the Empire.<sup>54</sup> The rest of the world, however, is presented not by what they have to offer, but just by the country. According to Auerbach, ‘the Exhibition made clear that it [the British Empire] was an important and growing component of British wealth, power and prestige.’<sup>55</sup> The fact

<sup>54</sup> *Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the works of Industry of All Nations*, (London: Spicer Brothers, 1851) p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, ‘Empire Under Glass: The British Empire and the Crystal

that Britain and the Empire were able to have space dedicated to different sectors of manufacturing, rather than just the location, as mentioned in chapter two, demonstrates the power and strength that they exerted during this time. This therefore highlights the motives of the Royal Commission in their plans to have Britain on the world stage. The sheer size of Britain and the Empire's displays compared to the rest of the world, therefore, also emphasized the ways in which the organisers of this British event conceptualised Britain's importance in a global context.

It was this power, at the time of the Exhibition, which resulted in a large amount of propaganda material being produced. It was the sketch in figure 11, previously mentioned to highlight the popularity of the event, which pushed this propaganda of this superiority at the Exhibition. According to Ciugureanu: 'the mass of people in the picture is obviously sketched to mirror both Britain's political strength (the royal family, the MPs and the representatives of the army gathered in one place) and its economic prosperity the crowd attends an international exposition of manufactured goods, most of which were English.'<sup>56</sup>

In the first month of the Exhibition being open, it was presented to Britain and the rest of the world as an event in which Britain dominated, despite the fact that 'thirty-four foreign states contributed to the display.'<sup>57</sup> Although it was advertised as a 'works of industry of all nations' it provided Britain and the Empire with the perfect chance to promote the notion of British superiority over the rest of the world. Paul

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Palace 1851-1911' in John McAleer and John M. MacKenzie, *Exhibiting the Empire*, p. 117.

<sup>56</sup> Adina Ciugureanu, 'Mediating between the Mass and the Individual', p. 103.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition: The Victorian New World Order*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p. 42.

Young comments on the propaganda released at the time of the Exhibition. He notes that 'some two weeks after the Crystal Palace had opened, the Illustrated London News declared that London was not just "the capital of a great nation, but the metropolis of the world."'58 It was this capital that became the centre of attention for much of that year, with people travelling from all over the globe to see the famous Crystal Palace. In this sense, the Great Exhibition 'operated, therefore, as a site for liberal propaganda and governmental disciplinary technologies.'59

There was no shortage of items to admire, and while 'some exhibits aimed to unite industry and art, others sought above all to speak to the imagination, from the dazzling 'Crystal Fountain', to the fabulous Crown diamond, the Koh-i-Noor.'60 Although one of the most controversial exhibits on display, it was one of its highlights. It was the largest diamond in the world at the time and had been loaned to the Exhibition by Queen Victoria herself. Figure 16 demonstrates the crowds that the diamond attracted to the Exhibition.61 However, it was 'something of a disappointment to the vast crowds that jostled to see it.'62

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition*, p. 22.

<sup>59</sup> Michele M. Strong, *Education, Travel and the Civilisation of the Victorian Working Classes*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) p. 30.

<sup>60</sup> Francois Bedarida, *A Social History of England 1851-1990*, (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2013) p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, NAL Pressmark: PP.10, Koh-i-Noor Diamond, Illustrated London News, (1851) <<https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/caring-for-our-collections/henry-cole-and-the-koh-i-noor-diamond>> [Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021].

<sup>62</sup> Helen Rappaport, *Queen Victoria: A Biographical Companion*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003) p. 229.



Figure 16: Victoria and Albert Museum, Koh-i-Noor Diamond



Victoria and Albert Museum, NAL Pressmark: PP.10, Koh-i-Noor Diamond, Illustrated London News, (1851) <<https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/caring-for-our-collections/henry-cole-and-the-koh-i-noor-diamond>>

Although displayed as an item for crowds to marvel at, the way the Queen had come to acquire it was much darker and highlighted some unsavoury aspects of the growth of the empire. Only a couple of years after Queen Victoria's own accession to the throne, Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) had died, and soon his heirs began to fight for the throne. Often described as the 'Lion of Punjab', Ranjit Singh was 'credited for having founded the rich and powerful Sikh Empire', highlighting why his heirs were willing to put up such a fight to try and take their place on its throne.<sup>63</sup> During this time, the British governor of the East India Company, Lord Dalhousie, had aimed to take control of the Punjab. As a result, Britain had defeated the Sikhs at Gujerat and the state was taken over in 1849. Following this, 'Ranjit Singh's nine-year-old successor, Duleep Singh, was forced by the Treaty of Lahore to abdicate and hand over the contents of the treasury, including the Koh-i-Noor diamond to the British crown.'<sup>64</sup> It

<sup>63</sup> Priya Atwal, *Royals and Rebels: The Rise and Fall of the Sikh Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Helen Rappaport, *Queen Victoria: A Biographical Companion*, p. 229.

was this item that highlighted a more troubling side of the Empire. The way this diamond had been acquired demonstrated the British Empire's desire to increase their wealth and expand their presence across the world and shows the lengths they would go to make that happen. Although this would have not been obvious at the time, it is clear that the Exhibition served as a means to demonstrate the Empire's desire to expand across the world and the measures they were prepared to employ in order to do this.

Auerbach does, however, also provide an opposing view to the British Empire's involvement in the Great Exhibition, suggesting that, 'one of the most remarkable features of this first world's fair was how limited a role the Empire played.'<sup>65</sup> Although Britain and the Empire did dominate a large part of the Crystal Palace, its colonies only made up a very small portion of the exhibits on display, with only around 5% of the total exhibits being colonial.<sup>66</sup> While the Exhibition appeared to be a chance to showcase British superiority, it was the other countries on display that had caught the attention of those visiting. It was clear that this event had allowed countries to 'compete' with one another, but it also enabled them to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the rest of the world's manufacturing and industry. It was the French displays that gained much attention from those visiting the Exhibition. The French exhibits, according to C. H. Gibbs-Smith, were 'one of the most attractive and extensive of the Exhibition... no class of the Exhibition was left unrepresented by our continental neighbours.'<sup>67</sup> The French displays, along with Germany's section, held

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<sup>65</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, 'Empire Under Glass: The British Empire and the Crystal Palace 1851-1911' in John McAleer and John M. MacKenzie, *Exhibiting the Empire*, p. 111.

<sup>66</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 98.

<sup>67</sup> C. H. Gibbs-Smith, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, p. 74.

100,000 square feet of space in the Crystal Palace – with the two countries jointly occupying the second largest amount of space given to foreign exhibitors as was mentioned in chapter two.

There were 1,750 exhibitors for the French section and their displays did not go unnoticed.<sup>68</sup> Adolphe Blanqui (1798-1854) commented on the French exhibits, stating that ‘this part of the Exhibition [was] very dangerous for husbands. From the morning to the evening, thousands of ecstatic women jot[ted] down in their notebooks’ the information of the French manufacturers.<sup>69</sup> Figure 17 demonstrates a highlight of the French exhibition, the colourful display of Lyon silks in the very heart of the French display was the centre of attention.<sup>70</sup> Unlike the sections focusing on machinery, the French exhibit would have directly appealed to the female visitors at the Exhibition, and this popularity grew throughout the months that it was open.

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<sup>68</sup> *Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition*, p. 1168.

<sup>69</sup> Adolphe Blanqui cited in David Todd, *A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021) p. 137.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph Nash, ‘The Great Exhibition: France No.1, [Watercolour and bodycolour], Royal Collection Trust, (1851), <<https://www.rct.uk/collection/919960/the-great-exhibition-france-no-i>> [Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021].

Figure 17: Royal Collection Trust, The Great Exhibition: France no.1



Joseph Nash, 'The Great Exhibition: France No.1, [Watercolour and bodycolour], Royal Collection Trust, (1851) <<https://www.rct.uk/collection/919960/the-great-exhibition-france-no-i>>

France was not, however, the only country that was popular with visitors. Scott Ruby emphasises the significance of the other countries, stating that the 'Russian and Austrian exhibits were considered highly important in this regard and were referred to as the "Lions of the Exhibitions."'71 The Russian display included items such as tapestries, furs, porcelain vases, grain, tobacco and cotton and 'had contributions from almost 400 exhibitors' and proved to be incredibly popular with those visiting.<sup>72</sup> According to David C. Fisher, 'the presence of a Russian display at the Great Exhibition testified to the desire of tsarist officials and subjects to combat

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<sup>71</sup> Scott Ruby, 'The Crystal Palace Exhibition and Britain's Encounter with Russia' in Anthony Cross (ed by), *A People's Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture*, (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012) p. 90.

<sup>72</sup> Anthony Swift, 'Russia and the Great Exhibition of 1851: Representations, Perceptions and a Missed Opportunity', *Jahrbucher Fur Geschichte*, vol 55, no 2, (2007), pp242-263, <[www.jstor.org/stable/41052659](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41052659)> [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021] p. 248.

Russophobia.<sup>73</sup> Russophobia, at the time of the Exhibition, was a result of ‘an antipathy toward Russia which soon became the most pronounced and enduring element in the national outlook on the world abroad.’<sup>74</sup> In this period, Russia was still a curiosity to the rest of the world. This idea is emphasised by Ruby, who claims that to many in Britain ‘Russia represented an unknown, it conjured up images of a barbaric people living in arctic cold and ruled by tyrannical people.’<sup>75</sup> It was at the beginning of this decade that the threat of a new war in Crimea was at a high, as ‘the liberal government of Great Britain [were] suspicious of growing Russian power in general in the eastern Mediterranean and in central Asia, bordering on India’ and so the participation of Russia in the Exhibition would have been met with a high level of uncertainty and suspicion.<sup>76</sup>

The Exhibition, however, did help to alter people’s views towards the country. Alexis de Valon stated at the time ‘I do not know Russia and this causes me much regret. It seems that there is not another country in the entire world about which such a false understanding is held.’<sup>77</sup> Although the exhibits were delayed, not being complete until 11 June, they were very impressive – so much so that even Queen Victoria herself noted the fact. Her journal entry for that day states ‘we went to look at the Russian exhibits, which have just arrived and are very fine.’<sup>78</sup> Throughout her

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<sup>73</sup> David C. Fisher, ‘Russia and the Crystal Palace in 1851’ in Jeffrey A. Auerbach & Peter Hoffenberg (ed by), *Britain, the Empire and the World*, p. 123.

<sup>74</sup> John Howes Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain; A Study of the Interaction of Policy and Opinion*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1972) p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Scott Ruby, ‘The Crystal Palace Exhibition and Britain’s Encounter with Russia’ in Anthony Cross (ed by), *A People’s Passing Rude*, p. 91.

<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Sperber, *Europe 1850-1914*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014) p. 86.

<sup>77</sup> Alexis de Valon cited in David C. Fisher, ‘Russia and the Crystal Palace in 1851’ in Jeffrey A. Auerbach & Peter Hoffenberg (ed by), *Britain, the Empire and the World*, p. 123.

<sup>78</sup> Queen Victoria’s journal cited in C. H. Gibbs-Smith, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, p. 21.

countless journal entries and visits to the Exhibition, Queen Victoria makes reference several times to visiting the Russian exhibits, demonstrating the popularity of them. Her journal entry on 12 June emphasises how highly she regarded the Russian displays as she wrote that she had ‘viewed the Russian exhibits on the opposite side, among which were silk and gold brocades from Moscow, which beat the French and are really magnificent.’<sup>79</sup> Taking up six pages in the Official Catalogue for the Great Exhibition of 1851, it is clear that the Russian exhibits had a lot to show and their diverse nature from ‘a vacuum pen, for the evaporation of sugar syrup’ to ‘iron work for gun-carriages’ demonstrated to the world just how much variety they had to offer and how much of a developed nation they were.<sup>80</sup>

Unfortunately, regarding Prince Albert’s wish to unite the nations as mentioned in his Mansion House speech, ‘the Great Exhibition did not, as it happened, set the stage for world peace, as Dickens and many others had ardently hoped.’<sup>81</sup> The Exhibition, and in particular, the displays from other countries, both heightened and put on show to the world the extent to which xenophobia was felt through the country. From the very early stages of planning the Exhibition, there were some in society that were sceptical of the idea of so many ‘foreigners’ coming into Britain. Ruby highlights this, stating that ‘many producers had viewed the Exhibition suspiciously, as an event that would allow foreign manufacturers to spy on British production techniques.’<sup>82</sup> Up until this point, the exhibitions that had taken place in the country had only consisted of British manufacturers. This therefore meant that the opportunity to have strangers

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<sup>79</sup> Queen Victoria’s journal cited in C. H. Gibbs-Smith, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, p. 21.

<sup>80</sup> *Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition*, p. 292.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 219.

<sup>82</sup> Scott Ruby, ‘The Crystal Palace Exhibition and Britain’s Encounter with Russia’ in Anthony Cross (ed by), *A People’s Passing Rude*, p. 90.

from other countries viewing their manufacturing techniques had been met with a large degree of uncertainty and mistrust, which was ironic, given that Britain was certainly looking to observe the manufacturing of other countries in exactly this way.

As a result of the surge of foreign manufacturers that would be attending, magazines such as *Punch* took a great interest in those visiting. For example, 'Richard Altick comments on the periodicals traditional mild xenophobia in its depiction of foreigners and outsiders.'<sup>83</sup> By focusing on the ethnic groups that were attending the event, it became not just a show of objects but a show of people, once again reinforcing the idea of British superiority throughout. It is clear, therefore, that magazines such as *Punch* were serving as an advert for propaganda for the Empire as these images of xenophobia promoted the idea, to an extent, that foreigners were seen as less than or 'other' to the inhabitants of the Empire. Consequently, the 'inhabitants of the [united] kingdom were urged to think of themselves as Britons, not English, Welsh or Scots (the Irish always remained a separate matter)' and it was this collective national identity that allowed for the presence of xenophobia in such magazines at the time of the Exhibition.<sup>84</sup>

At this time, Britain and the Empire were the world's leading imperial power and its inhabitants saw themselves as superior to the people from other cultures and civilizations. Kumar argues that the British Empire at the time would have seen themselves as 'the standard bearers of modernity and progress, the carriers of civilization to the "lesser breeds without the law"'. They took up the white man's

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<sup>83</sup> Frank Felsenstein, 'Mr Punch at the Great Exhibition: Stereotypes of Yankee and Hebrew in 1851' in Sheila Spector (ed), *The Jews and British Romanticism*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 17.

<sup>84</sup> Krishan Kumar, 'Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective', *Theory and Society*, vol 29, no 5, (2005), pp575-608, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3108547>> [Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021] p. 589.

burden.<sup>85</sup> Many Britons, (particularly those from higher orders), felt it was their job to educate and better the people from other countries not part of the Empire. It was the Great Exhibition that seemed to put this national identity on display, emphasising their supposed greatness throughout much of the propaganda released regarding this event.

The popularity of the Exhibition meant that (whether positive or negative), there would be a lot of literature and attention relating to it. In such pieces, the Exhibition was naturally presented as a triumph for Britain and the Empire, and ‘in each of these representations, the world is made to play to the British tune.’<sup>86</sup> In most representations of the Exhibition, it was the British – stereotypically the middle and upper classes – that were portrayed as well behaved and respectable, with ‘the non-English crowds, mostly representing imaginary foreign visitors, that are actually portrayed as a ‘mob’ (filthy, uncontrolled, riotous, savage).’<sup>87</sup> Indeed, it can be seen that there were similar suspicions aimed at both the British working class and foreign visitors. While the representation of foreign visitors in this way may have been imaginary, it cannot be ignored that many in Britain would have viewed them in this way at the time, increasing both a panic and mistrust when being in close proximity to them in the crowds at the Exhibition.

There are two illustrations featured in *Punch*, in particular, that are most telling when considering these feelings of xenophobia during the Exhibition, *Memorials of the Great Exhibition – 1851* and *The North American Lodgers in 1851*. Both of these

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<sup>85</sup> Krishan Kumar, ‘Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective’, p. 591.

<sup>86</sup> Frank Felsenstein, ‘Mr Punch at the Great Exhibition: Stereotypes of Yankee and Hebrew in 1851’ in Sheila Spector (ed), *The Jews and British Romanticism*, p. 20.

<sup>87</sup> Adina Ciugureanu, ‘Mediating between the Mass and the Individual’, p. 116.



'illustrate the disruption which the visitors were imagined to have produced in the supposedly clean and peaceful household of the locals.'<sup>88</sup> In this image, seen in figure 18, the reader could see a mixture of individuals clearly from different ethnic groups – 'a Turk, a Chinese, a Frenchman or a German reading the newspaper in the right-hand corner, a few North-Americans, one playing the piano on the left-hand side of the picture.'<sup>89</sup> It is clear that it was the intention of the illustrator to make these individuals appear to be a chaotic group of people that had come in to cause disturbance to what would have been viewed as the traditional, peaceful British order. It is in this cartoon, according to Ushashi Dasgupta, that this group of foreigners are simply fitting in with the stereotypical view of them for the period. Here these visitors from different nations can be seen to 'refuse to integrate, and yet make themselves at home.'<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Adina Ciugureanu, 'Mediating between the Mass and the Individual', p. 111.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

John Leech, *Memorials of the Great Exhibition – 1851*, John Leech Archive (1851), <<http://www.john-leech-archive.org.uk/1851/memorials-great-exhibition-22.htm>> [Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> February 2021].

<sup>90</sup> Ushashi Dasgupta, *Charles Dickens and the Properties of Fiction: The Lodger World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) p. 175.

Figure 18: John Leech, Memorials of the Great Exhibition 1851



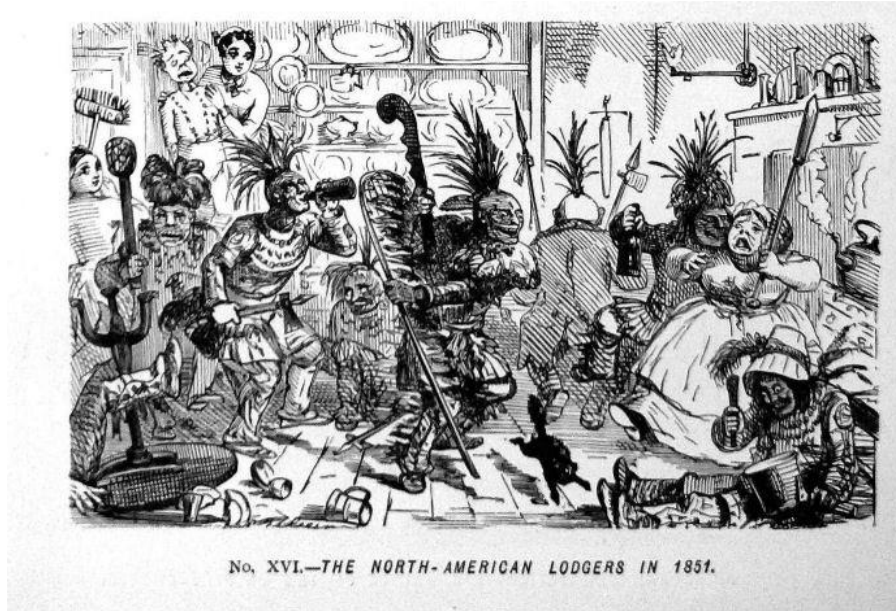
John Leech, *Memorials of the Great Exhibition – 1851*, John Leech Archive (1851) < <http://www.john-leech-archive.org.uk/1851/memorials-great-exhibition-22.htm>>

This reflects the views at the time where some Britons were fearful of these ethnic groups coming over to their country, and settling there, when they were seen to hold ideals alien to those generally held in Victorian Britain. This suspicion could arguably be linked to Britain's expansionism across the globe within their Empire at this time – people from countries and civilizations that were deemed as 'savages' by Britons were generally viewed as dangerous.

Of this suspicion surrounding foreign visitors to Britain, Ciugureanu, discussing *The North American Lodgers in 1851* suggests, 'depicted as a wild tribe of Native-Americans, turned even wilder by the booze, the foreigners sketched in the cartoon reveal the stereotypical image of America in the middle-class imagination: a land of

loose, uncivilized behaviour, opposing any Victorian rules of order, decency and cleanliness.<sup>91</sup> (See figure 19).<sup>92</sup>

Figure 19: John Leech, The North American Lodgers in 1851



John Leech, *The North American Lodgers in 1851*, John Leech Archive (1851), <<http://www.john-leech-archive.org.uk/1851/memorials-great-exhibition-16.htm>>

North American displays were extensively focused on in the countless articles focusing on the Great Exhibition and it is no surprise that such an illustration featured in *Punch*. It is in figure 19 that the fragile state of Britain and the Empire can clearly be seen. This cartoon, according to Ciugureanu, could 'represent the middle-class's derogatory attitude towards their former colony, an attitude that actually hides the dissatisfaction and frustration of having lost it.'<sup>93</sup> This was a time in which Britain and the Empire were trying to dominate the world, and having lost colonies in the

<sup>91</sup> Adina Ciugureanu, 'Mediating between the Mass and the Individual', p. 112-3.

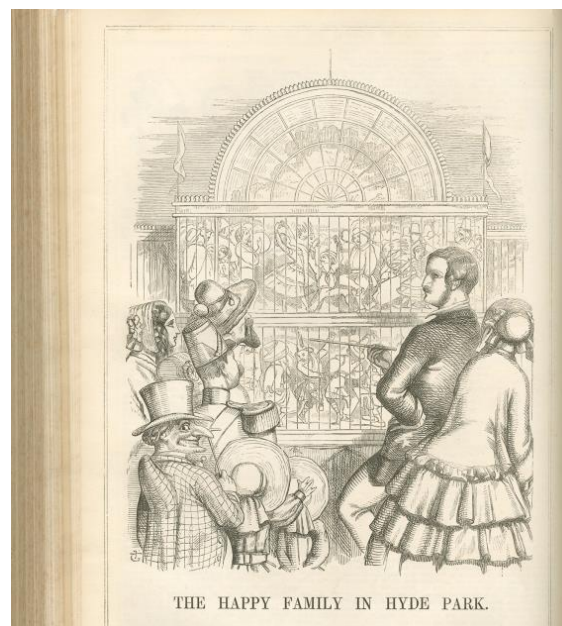
<sup>92</sup> John Leech, *The North American Lodgers in 1851*, John Leech Archive (1851), <<http://www.john-leech-archive.org.uk/1851/memorials-great-exhibition-16.htm>> [Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> February 2021].

<sup>93</sup> Adina Ciugureanu, 'Mediating between the Mass and the Individual', p. 113.

previous century would have made them appear weaker. It was with illustrations such as these that they could attack their former colonies and demonstrate their ideals of superiority within the Empire.

Likewise, *The Happy Family in Hyde Park* in figure 20 also reinforces the idea of xenophobia at the time of the Exhibition.<sup>94</sup> In this illustration, Prince Albert is seen with a crowd looking into the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park. However, instead of the displays being of items from each country, it is in-fact the people from those countries that are put on display instead. This leads the reader to conclude that the Great Exhibition is not a display of the works of industry of all nations as the title of the event implies, but is instead a display of foreigners from different, exotic nations who, in the eyes of people in Britain, could not be more different from them.

Figure 20: John Tenniel, *The Happy Family in Hyde Park*



John Tenniel, *The Happy Family in Hyde Park*, University of Exeter, (1851), <[https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10472/103/b15966410\\_0021\\_162\\_2.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y](https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10472/103/b15966410_0021_162_2.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y)>

<sup>94</sup> John Tenniel, *The Happy Family in Hyde Park*, University of Exeter, (1851), <[https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10472/103/b15966410\\_0021\\_162\\_2.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y](https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10472/103/b15966410_0021_162_2.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y)> [Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2021].

It was this cartoon, according to Edward Ziter, that summed up the 'strange mix of international cooperation and xenophobia engendered by the Exhibition.'<sup>95</sup> Images such as this demonstrate that Prince Albert's goal of a unification amongst countries would be extremely unlikely as a result of the Great Exhibition, as these deep-seated prejudices were too far ingrained to eradicate overnight.

However, despite all of this, the Exhibition had still been hugely popular in the six months that it was open. It had been the first time that people from countries across the globe were able to get a true insight into the development of industry and manufacturing from other countries. This Exhibition provided people of all classes, and many different nationalities, the chance to view the world in a way few had been able to do before. Visitor numbers had remained high and continued to increase as the Exhibition drew to a close. According to Hermione Hobhouse, 'the last two weeks, at the beginning of October, saw the greatest weekly totals, 324,000 and over half a million respectively.'<sup>96</sup> Just a few days before it officially closed to the public, 'nearly 110,000 visited the building in one day, on 7 October.'<sup>97</sup> The Exhibition had been a triumphant event for Britain, and its ever growing popularity as it moved to a conclusion highlights the fact that the event had been a huge success for the Royal Commission in many different ways.

This chapter has covered, in detail, the direct impact that the Exhibition had during the months it was open. In order to do so, it has focused on individual aspects of society such as the working classes, trade and commerce and the British Empire and has analysed the direct impact the event had on each of these. By critically

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<sup>95</sup> Edward Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 106.

<sup>96</sup> Hermione Hobhouse, *The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition*, p. 69.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

assessing the use of the railways, and the excursion trains set up by Thomas Cook, this chapter has highlighted the direct link between the working classes and railways regarding this event. After the introduction of Shilling Days made it affordable for the working classes to attend, the railway companies worked hard to make travel affordable, and labourers from all over the country made use of the trains to get down to London. It is clear, through the analysis undertaken in this chapter that the popularity of railways at this time was largely helped by the affordability of tickets to this event and it is from around this time that people really began to use trains to travel the country especially for day trips or holidays. This emphasis on the working classes has contributed towards the overall aim of this project which has examined how the Exhibition directly helped the working classes and provided new opportunities for them.

Furthermore, this chapter has also placed particular emphasis on the event as a means of propaganda for the British Empire. The extent of xenophobia demonstrated in magazines such as *Punch* have highlighted the ways in which it was an advert for British superiority, which is further demonstrated in the division of the Crystal Palace with the Empire dominating half of the floor space. However, this chapter has highlighted that the Empire were not as superior as the propaganda attempted to make it seem. The popularity of countries such as France and Russia had emphasised that this was not necessarily a British dominated affair. Thus, chapter four will expand on this focus and seeks to explore both the short and long term impacts of the event. As well as this, it considers whether the Exhibition was a success or failure in terms of educating the working classes and spreading imperialist propaganda.

## **Chapter Four: The legacies of the Great Exhibition 1851**

On 11 October 1851, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations officially closed its doors to the public. Attracting over six million people in the six months it was open, this Exhibition gained popularity throughout the world. As a result, this chapter will examine in detail the benefits this event had on the working classes along with the impact it had on imperial relations post 1851. This chapter will also consider the short and long term legacies of the event by analysing the monetary success of this trade fair, the future exhibitions once the Crystal Palace was moved to Sydenham and the formation of museums in South Kensington.

### **Closing of the Great Exhibition**

On 13 and 14 October, 'the Crystal Palace was thrown open to exhibitors and their friends, who were admitted by tickets without charge.'<sup>1</sup> This gave those intimately involved in the Exhibition the chance to take in and truly appreciate the hard work that they had put in during the months it was open.

The following day, 15 October 1851, the Exhibition officially came to an end with Prince Albert hosting a ceremony to mark the end of a triumphant year for the Royal Commission, in particular. It was decided by the Commission that 'Prince Albert should do the honours [and] the ceremony was set deliberately in a low key, so as not to compete in anyone's memory with the splendour of the opening.'<sup>2</sup> The closing ceremony 'took place upon a temporary dais in the middle of the transept (the Crystal Fountain having been previously removed) and the whole building was

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<sup>1</sup> Illustrated London News, *The Illustrated London Almanack 1852*, (London: Illustrated London News, 1852) p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 255.

crowded with exhibitors and others admitted by tickets.’<sup>3</sup> As was clear throughout the planning of the Exhibition – in particular his speech at the Mansion House in the March of 1850 – Prince Albert had hoped this event would bring about international peace and co-operation. This was emphasised in his closing remarks, where he stated that ‘by sharing our mutual dependence upon each other, be a happy means of promoting unity among nations and peace and goodwill among the various races of mankind.’<sup>4</sup> While the Empire, in the end, did play a limited role in the Exhibition, the event was still able to highlight the benefits of countries coming together to compete and compare their items. Although this chapter will go on to demonstrate how not all was peaceful following the Great Exhibition, it is clear that this event opened the doors for further international displays of this manner to take place. Thus, Prince Albert’s intentions of co-operation after this event would be seen in the trade fairs that followed.

The Great Exhibition’s success had been widespread, something that is further evidenced by the popularity of the closing ceremony. Although it had faced considerable public opposition in the early stages of planning, it had given Britain a platform on which the industrial development of the nation could be displayed. Adam Hart-Davis notes the success stating that ‘not only did six million people visit in six months, but it made a profit of £185,437.’<sup>5</sup> In today’s money, this would amount to £26,475,849.38 which further highlights the accomplishments of Prince Albert and the Commission.

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<sup>3</sup> Illustrated London News, *The Illustrated London Almanack 1852*, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> Adam Hart-Davis, *What the Victorians Did for Us*, (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2001) p. 78.



Figure 21, featured in *Illustrated London Almanack 1852*, shows both the success and popularity of the Exhibition during the months that it was open by providing statistics of the monthly visitors to the Crystal Palace along with the money that was gained during this time.<sup>6</sup> While the Royal Commission had only managed to attract 734,782 visitors in the first month, it was acknowledged that in the first three weeks this had mainly been due to the high prices of the tickets.<sup>7</sup> It is clear that the introduction of the 'Shilling Days' at the end of May largely contributed to the event's success – with over one million visitors in each of the summer months. Additionally, the fact that it was attended by over 800,000 people in the eleven days of October further demonstrates its increasing popularity (probably due to word of mouth) and the notion that as many people were determined to attend the Exhibition before it closed as possible.

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<sup>6</sup> *Illustrated London News*, *The Illustrated London Almanack 1852*, p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

Figure 21: Illustrated London Almanack – Statistics of the Exhibition

STATISTICS OF THE EXHIBITION.	
NUMBER OF VISITORS.	
In the month of May the number of visitors was	734,782
In June	1,133,116
In July	1,314,176
In August	1,023,435
In September	1,155,240
In October, up to the 11th instant	841,107
Grand total	6,201,856
The total receipts were as follows, up to the close of the Exhibition:—	
Public subscriptions	£64,344 0 0
Privilege of printing	3,200 0 0
Privilege of supplying refreshments	5,500 0 0
Amount received for season tickets up to 1st of May	40,000 0 0
Royalty of 2d. per copy on Catalogues	
Total funds in hand on the 1st of May	£113,044 0 0
Amount received at the doors up to August 30	252,141 9 6
Ditto up to the end of September	62,007 12 0
Ditto up to Saturday, October 11	41,922 11 6
Grand total	£469,115 13 0

Illustrated London News, *The Illustrated London Almanack 1852*, (London: Illustrated London News, 1852) p. 71.

When the Society of Arts initially put forward the proposal for the event, even before the formation of the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851, they did not expect to equal the amount of subscriptions they had raised in the months leading up to May 1851. Therefore, the fact that the Commission did make such a substantial profit highlighted not only the success of their hard work, but also the public's desire to showcase their industry and manufacturing to the world. As well as celebrating their industry, it also demonstrated the British people's curiosity in other nations. As a thank you for their contributions, awards were given out to participating countries and 'of more than 17,000 who took part, 164 were to receive the top-rated Council Medal and 2,918 the lesser Prize Medal.'<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 256.

Unsurprisingly, Britain and the Empire received the largest amount of these Council Medals having been awarded seventy-eight, with France coming second with fifty-four.<sup>9</sup> It is telling that France received the second largest number of medals given the fact that the nation only contributed a very small number of the exhibits on display at the event. This was significant due to the fact that France, at the time, was one of Britain's biggest rivals and their popularity at the Exhibition would have demonstrated that they too were on an industrial rise. Britain were awarded medals for items such as photography and the electronic telegraph whereas France 'were for instruments with clear commercial applications.'<sup>10</sup>

However, it became immediately clear with the giving of these awards that Prince Albert's hope for securing peace among countries was increasingly unlikely as 'although each country had been fairly represented on the juries, there were inevitably allegations of discrimination.'<sup>11</sup> As a British organised event, bias towards British exhibits was inevitable. Leapman stated that 'the Morning Chronicle made the point that Osler's Crystal Fountain, for many the highlight of all the exhibits, rightly received a Prize Medal – but then so did a shirt from the United States.'<sup>12</sup> The public were therefore confused that items that could not be more different in every respect were able to pick up the same award. This shows that the prize giving may have been well intentioned, but it only served to cause more divisions between the nations involved.

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 258.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, 'The Great Exhibition and Historical Memory', p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 258.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

## The fate of the Crystal Palace

When the Exhibition came to an end in October 1851, many people were concerned as to the fate of the building as ‘the popularity of the Crystal Palace had led to protests about its impending removal.’<sup>13</sup> Paxton’s famous structure was unlike anything which had gone before and ‘the Great Exhibition and the Hyde Park Crystal Palace became part of popular culture.’<sup>14</sup> During that year, it would have been difficult to refer to either the Exhibition or the Palace without automatically associating each with the other. Once it had closed, the Exhibition truly became one of the defining aspects of the Victorian period as we know it. The question of what to do with the Crystal Palace going forward had been at the forefront of debates and only intensified in the October of that year.

To avoid the building being demolished immediately, the government allowed for the Palace to remain in Hyde Park from the October of 1851 to May 1852. This meant people would still be able to visit the park to marvel at the magnificent building from the outside. It was stated in the *Illustrated London Almanack of 1852* that ‘it may be noticed that the width of the main avenue is within ten feet double that of Saint Paul’s Cathedral, while its length is more than four times as great.’<sup>15</sup> The building would have been a major attraction in London during this time, and throughout the entire year it brought in millions of people who wanted to see just the famous Crystal Palace, despite it standing empty. Thus, it can be seen to continue generating income. It was so popular that 84 year old Mary Kelynack, who had no way of getting

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<sup>13</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 205.

<sup>14</sup> Edmund King, ‘The Great Exhibition at Hyde Park and its Publications’, *RSA Journal*, vol 144, no 5475, pp58-62, (1996), <[www.jstor.org/stable/41377238](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41377238)> [Accessed May 11<sup>th</sup> 2021] p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> Illustrated London News, *The Illustrated London Almanack 1852*, p. 68-70.

to London to see the Palace, 'walked the full 300-mile distance, in five weeks' showing how dedicated people in Britain were to attend such an occasion.<sup>16</sup>

In order to try and decide the best outcome for the Crystal Palace, a Royal Commission of Inquiry was set up in the December of 1851. This Commission included some key figures that had worked so intimately on the Exhibition itself such as Lord Seymour (1804-1885), William Cubitt (1785-1861) and Dr Lindley (1799-1865).<sup>17</sup> Although the Exhibition was a fine achievement for the Commission, especially for Prince Albert, he was aware that maintaining the Palace in Hyde Park would be a costly affair. Not only this, the Prince noted that purchasing the Palace 'for the purpose of establishing a Winter Garden, or museum of Antiquities, or a public promenade ride, lounging place &c &c has in my opinion, no connexion whatever with the Exhibition.'<sup>18</sup> Instead, Prince Albert proposed that he would instead prefer to purchase other land, in which he would 'place on it four institutions corresponding to the four great sections of the Exhibition – Raw Material, Machinery, Manufactures and Plastic Art.'<sup>19</sup> As a result, it was agreed that the best thing to do would be to let the Palace go and it was decided by the government that in 1852 the Palace should be sold. It was discussed in parliament that the Palace would, unfortunately, be sold for '£45,000 which was very much below the value of the materials of that immense pile of glass and iron.'<sup>20</sup> The popularity of the Palace

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<sup>16</sup> John Van der Kiste, *The Little Book of Cornwall*, (London: History Press Limited, 2013)  
<[https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The\\_Little\\_Book\\_of\\_Cornwall/d7E7AwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Little_Book_of_Cornwall/d7E7AwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)> [Accessed 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021] np.

<sup>17</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 205.

<sup>18</sup> Jan Piggott, *Palace of the People: The Crystal Palace at Sydenham 1864-1936*, (London: C Hurst, 2004) p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 205-206.

<sup>20</sup> UK Parliament, Hansard Archive, *Exhibition of 1851 – Crystal Palace*, (1852),

became clear as ‘the building was immediately bought by a consortium’ of Samuel Laing (1812-1897), the Chairman of Railways across the South along with individuals that had direct involvement with the Exhibition such as Francis Fuller, William Cubitt and John Scott Russell.<sup>21</sup> The rush by this group to purchase the building and to prevent it from being destroyed ‘reflected the pulling-power not only of the building, but also of the educational message, popularised by the Exhibition.’<sup>22</sup> As a result, it was decided that the Palace would be moved to a different site. It was here that a ‘still finer Crystal Palace was raised on a hill at Sydenham as a public resort for healthful recreation and the exhibition of instructive objects of art and industry from the ancient and modern world.’<sup>23</sup> The project took two years and was completed in 1854. It was at the Sydenham site that Paxton hoped to make his famous and much-loved Crystal Palace even bigger and better than during the 1851 Exhibition – perhaps to reflect Britain’s continued industrial development. As a result, Paxton made the arched central transept visibly bigger and higher than its Hyde Park predecessor. Not only this, they also added in a north and south tower, which were around 282 feet high. Unfortunately, these had to be taken down once it was discovered they were too insecure and could be a risk to the public. Nonetheless, the building still stood as a testament to its 1851 predecessor (see figure 22).<sup>24</sup>

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<<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1852-04-29/debates/e4f84baf-6f9a-45f7-b9da-be776a1d1533/ExhibitionOf1851%E2%80%94CrystalPalace>> [Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> June 2021].

<sup>21</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 210.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Smith, *The Popular History of England*, p. 101.

<sup>24</sup> Oliver Wainwright, ‘Raising The Glass: Crystal Palace to Come Back from the Dead’, *Guardian*, 26 July 2013  
<<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/jul/26/crystal-palace-rebuild-chinese-developer>> [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022]

Figure 22: Raising the Glass: Crystal Palace to Come Back from the Dead



'Raising the Glass: Crystal Palace to Come Back from the Dead', *Guardian*, 26 July 2013, <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/jul/26/crystal-palace-rebuild-chinese-developer>>

The Palace was opened on 10 June 1854, by Queen Victoria to around 40,000 spectators – demonstrating that the Crystal Palace was still popular three years after the Great Exhibition. Although many members of the Royal Commission were not involved with this Palace, it still held the educational tone seen at the Great Exhibition and 'the organisers hoped that visitors would not wonder aimlessly... but would participate and learn through a systematic encounter with a carefully selected display of objects.'<sup>25</sup> Unlike the Crystal Palace that hosted the Great Exhibition, this Palace had a much bigger interest in fine arts. Edward MacDermott's *Routledge's Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park at Sydenham* provides a huge amount of insight into what was on display at Sydenham, listing that there were displays for fine

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<sup>25</sup> Kate Nichols & Sarah Victoria Turner, 'What is to become of the Crystal Palace? The Crystal Palace after 1851', in *After 1851: The Material and Visual Cultures of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham*, Kate Nichols & Sarah Victoria Turner (ed), (Manchester: Manchester University Press), np.

arts; an industrial department; natural history; sovereigns of England; and Geological Islands.<sup>26</sup>

As well as an emphasis on education, it was also at this Palace that 'a series of Handel festivals was started in 1859, and six years later saw the beginning of spectacular firework displays.'<sup>27</sup> While the Great Exhibition's Crystal Palace only remained open between May-October 1851, its successor stayed open for 82 years and became host to exhibitions, concerts, cinemas and shopping centres. It attempted to combine education and entertainment in one place, and it formed 'the later Victorian and Edwardian cultures of museum visiting, archaeological reconstruction, sports participation and spectatorship, amusement parks, shopping centres and pet shows.'<sup>28</sup> The Sydenham Palace became a central hub of entertainment for the rest of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century until it fell into disrepair in the 1930s and a fire rapidly spread through the building causing irreparable damage in 1936.

It was not only the relocation of the Crystal Palace to Sydenham that demonstrated the long-lasting impact that the Great Exhibition would have in the country. The Exhibition had garnered substantial profits and it was with this sum that Prince Albert in particular hoped to purchase land in order to erect a set of educational institutions. According to Davis, 'Prince Albert's plans revealed the influence of German ideas about central institutions and their value to industry.'<sup>29</sup> Prince Albert, along with other members of the Commission, did not attach themselves to the Sydenham Crystal

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<sup>26</sup> Edward MacDermott, *Routledge's Guide to the Crystal Palace and Park at Sydenham*, (London: G Routledge & Company, 1854) p. vii-viii.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 252.

<sup>28</sup> Kate Nichols & Sarah Victoria Turner, 'What is to become of the Crystal Palace? The Crystal Palace after 1851', np.

<sup>29</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 206.



Palace project. They believed that the project did not provide the educational opportunities that they had hoped would have been a direct result of the Exhibition. They had hoped that these profits could be put towards 'purposes of permanent importance akin to the objects of the Great Exhibition, rather than to mere recreation and amusement.'<sup>30</sup> Following the closing of the Exhibition, the Commission received many petitions for the formation of a technical institution, and it was from the December of 1851 that land began to be purchased for this purpose. Furthermore, pressure began to be put on the government to support the increase and development of industrial education which helped the Commission purchase even more land. The government had faced pressure as a direct result of public petitions, along with lectures on the educational legacy of the Exhibition that were published by the Society of Arts, along with a Second Report which was published by the Royal Commission.

The Second Report consisted of thirty-two pages, explaining, in detail, the key areas on which the Commission hoped to spend the profits of the Exhibition. It is early on in this report that the initial impacts of the Exhibition can be seen. The Commission stated that as a result of their request, 'Her Majesty was graciously pleased to confer upon us the Supplemental Charter which is prefixed to this report, and which bears the date the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1851.'<sup>31</sup> It is in this section that the report demonstrated the Commission's power and influence. Initially, the Commission had only been formed to help organise the Exhibition. Therefore, the fact that they were

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<sup>30</sup> Philip Smith, *The Popular History of England*, p. 101.

<sup>31</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/10/82, Second Report of the Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851, (1852), <<https://albert.rct.uk/collections/royal-commission-for-the-exhibition-of-1851/prince-alberts-papers/-469>> [Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2021].

given this Charter to continue after the event had ended rather than be disbanded, emphasises the idea that they still had not achieved all their educational goals. As discussed in chapter two, it was the goal of Prince Albert and Henry Cole, and by extension the Commission as a whole, that they would be able to contribute to the advancement in the arts sector and scientific progress in the country, along with technological advances. While the Exhibition had begun to touch on such notions, the event was only six months long and was not enough time for the Commission to set in stone the changes that they hoped for to bring about such advancement.

This Charter would help the Commission to set the groundwork for further education in such areas as it gave them the power to ‘dispose of the surplus in the furtherance of any plans that may be devised by us’, as well as the ability to ‘purchase and hold lands and hereditaments in any part of Her Majesty’s dominions.’<sup>32</sup> This new-found power for the Commission meant that after the Exhibition, they were still able to proceed with their plans to influence both the industry and education of Britain. Members of the Commission believed that ‘the greatest benefit would be conferred on the community, if such an institution as that indicated by us were established in the metropolis.’<sup>33</sup>

The Commissioners were, however, aware that although the profits as a result of the huge success of the Exhibition were considerable, they were still not enough for them to achieve their educational ambitions. In this report they stated that they ‘cannot but be sensible that the sum at their disposal as the Surplus Fund is altogether inadequate to the complete development and satisfactory execution of a

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<sup>32</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/10/82, Second Report of the Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

plan of the nature contemplated by them.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the government's support for the development of industry and education also increased. The new Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, Benjamin Disraeli, 'arranged a government grant of £150,000 to match the Royal Commission's outlay.'<sup>35</sup> The government had needed to be persuaded to join the cause, after having no initial interest in any educational institutions from the Exhibition profits. The Commission, therefore, 'decided to buy Gore House and seventy acres of land', located in the South Kensington area of London, at a cost of around £336,000.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, the Commission would set up various educational institutions on the land they purchased to help encourage the interest and development of the sciences and arts in particular. By the beginning of the following decade, the purchased land was worth more than one million pounds and the period following the Exhibition increasingly became one of rapid industrial and educational development in Britain. Today it holds some of the world's most famous tourist attractions and world-renowned institutions, including the Natural History Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Royal College of Music and the Imperial College London.<sup>37</sup>

## **Reflection on successes and failures and the long-term legacies of the Exhibition**

The Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851 was officially formed by Queen Victoria in 1850 to help with the organisation, and to allow the group to

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<sup>34</sup> Royal Collection Trust (RCT), RC/H/1/10/82, Second Report of the Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851.

<sup>35</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 206.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling*, p. 263.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

facilitate their aims. The Commission were a 'diverse group often with competing ambitions', which was demonstrated throughout the Exhibition with the many categories of display.<sup>38</sup> By having such a mixed group in the organisation meant they were able to make the Exhibition more accessible to a wider audience. The group represented key areas such as art, science and industry with figures also coming from the aristocracy and key political groups at the time. With key figures such as Charles Barry (1795-1860), William Cubitt, the Duke of Buccleuch (1831-1914) and Thomas Bozley, the Commission would therefore be able to have a wider focus for their intended audience – ultimately giving it a wider appeal. It was this, therefore, that helped make the event such a success because 'its organizers promoted it in multifarious ways, continually shifting the focus of their appeal to fit their audience, and because millions of Britons were able to see in it what they wanted.'<sup>39</sup>

When the Commission was formed in 1850, its member's plan for an Exhibition included wanting to 'raise the standards of British manufacturing, design, now also including science through comparison.'<sup>40</sup> It was clear at this time that such aims were achievable, and had already been demonstrated in the years 1847, 1848 and 1849 when the Society of Arts hosted a number of smaller scale exhibitions. These earlier events provided an insight into how they could be used to combine manufacturing with design and science, and how best to display them in order to benefit both the exhibitors and the public that would attend. By hosting these earlier exhibitions, members of the Society of Arts had been able to gauge the public's willingness to participate – either as visitors or exhibitors.

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<sup>38</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, 'The Great Exhibition and Historical Memory', p. 97.

<sup>40</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 35.

In the two years prior to the 1851 event, the Society of Arts (and later the Royal Commission) did as much as they could to generate public involvement. As the scale of this support grew, so too did its intended audience. Therefore, rather than being accessible to only a select minority, it would instead appeal to a large majority of the populous. As a group, they 'stipulated that "the whole Kingdom should be thoroughly educated to understand the several objects and scope of the Exhibition, and have their sympathies properly aroused towards it: and that the local committees ought to be the machinery by which this object is to be accomplished."'”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, although its members did have competing interests when it came to planning the Exhibition, it was generally the idea of developing Britain's industry that brought them together to promote the idea of this Exhibition. The Royal Commission had largely benefited from using local committees up and down the country in the planning of the event. Figure 23 shows the sheer scale of the contributions of these committees, whose input undoubtedly contributed towards making this event the success that it was, with over two hundred contributors.<sup>42</sup> It was their job to help pull in locals to become involved and it was the use of these local groups that ultimately contributed to its overall success.

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<sup>41</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 53-54.

<sup>42</sup> Illustrated London News, *The Illustrated London Almanack 1852*, p. 56.



new, relatable light. No longer were the monarchy an impersonal institution, now Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were seen to be doing things for the people and the involvement of the working classes at the Great Exhibition highlighted this. When Queen Victoria had ascended the throne in 1837, the monarchy was not a popular establishment.

This was a time where monarchies across Europe had been rapidly declining in popularity. In 1789, after a revolution began in France, King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette had been arrested by rebels. The revolution lasted until 1792 when the monarchy was abolished and France was declared a republic. In the following year, both the King and Queen were executed. This act demonstrated to people across Europe the power of revolution, and what could happen to monarchies in other countries if they lost their popularity. In Britain, the Hanoverian rulers between 1714 and 1837 had been very unpopular, given largely to the fact that they were not 'the most competent of monarchs.'<sup>43</sup> Under George III, a large population of Britain's subjects were lost as a result of the War of American Independence and 'Hanover was lost to French control from 1803 to 1813.'<sup>44</sup> Unable to keep land and power under control, 'when Victoria ascended the throne, the status of the monarchy was low and its future uncertain.'<sup>45</sup>

As a result, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert tried to change people's perceptions of the monarchy, hoping to make them more relatable to the British public. Prince Albert, in particular, had attempted to set the image of the royals as family

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<sup>43</sup> Jeremy Black, *The Hanoverians: The History of a Dynasty*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007) p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Vernon Bogdanor, *The Monarchy and the Constitution*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p. 37.

orientated, once again reinforcing the notion that this was a royal family whose norms and values most families in Britain could now relate to. Not only this, he had also begun attempting to improve the lives of the lower classes by introducing means of better living conditions – such as the Model Houses mentioned previously. It was the implementation of schemes such as this that demonstrated to the British public the monarchies' desire to help the British people as much as they could. Thus, the growing popularity of the royal family after Queen Victoria's accession was, according to Margaret Homans, a result of 'its transformation into a popular spectacle during the nineteenth century.'<sup>46</sup>

The accessibility, therefore, of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert during the time of the Great Exhibition added a new human aspect to the monarchy. Seeing them at this event, (especially given the fact that Queen Victoria made several visits during the time it was open and that she happily mingled with the crowds despite previous fears due to several assassination attempts), would have made them seem much more relatable. According to Jaap van Osta, 'the Crown's popularity depended upon the monarchy's visibility', and so the fact that Queen Victoria gladly walked among the people at this event would have largely contributed to both her and the monarchy as a whole growing in popularity.<sup>47</sup>

Although he was late to join the Exhibition project, Prince Albert's influence was of vital importance to the project and 'the marriage which it demonstrated between the Prince and the emergent wealth producers of the world, was a decisive factor in the

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<sup>46</sup> Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture 1837-1876*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Jaap van Osta, 'The Emperors New Clothes: The Reappearance of the Performing Monarchy in Europe c1870-1914' in Gita Deneckere (ed by) *Mystifying the Monarch: Studies on Discourse, Power and History*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006) p. 183.



stabilizing of the monarchy for the future.<sup>48</sup> It was from 1851 onwards that the royal family really began to be viewed as different to the monarchs before Queen Victoria's reign. Now, they appeared to be a monarchy that wanted to work with the people to improve Britain's industrial position throughout the world, and according to Davis, 'the Great Exhibition provided Prince Albert with an opportunity to reinvigorate the monarchy by extending its ceremonial to industrial affairs and demonstrating solidarity with the people.'<sup>49</sup>

Not only had the Exhibition allowed Prince Albert to intertwine the work of monarchy and industry, it also provided him the opportunity to improve the living standards of the working classes. It was the goal of Prince Albert that the main legacy of this event would be to improve the lives and opportunities of this sector of society as much as possible. One of the ways in which he did this was with his introduction of Model Houses during the Exhibition as was mentioned in chapter two. The Society for Improving the Conditions of Labouring Classes, (of which Prince Albert was president), had erected two-story houses, called model houses for families, just outside the Crystal Palace. These houses were 'created under Prince Albert's scheme for finding decent accommodation for the poor' and are further evidence of the monarchy's willingness to improve the situation for this class in a way that the country had not seen before.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, Prince Albert hoped that the event would bring about 'social harmony between the aristocracy and the working classes.'<sup>51</sup> The Exhibition, according to Chloe Jeffries, 'was a significant factor in the increase in

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<sup>48</sup> A. N. Wilson, *Prince Albert: The Man who Saved the Monarchy*, p. 222.

<sup>49</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 212.

<sup>50</sup> A. N. Wilson, *Prince Albert: The Man who Saved the Monarchy*, p. 187.

<sup>51</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 60.

social stability in the 1850s, not so much because of its direct influence, but because it distilled all others.<sup>52</sup>

However, while the working classes were a huge reason for the overall success of the Exhibition, contributing significantly to the revenue generated through the ticket sales (in particular on Shilling Days), the extent to which the Exhibition actually benefited the working classes must be considered. While the Exhibition largely promoted British manufacturing and industry, (especially through the Royal Commission's use of propaganda for the country), the event was not by any means a true representation of the country at the time. It is clear that the organisers purposely turned their focus away from the problems inherent in certain sectors of society in order to make Britain appear in a favourable light. One of the aspects they failed to make reference to was the amount of working class people that were living in desperate poverty. The event was a showcase of Britain's greatness, their industrial strength and power, so it is no surprise they were less keen to highlight anything which would have shown any kind of frailty.

As one of the wealthiest nations of the world, 'mostly because [of] money made through trade', it would have considerably weakened their position on the world stage had the poverty of some of these classes been made clear.<sup>53</sup> When considering the yawning gap between the rich and the poor in Victorian Britain, Auerbach suggests, 'the class-based character of the Exhibition itself should not be underestimated.'<sup>54</sup> With the opening of the event, 'admission prices were elaborately structured so as to segregate the classes, and Lord Palmerston was not alone in

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<sup>52</sup> Chloe Jeffries, 'The Great Exhibition', p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Jane Shuter, *Victorian Britain*, (London: Pearson Education, 2001) p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, 'The Great Exhibition and Historical Memory', p. 102.

refusing to attend the exhibition on so-called shilling days.<sup>55</sup> Although the ticket prices were eventually reduced so as to attract the working classes, many of the middle and upper classes still held prejudiced attitudes towards them.

The decades following the Exhibition were 'characterized by rapid technological progress and the growth of a modern transport infrastructure, which facilitated trade growth at a time of almost uninterrupted economic expansion in Europe.'<sup>56</sup> The Exhibition was centred on the notion of free-trade, and this was something recognised long after the event had closed by foreign visitors from all over the globe. The *Manchester News* reported that 'we may not be sure that if there had not been a universal faith in the permanency of free trade, the Exhibition would either never have opened, or would never have achieved the brilliant success that it has obtained.'<sup>57</sup> Wolfram Kaiser states that 'Henry Cole, argued with some justification in a lecture after the closing of the Exhibition that the Crystal Palace as a building and in this form would never have been built in the first place without free competition and free trade in Britain.'<sup>58</sup> Demonstrating the event's long-term legacy regarding free trade.

However, while free trade had a positive impact in relation to the Exhibition, the extent to which the event itself benefited other aspects of British commerce (such as the British Empire) must be considered. As seen in chapter three with the cartoons featured in *Punch*, this trade fair served as a means of propaganda to highlight

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<sup>55</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, 'The Great Exhibition and Historical Memory', p. 102.

<sup>56</sup> Wolfram Kaiser, 'Cultural Transfer of Free Trade at the World Exhibitions 1851-1862', *Journal of Modern History*, vol 77, no 3, (2005), pp 563-590, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/497717>> [Accessed May 13<sup>th</sup> 2021] p. 563-564.

<sup>57</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 213.

<sup>58</sup> Wolfram Kaiser, 'Cultural Transfer of Free Trade at the World Exhibitions 1851-1862', p. 571.

British superiority. This superiority, though, seemed to have been exaggerated during the 1851 event. As Bernard Porter argues, 'there is no direct evidence that this great majority of Britons supported the Empire, took an interest in it, or were even aware of it for most of the century; whereas much circumstantial evidence points the other way.'<sup>59</sup> While this event was incredibly beneficial to trade, tourism and the working classes, with hindsight it is clear that this 'Great Exhibition' was propaganda for an Empire that not many cared for. Catherine Hall goes on to comment 'the Empire's influence on the metropole was undoubtedly uneven. There were times when it was simply there, not a subject of popular critical consciousness.'<sup>60</sup>

Although the geographical domination of the Empire was significant for this period, it is clear that by 1851 it was just not a priority to the British people. Not only this, for an Empire that had colonies across the globe and an event that wanted to highlight this, only '520 out of 14,000 exhibitors were colonial.'<sup>61</sup> If this event was truly to be a showcase of the Empire's superiority, then it is questionable why only a very small minority of exhibits came from their colonies. This is emphasised by the moving of the Crystal Palace to Sydenham in 1854 as 'the Indian and Colonial exhibits were not thought worth transferring there. The Empire disappeared.'<sup>62</sup> It became clear after the Exhibition had finished that the British Empire were rapidly declining in their power and influence across the world, and cracks began to appear throughout parts of the Empire all over the world quite rapidly post-1851.

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<sup>59</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 115.

<sup>60</sup> Catherine Hall, *At Home with the Empire*, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 98.

<sup>62</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, p. 93.

As mentioned in the first two chapters, the event had been promoted, especially by Prince Albert, as a means to encourage peaceful co-operation with the rest of the world. However, it was evident in the years leading up to and directly after the Exhibition that this was not the case, and weaknesses in the Empire were showing. In-fact, 'the mid-century years, with the revolutions of 1848, Russia's repression of Hungary, Napoleon's rise to power in France and the Crimean War, were hardly peaceful.'<sup>63</sup> Although the Exhibition had been held with the intentions of promoting international peace and cooperation, the following years were met with wars and conflicts. It was, according to K. Theodore Hoppen, 'almost as if, by some curious act of compensation, a period of comparative social calm at home had to be balanced by death and destruction beyond the seas.'<sup>64</sup> Although in 1851, Britain was the world's leading industrial and imperial power, the Crimean War of 1854-56 (briefly touched upon in chapter three) along with the Indian Rebellion in 1857-58, for example, would come to dominate the international affairs of the decade.

Although the Great Exhibition was not a direct cause of the conflicts that took place in the 1850s, there can be no denying that it both highlighted and heightened feelings of Russophobia during this period. Material released through *Punch* during the event put on display the xenophobic feelings that were still at large in the country, and people generally became mistrustful towards foreign visitors and exhibitors. Russia, in particular, was a very guarded and unknown country, and many did not trust them as a result which resulted in tensions in the years following the Exhibition. The emergence of the Crimean War in 1854, therefore, did little to

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<sup>63</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, 'The Great Exhibition and Historical Memory' p. 107.

<sup>64</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) p. 167.

reduce this. As a result of increasing pressure from Russia on Turkey, the Crimean War was fought between Russia and the British, French and Ottoman Turkish armies. This was a huge concern for Britain at the time as it 'constituted the kind of conflict which British statesmen thought the Vienna settlement of 1815 had rendered virtually impossible.'<sup>65</sup> Not only this, this kind of war was a threat to Britain in terms of their commercial interests in the Middle East and India – one of the aims of the Exhibition was to help increase global trade and such a conflict would put immense pressure on this becoming a reality.

Britain had signed an alliance with Turkey in March of 1854 and declared war on Russia just two weeks later. It was the start of this war that 'cranked the Russophobia of much of the British press to new heights of excitement, with the result that public opinion became an ever sharper debating sword in the hands of those members of Aberdeen's cabinet.'<sup>66</sup> Consequently, a Peace of Paris treaty was signed on March 30 1856, two years after the war had begun. This treaty effectively put an end to this war, crippling Russia and preserving Ottoman rule in Turkey until the early 1900s. This war demonstrated the fact that Prince Albert's hopes of international cooperation, as promoted throughout the Exhibition, were not to be as the conflict 'undoubtedly reduced the prestige of Britain abroad as well as that of the political and economic relationships which she exemplified.'<sup>67</sup> It did, however, highlight the power of Britain's naval force and the importance of a strong navy when it came to global conflict.

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<sup>65</sup> K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 167.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Furthermore, the unsettling of international peace did not end with the Crimean War. In 1849, Russell had mentioned to Cole that 'the loss of any great portion of our colonies would diminish our importance in the world and the vultures would soon gather to despoil us of other parts of the empire.'<sup>68</sup> And it was this notion that was put to the test in India in 1857. Britain had been asserting power in India from early in the nineteenth century regularly replacing members of the Indian aristocracy with British officials. The implementation of the Doctrine of Lapse (1857-1859) further encouraged this, decreeing that when a Hindu ruler died, Britain would be able to annex their land. This 'deployment of the Doctrine of Lapse unnerved the remaining rulers of India and helped prepare the ground for the implosion of the Mutiny in 1857.'<sup>69</sup>

Cracks in the Empire began to show in 1857 when Mangal Pandey (1827-1857), serving as a sepoy of the Bengal Native Infantry, attacked British officers, although he was later executed such outbreaks did not end there.<sup>70</sup> In April, other sepoys were given long prison sentences which caused their fellow soldiers to attack British officers in May, shooting many of them in retaliation. This rebellion soon became widespread across the country and lasted for over a year. However, it was eventually put down by British forces. While this uprising was ultimately unsuccessful and British power remained in place, it highlighted the beginning of the cracks in the Empire and a weakening of its status in the eyes of the world. It was these conflicts in the latter part of this decade that demonstrated the short-lived hope of

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<sup>68</sup> W. P. Morrell, *British Colonial Policy in the Age of Peel and Russell*, (Oxford: Routledge, 1930) p. 230.

<sup>69</sup> Chandrika Kaul, *The Making of the Raj: India Under the East India Company*, (Connecticut: Praeger, 2012) p. 34.

<sup>70</sup> Kim A. Wagner, *The Skull of Alum Bhag: The Life and Death of a Rebel of 1857*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) p. 45.

international peace and cooperation at the Exhibition in 1851. Whilst the Royal Commission had been able to encourage the involvement from countries all over the world, it was clear that peace was not to be and the nineteenth century was to be met with further conflict and unsettlement among the countries of the world.

### **Future exhibitions inspired by the Great Exhibition**

These conflicts also began to impact other exhibitions which aimed to emulate the success of the 1851 event. The Great Exhibition had 'inaugurated a century of display, self-congratulation, self-promotion and competition among the industrialized nations of the world.'<sup>71</sup> Although there had been many exhibitions throughout Britain and the rest of the world in the first half of the nineteenth century, these nationally focused events had nothing quite like the impact that the Great Exhibition did. One of the key notions of the Exhibition was to encourage friendly comparison and competition between Britain, the Empire and the rest of the world and it was this ideal which encouraged other countries to have their own. It was the Great Exhibition, therefore, that inspired exhibitions in, for example, 'Paris (1855), London (1862), Paris (1867), Vienna (1873), Philadelphia (1876)'.<sup>72</sup>

Only a few years after the close of the 1851 Great Exhibition did another international event take place. In 1855, a similar trade fair was held in Paris, 'one nearly equal to that of Hyde Park in most particulars and more superior to it in others.'<sup>73</sup> According to Frank Anderson Trapp, 'in the effort to be more truly universal, its organizers included with its industrial display a vast retrospective

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<sup>71</sup> Diana Reynolds, 'Interpretive Essay' in John E. Findling (ed by), *Events that Changed Great Britain Since 1689*, p. 99.

<sup>72</sup> John R. Davis, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 215.

<sup>73</sup> Anon, *The British Almanac*, (London: Stationers' Company, 1862), p. 87.



exhibition of paintings, sculpture, prints and architecture to recall man's accomplishments in the arts.<sup>74</sup> Like its predecessor, this event was meant to 'symbolize peace and culture even though the Crimean War shadowed the peace and the absence of Russian participation in the fair subtracted from the universality of the culture.'<sup>75</sup> The absence of the presence of Russia was highly significant as it demonstrated the impact that the Crimean War was having internationally. Russia had attended the Great Exhibition, which also encouraged peaceful co-operation, and so the absence of them at the Paris Exhibition highlighted once more that Prince Albert's hopes of peace had sadly not been fulfilled.

Although according to Auerbach, 'from the International Exhibition of 1862 through the end of the nineteenth century, the Great Exhibition of 1851 was viewed positively, as a success for Britain and a symbol of peace', the extent to which this was the case must be questioned.<sup>76</sup> After the Paris Exhibition in 1855, the Society of Arts began to plan another affair in Britain. The initial plan was to have the event ten years after the Great Exhibition, in 1861, but this did not materialise. In the latter part of the 1850s, 'France, Austria and Italy plunged into war, and men's thoughts became turned more to guns and swords than to peaceful industry.'<sup>77</sup> Any hopes at peaceful cooperation were, therefore, put on hold as the Society believed that it would have been difficult to garner any support or interest for another exhibition at this time while many were concerned with war.

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<sup>74</sup> Frank Anderson Trapp, 'The Universal Exhibition of 1855', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol 107, no 747, (1965), pp300-305, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/874679?seq=1>> [Accessed May 27<sup>th</sup> 2021] p. 300.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>76</sup> Jeffrey A. Auerbach, 'The Great Exhibition and Historical Memory', p. 91.

<sup>77</sup> Anon, *The British Almanac*, (London: Stationers' Company, 1862), p. 96.

It was decided, therefore, that the event would take place in 1862 (in the South Kensington area purchased by the Royal Commission) and would have a very different tone to its predecessor. Whereas the Great Exhibition had a competitive approach with displays divided by country, the International Exhibition of 1862 would instead be divided by the classes of the objects instead. It was this feature that would 'distinguish that of 1862 from all its predecessors', for example, 'in the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Fine Arts received no formal recognition.'<sup>78</sup> Much like the Great Exhibition, the International Exhibition had the same time frame – it opened in May and ran for six months before closing in October. This exhibition also matched the number of visitors from 1851 and was visited by just over 6.1 million people who came to see over 29,000 exhibits from around thirty-seven countries. While international co-operation between countries was constantly faced with wars and conflicts in the period after 1851, it is clear that these exhibitions were still able to bring countries and people together. It was, therefore, 'the subsequent world exhibitions in Paris and in London in 1862 [that] extended the horizon of the collective experience of international comparison.'<sup>79</sup>

Additionally, alongside this 'collective experience' through other exhibitions, the development of museums post-1851 (often as a direct result of these trade fairs) is also incredibly significant. The Great Exhibition seemed to have an immediate impact on the popularity of museums as attendance for the British Museum went from '720,463 in 1850 to 2,230,242 in 1851.'<sup>80</sup> This event had provided people of all ethnicities and social classes the opportunity to have access to displays from all over

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<sup>78</sup> Anon, *The British Almanac*, p. 96.

<sup>79</sup> Wolfram Kaiser, 'Cultural Transfer of Free Trade at the World Exhibitions 1851-1862', p. 579.

<sup>80</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 72.

the world which encouraged further public displays in art, science and history. It was through these fairs that 'exposition authorities sought to use the power of display to convince the public of the necessary connection between scientific and technological innovation and national progress.'<sup>81</sup> This was clear in the very early stages of the planning for the Great Exhibition as the Royal Commission made apparent their intentions to educate the masses in science and technology, and it was this ideal that was taken further in the many trade fairs that followed.

Furthermore, these educational intentions could be seen not only through the many expositions that followed the Great Exhibition but through the increasing presence of museums in the latter half of the century. Links between these expositions and museums became clear as Bennett highlights, 'the nineteenth century saw their [museums] doors opened to the general public – witnesses whose presence was just as essential to a display of power.'<sup>82</sup> As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, the Royal Commission received a grant to match the money that they had – a mixture of money made from subscriptions and the profits from the Exhibition. With this, the Commission purchased land in the South Kensington area with the hopes of erecting educational institutions. As a result, the rest of the nineteenth century saw the development of museums such as the Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum (initially known as the South Kensington Museum) which made up a central part of this purchased land.

According to the British Museum Act of 1753, museums were 'not only for the inspection and entertainment of the learned and the curious, but for the general use

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<sup>81</sup> Robert W. Rydell, 'World Fairs and Museums', p. 143.

<sup>82</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 59.

and benefit of the public.’<sup>83</sup> It was clear by the Royal Commission’s desire to go ahead with these educational institutions rather than committing themselves to the Sydenham Crystal Palace that many of its members had a desire for the people in Britain to become actively involved and interested in these institutions. In his essay, ‘The Exhibitionary Complex’, Bennett discusses the further development of museums and the introduction of them into the public sphere during the nineteenth century. In this analysis Bennett uses a comparison to Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* which focuses on the removal of asylums and prisons from the public eye. While such punishments were decreasing as a public spectacle, the institutions comprising part of the Exhibitionary Complex, however, ‘were involved in the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains in which they had previously been displayed (but to a restricted public) into progressively more open and public arenas.’<sup>84</sup>

As Bennett highlights, the Exhibition had ‘brought together an ensemble of disciplines and techniques of display that had been developed within the previous histories of museums, panoramas, Mechanics’ Institute exhibitions, art galleries, and arcades.’<sup>85</sup> It had, therefore, further encouraged the idea of public displays of significant collections of history and art when it closed in October 1851 and was a catalyst for the increase of museums throughout the latter half of the century. This event was ‘a kind of great but evanescent museum of contemporary arts from all over the world; the urge to collect, assemble and exhibit and usually possess could

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<sup>83</sup> Crook referenced in Nick Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case*, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 60-61.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

take more than one form' and this was demonstrated in the six months it was open.<sup>86</sup> While the profits made from the Exhibition contributed heavily to the building of new institutions post-1851, it was clear that its educational goals were being reflected after the event had finished. As J. W. Burrow states, 'the second half of the nineteenth century was the great age of new museums, of arts and archaeology, palaeontology, natural history, ethnography and anthropology.'<sup>87</sup> The institutions being developed clearly reflected this desire to encourage the public to actively educate themselves in sectors that were not previously accessible to all.

By setting up these museums, all of which had a different focus, they were able to appeal to many different groups of people and this would have inevitably led to the desire for more institutions of this kind around the country and the globe. Merriman states that 'it is in the Victorian period that we see the proliferation of antiquarianism, museums, historical and archaeological societies and the beginnings of systematic academic study of the past' and it is this that is clearly evident around the time of the Exhibition, and in particular, the years following it.<sup>88</sup> This demonstrates the clear impact and influence that the Great Exhibition had in relation to the development of museums in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Chapter four has considered at length the direct results of the Exhibition, along with its short and long term legacy. Through analysing the profits made in the six months it was open, this chapter has focused on the use of the money to leave a long lasting impact, with the erection of educational institutions such as the Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. It has also considered the significance

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<sup>86</sup> J. W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought 1848-1914*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), np.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, np.

<sup>88</sup> Nick Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case*, p. 11.

of moving the Crystal Palace to Sydenham where it remained a London landmark until 1936.

It has also studied whether the event was a success or failure in terms of educating the working classes and spreading imperialist propaganda. The Exhibition highlighted the possibility of mixing social classes and emphasised Prince Albert's goal of improving the working classes' living conditions, and this chapter has analysed the ways in which the event had benefited the working classes.

Furthermore, by studying the Empire in detail, this chapter has demonstrated that the Empire was not a priority to the British people in this period and its position at the Exhibition had been exaggerated. This chapter has added to the overall objective of the thesis by highlighting the significance of the event for both Victorian Britain and the development of industry but also in London today with its material legacy still evident through the institutions erected as a result of the profits.

## **Conclusion**

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was, Jane Budge argues, ‘the brightest year of all Victoria’s reign, when [t]he world was at peace, and England, prosperous at home and honoured abroad, saw men of almost every nation gather in friendly rivalry to her shores.’<sup>1</sup> Writing about the history of Britain up to Queen Victoria’s reign, Budge recognised that the following years after the Exhibition were met by war and conflicts. With that, the Exhibition was something of a standalone event when it came to encouraging international co-operation and Budge emphasises this in her reflection of what it contributed towards Queen Victoria’s reign.

This thesis has explored, in detail, the specific intentions behind the Exhibition and its impact on the working classes and by extension, the impacts on trade and commerce. This study has found that, as a result of encouraging working class participation, tourism via the railways began to increase as a result of the Exhibition and allowed for people to travel the country – also giving opportunities to find new employment around the country.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 was the product of many different aims and ambitions, with members of the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851 having varied backgrounds and intentions. This played a huge contributing factor to its overall success. These varied aims encouraged wider interest in the event, from different areas of society. For Prince Albert in particular, the priority had been to improve the lives of the working class people in the country, and to encourage peace

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Budge, *Great Events in England’s History*, (London: John Marshall, 1873) p. 222.

and co-operation throughout the countries of the world. This study has analysed these events more deeply than many other works focusing on the Exhibition as this thesis looked in detail at the specific decisions that were made in order to benefit the working classes and involve them directly. For example, Prince Albert's insistence from early on in his involvement that the labouring class should be included in this event, along with the decisions to make both tickets for the event and for travel more affordable to accommodate those travelling from around the country to come to London for this trade fair. This study, therefore, has helped to pick apart the finer details of exactly why this Exhibition would prove to be such a crucial event in the 1850s in Victorian Britain, what exactly the Commission hoped to achieve with it and whether it met these long-term legacies.

Additionally, this thesis has highlighted the impact that the event had directly on the working classes and, of equal importance, the impact that they directly had on the Exhibition. The Exhibition helped to highlight the popularity of such trade fairs across the classes. Up until the end of May 1851, although steadily growing in attendance, it was not anywhere near as successful as the Commission had hoped. However, as soon as the Shilling Days were announced, the working classes visited in their masses and each month over one million people turned up to the event, as was discussed in detail in chapter three.

The Exhibition also provided a link between the working classes and the rise in the use of railways. As mentioned previously, special excursion trains were put on specifically for the Exhibition, and the working classes made as much use of those as possible, travelling from out in the country to get to London for the event. It is through this link to the railways that we see the Exhibition had a real impact on both the working classes and trade/commerce, as it was giving the working classes



chances to move around the country at an affordable price. It also helped to highlight the rapid expansion of the railways and encouraged people all over the country to start travelling especially for leisure, for example via the package holiday industry which began to spring up at the time, spearheaded by entrepreneurs such as Thomas Cook. While the industrialisation of the railways, in particular, is often looked at in studies of the Exhibition, what is not always considered in detail is the working classes contribution and active involvement both in the event and using this mode of transport to visit it – something that this study has analysed in detail.

The research throughout this thesis has also uncovered that the Exhibition was, to an extent, an advert for an Empire that was not a priority to the British people at this time. As mentioned in chapters one and two, the motives behind planning such an event were heavily based on benefiting Britain and the Empire. By displaying items from the Empire, it was hoped that they would be able to demonstrate their power during this period and would have the chance to compete and compare with the exhibits of other countries. Through organising the event, the size and power of Britain and the Empire became clear. By being allocated half of the space in the Crystal Palace, the organisers were pushing the idea that this truly was to be a British dominated event and would serve as a means of propaganda for the Empire's power.

However, while it did showcase the advancement of British industry, it was the displays from the other countries that were the highlight for most of the visitors. Although xenophobic propaganda was released in *Punch* as a way to shed a negative light on the foreign exhibitors and visitors, it was countries such as France and Russia that were incredibly popular for the people visiting the Exhibition. With

this, it becomes clear that the Empire's presence at the Great Exhibition had indeed been exaggerated, and only a very small minority of exhibits were colonial.

Thus, this analysis of the British Empire before, during and after the Great Exhibition has demonstrated that its reach was not as powerful as it first appeared. Its presence at the 1851 event was overstated and the Empire's dominance began to falter in the years following. Once moved to Sydenham, the organisers of the new Crystal Palace had little interest in displaying colonial items, and its presence at other exhibitions seemed to decline. With the British people rapidly losing interest in the British Empire and what it was meant to symbolise, along with conflicts such as the Crimean War in 1854-1856 and the Indian Rebellion in 1857-1858, it became clear that there were huge cracks appearing in the foundation of the Empire. As a result, it slowly began to lose more of its power, and by the end of Queen Victoria's reign in 1901, it certainly did not reflect the dominance it held early into her reign.

One of the most significant findings when researching this event, however, is that although it only ran for six months, the Exhibition's legacy is still materially evident today. While works such as those by Leapman and Davis do ultimately consider this, there is less discussion on its legacy in an up-to-date context. Not only this, there are only limited amounts of work on the Exhibition that have been released in more recent years, meaning there is little to demonstrate how the impact of the Exhibition is still evident today. This thesis, therefore, took this into consideration and examined the long-term impact of the event, and the ways in which it can still be felt.

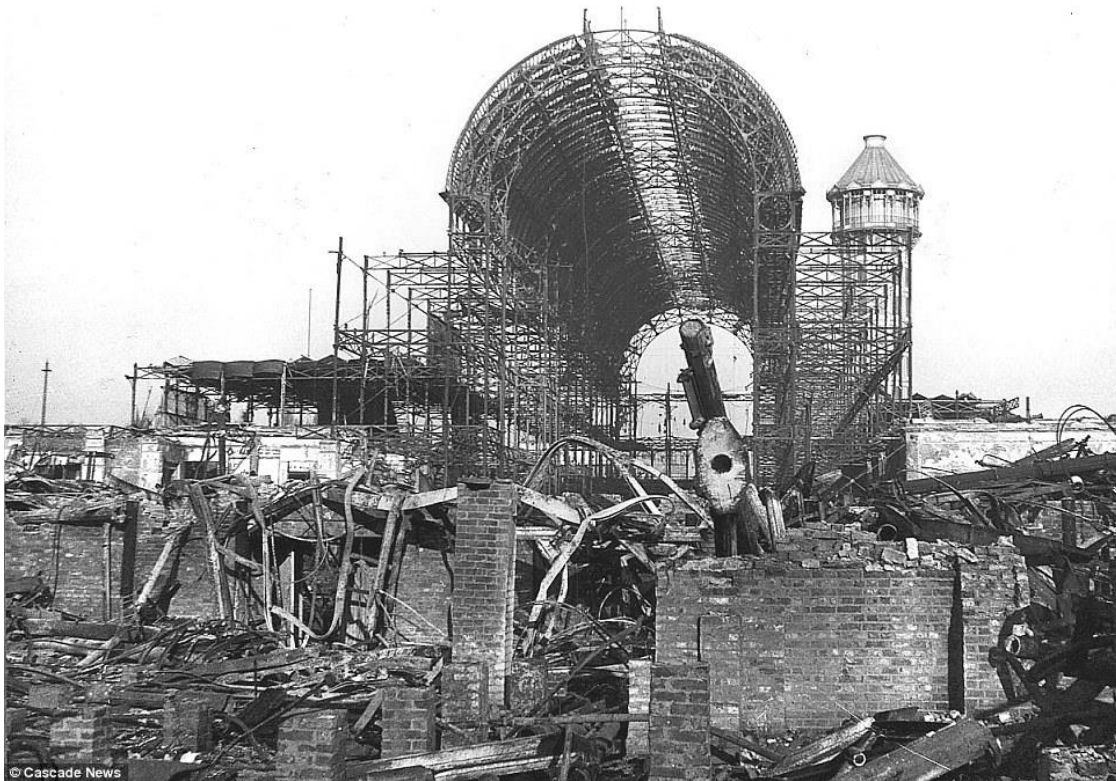
Although it was moved from its original site in Hyde Park, the Sydenham Crystal Palace became a major attraction in London and continued to generate revenue. Acting as a venue for cinemas, concerts, firework displays and expositions, it

remained an important part of London life until its untimely end in 1936. After being a site of entertainment for 82 years, part of the building caught fire in November 1936, rapidly spreading until the Palace could not be saved (see figure 24).<sup>2</sup> This figure emphasises not only the sheer size of the Palace, with its arched transept towering over its surroundings, but the extent of the damage of the fire. During the nineteenth century, although there had been fears that the glass may easily catch on fire, measures were put into place to ensure that if a fire were to happen it would be contained as there would always be someone nearby to maintain the Palace. However, after Queen Victoria's death, the building quickly began falling into disrepair as the government no longer wanted to be paying the costs to help maintain it.

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<sup>2</sup> Anon, 'Phoenix from the Flames', *Daily Mail*, 31 July 2013, in *Mail Online*, <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2382079/Crystal-Palace-replica-planned-Chinese-billionaire.html>> [Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2021].

Figure 24: Daily Mail, Phoenix from the Flames



'Phoenix from the Flames', *Daily Mail*, 31 July 2013, in *Mail Online*,  
<<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2382079/Crystal-Palace-replica-planned-Chinese-billionaire.html>>

Although dubbed 'the end of an era' by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the memory of the Palace still lives on despite it burning down in 1936.<sup>3</sup> Today, some of its remains can still be seen in Crystal Palace Park, providing a reminder of the sheer size and impact that this Palace had. Alongside this, a museum outside the park is dedicated to keeping its legacy alive, containing artefacts from its 79 year history. Furthermore, it is worth also noting its material legacy in the South Kensington area of London today. As mentioned in chapter four, the Royal Commission purchased land to erect educational institutions with the profits made from the Exhibition. Today, these institutions are some of the city's most famous

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas S. Davis, *The Extinct Scene: Late Modernism and Everyday Life*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2015) p. 50.

landmarks and the Exhibition's direct influence on their construction is possibly its most far-reaching and long lasting legacy. Here, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Natural History Museum, Imperial College London, Royal College of Music and the Royal Albert Hall stand as direct reminders of the successes of the Exhibition and the Royal Commission in organising this event.

Overlooking the Royal Albert Hall is one final reminder of the Great Exhibition, and in particular, an individual that is often credited for so much of its success. The Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens, commissioned by Queen Victoria as a long-lasting monument both to her husband and the Great Exhibition, stands overlooking these buildings (see figure 25).<sup>4</sup> What is not commonly known is that this statue of the Prince can be seen clutching the Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The fact that this statue is seen to be holding the catalogue highlights the notion that this was one of Prince Albert's greatest achievements. Although he cannot be credited solely for this event, as he joined the planning stages later than Henry Cole had hoped, his contribution, influence and enthusiasm were monumental to the success of the project. This statue and the world-renowned institutions nearby, therefore, demonstrate the legacy of the Exhibition and that Prince Albert's contributions are still clearly visible in London today.

It is not just materially, however, that the impact of the Exhibition is still evident. Today, the Royal Commission still stands and encourages studies of science and engineering. As a result, they give 35 fellowships a year, demonstrating that the

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<sup>4</sup> Walk London, *Memorial to Albert, Queen Victoria's Prince Consort, Kensington Gardens*, <<https://www.walklondon.com/london-attractions/prince-albert-memorial.htm>> [Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2021].

Commission's initial aims of encouraging education and the advancement in science is still ongoing.

Figure 25: Walk London, *Memorial to Albert, Queen Victoria's Prince Consort*



Walk London, *Memorial to Albert, Queen Victoria's Prince Consort, Kensington Gardens*, <<https://www.walklondon.com/london-attractions/prince-albert-memorial.htm>>

One problem when researching the Great Exhibition is the sheer volume of works on the topic. Therefore, finding an area that required further analysis was challenging. This thesis, however, has been able to focus in much greater detail on the specific individuals and actions involved in shaping this event and the impacts that it had on the wider population in the long-term. At the time of a rapid Industrial Revolution, it is unsurprising that many of the works focusing on this event look in particular towards the advances in industry and what the event would contribute to industrialisation after 1851. It was the recognition of this that helped to shape the focus of this thesis. While the contribution towards industrialisation is of immense importance, it is much harder to consider such an event without focusing specifically on the individuals that

were responsible for the Exhibition and by extension, what their particular motives were. While this has been covered by academics in previous works, the aims of the event are often only mentioned briefly. This thesis, therefore, has provided more detail of the exact origin of the Exhibition and the individuals involved. In many volumes, it is Prince Albert who is given all the credit for the planning and execution of the Great Exhibition. However, this thesis, while taking into consideration his crucial involvement, has instead focused on other key players such as Henry Cole.

This study has helped contribute to future discussions surrounding the topic by moving away from the more scientific aspects of the Exhibition and how the event directly influenced the rapid industrial revolution in Britain, instead choosing to highlight more personal narratives that can sometimes be overlooked in studies of this affair. The focus has been more on the specific individuals involved, and their direct roles when it came to planning. In previous works, academics such as A. N. Wilson touch on the fact that Prince Albert contributed to a huge extent, but they often fail to consider the contribution of other members of the Royal Commission, something which this thesis has attempted to address.

One recommendation for future research on this subject could be to look at this event on a wider spectrum than simply Prince Albert's role and potentially look at the backgrounds and motives of others involved in even greater detail. Furthermore, this thesis has extended the branch of understanding of both the Exhibition's direct impact on the working classes and their direct impact on the success of the Exhibition. In Leapman's book, the notion of Shilling Days has often been touched upon briefly but there are not many works that take into consideration the extent to which the Exhibition impacted this class directly. It is the recommendation of this study that future works on the event can explore in greater detail just how much the

Exhibition benefited the working classes both during the event and post-1851.

Further analysis would also be beneficial to the understanding of the true impact this event had, especially if future research was to explore, in a lot more depth, the extent to which the Exhibition can still be seen today, through the exploration of the impacts of the Natural History Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and by extension the specific role of the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851 and their ties to the development of science in a modern context.

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was a hugely significant event in Victorian Britain. It put on display to the world how rapidly Britain and the Empire were modernising their industrial sectors and encouraged friendly competition with the rest of the world. It also laid the foundations for the way that exhibitions would continue to run throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, helping encourage the development of industry and friendly competition between countries. After the success of the 1851 event, there was an exhibition somewhere throughout the world at least every year for the rest of the 1800s and into the early 1900s, and its influence, along with that of its famous patron, has been demonstrated here to continue to be felt throughout Britain today in many different ways.

Final word count: 31,901



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