PAPERS READ AT THE LAMAS LOCAL HISTORY CONFERENCE HELD AT THE MUSEUM OF LONDON ON 19 NOVEMBER 2005: 'WHEN LAMAS BEGAN: LONDON IN 1855'*

1855: ARCHITECTURE IN LONDON

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(Pevsner Architectural Guides)

This paper looks at the development of London's architecture by 1855, the buildings that gave it its specific and unique character, and some of the significant changes taking place in the 1850s that had implications for the city's architecture for the rest of the century.

A good representation of London's development by 1851 in geographic and architectural terms is Tallis's map (Fig 1), produced for visitors to the 1851 Great Exhibition; a reminder that the 1850s were the dawn of an age of mass tourism for London. By this period the city and its suburbs were home to 2.5 million people, with a working population entering it each day numbering into the hundreds of thousands. The map not only shows us how recent so much of the city's expansion had been, with streets built up from Paddington in the west to Poplar in the east, but also how much open territory still surrounded the metropolis, all of which was consumed in the ensuing 50 years. Around the border of the map is a selection of 1849 views of all the principal public buildings and places of amusement in the metropolis and suburbs, thus 'furnishing the visitor to the Great Exhibition ... with ... a faithful representation of the most important edifices and places of entertainment'.

What the map really shows us is the character of the Late Georgian and Early Victorian metropolis with the emphasis on several very recently completed major institutions, notably Sir John Soane's Bank of England (1788–1827); University College (1826–8 by William Wilkins); the National Gallery (1833–8 by Wilkins), and the monumental British Museum of 1823–52 by Sir Robert Smirke. It was the round Reading Room of the latter, begun in 1854 and completed in 1857, that drew most attention among the handful of major buildings illustrated in *The Builder* for 1855. The latter was the most important of the 19th-century architectural periodicals (founded 1843) and the one to which all local historians should look when researching.

But was it simply 'the most important edifices and places of entertainment' that drew the attention of visitors to mid-19th-century London? Certainly not. Several features of the 1851 map give a clue to its less obvious attractions.

By 1855 London was a world city, a status achieved largely in the previous five decades. From the beginning of the 19th century visitors to London came to marvel at its system of enclosed docks, clearly visible on the map along the eastern stretch of the Thames. These had been rushed into existence in two periods of activity,

*Two other papers read at the conference were published in the 150th anniversary edition of *Transactions* (Volume 55): B Sloane 'Archaeology in London: annual round-up and news for 1855/6' and E M Bowlt 'Some early Lamas meetings and outings'.

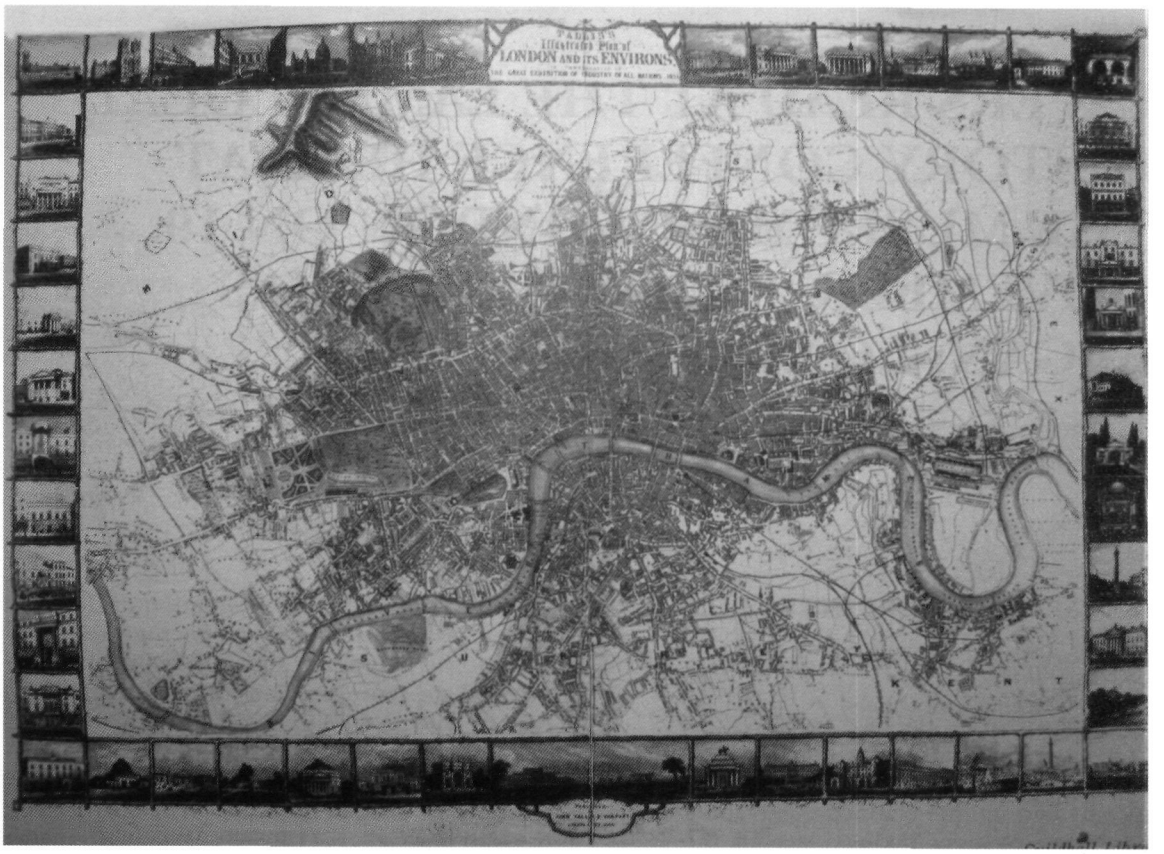

Fig 1. Map produced by Tallis for visitors to the Great Exhibition in 1851

the first in the early years after 1800: on the river's north side alone were the London Docks, the West and East India Docks, and the Regents Canal Basin at Limehouse to link the river-borne trade with the Midlands. A second phase of activity spread these docks over an even greater area, consuming much of Wapping and Shadwell and, by the 1860s, the barren marshes of Millwall. In the year of LAMAS's foundation, the last work was being completed on the London Dock system with the New Shadwell Basin.

Connecting trade along the river was matched by trade across it to the expanding urban districts on the Surrey side. Several new river crossings appeared in the first half of the 19th century, including toll bridges at Southwark, Waterloo, and Vauxhall and the rebuilding of London Bridge in 1823–31. Beneath the river ran the Thames Tunnel, initiated in 1825 using the revolutionary process, patented by Marc Isambard Brunel, of tunnelling just below the surface of the Thames using a shield to protect the workers. In spite of inundations the work was finally completed in 1843 and its popularity instant. *The Builder* in 1855 records the large numbers of foot passengers who passed through each month.

The railways, marked by looping lines across the 1851 map, brought new and ambitious building types to the capital in the form of the railway termini — notably at Paddington, completed 1850–54 by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, for the Great Western Railway, and King's Cross (Lewis Cubitt, 1851–2, for the Great Northern Railway).

More generally, Tallis's map presents a picture of London after several decades of housing development, the legacy of the series of building booms in the period up to 1830 and its resumption in the early decades of Victoria's reign. This was one of the most interesting periods in the history of English urban planning, the showpiece of which was John Nash's improvements in Westminster, tracing a line from St James's Park to the

new Regent's Park, ringed by villas. Its influence was immense and its impact was felt throughout the suburbs with the rushing up of streets and squares of terraces, their brick façades often concealed behind creamy stucco — a material whose versatility for modelling achieved the appearance of stone on the cheap.

The area enjoying the greatest vogue for developments of the 1840s and 1850s was West London. By 1855 Belgravia and Pimlico linked Westminster to Knightsbridge, Chelsea, and Brompton, while streets of houses also spread between Paddington, Bayswater, and Kensington. In the latter the major planned development was that of the Ladbroke estate; begun in the 1840s and typified by Stanley Gardens, laid out in 1852 by Thomas Allom, who also designed the convincingly Italianate St Peter's church to terminate the view along the street (Fig 2). These new developments were not only designed with gardens and crescents of private green space, but also took advantage of their proximity to the open space of Hyde Park. Also visible on the 1851 map at its eastern and southern extremities are two of the major new 'green lungs' provided as an antidote to the unrestrained development of large areas of mid-Victorian London not served by the Royal Parks. Victoria Park, between Bethnal Green and Hackney, was laid out by Sir James Pennethorne in 1841–5; the slightly smaller Battersea Park (on the south side of the river) was planned by Pennethorne in 1844 but not laid out until 1854. Although much of South London was still relatively undeveloped even by 1855, it is clear from the map that the north-east corner of the city was already heavily built-up. Here the social profile of development was very different.

In the East End, the cumulative effect of the docks and the railways allied to the demands of an increasingly prosperous capital city had created a large industrial suburb. But these enterprises had destroyed as much housing as they encouraged, while drawing in workers in ever greater numbers. In the '40s, '50s and '60s certain districts around the City — Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, and Spitalfields — and the riverside districts of Wapping and Shadwell became synonymous with slumdom. Perhaps indicative of the built environment of these areas are the illustrations which appeared in *The Builder* in 1855 accompanying an article on housing in Bermondsey — much of it ancient and of pre-urban type but also including cheap terraced

Fig 2. View of Stanley Gardens with St Peter's church at far end

houses with open sewers lovingly detailed by the illustrator. Of course not everywhere was like that. Modest but decent streets of terraced houses had been erected in numerous areas of the less fashionable parts of London in the period after 1815, but these were overtaken to some degree by the problem of overcrowding. What survives of this period is inevitably the best of its kind, spared the major slum clearances of the 20th century. Cyprus Street, just south of Victoria Park in Bethnal Green, is a good example from the mid-1850s.

The article in *The Builder*, it should be said, was less concerned with the question of housing design and more with the issue of sanitation — a matter that dominated the investigations of health reformers, who by 1855 had reported extensively on the state of the slum areas and the effect of the series of cholera outbreaks that befell London in the first half of the 19th century. A small number of modest but significant East End buildings provide evidence of the reforming spirit of the mid-century, for example the remains of a washhouse and public baths in Old Castle Street, Whitechapel (its façade now incorporated into the Guildhall University's Women's Library), opened in 1851 by Prince Albert. It was designed by P P Baly, engineer, for the charitable Committee for Promoting the Establishment of Baths and Washhouses for the Labouring Classes. In the same year the first Baths and Washhouses Act was passed, allowing

local authorities to erect such institutions, but provision remained largely in the hands of philanthropists. So too was the provision of the growing number of small medical institutions that would have been a visible feature of the poorer districts of 1850s and 1860s London. The provision of free medicine for the poor had a long history and numerous free dispensaries were set up by medics in deprived districts in the 18th century. But purpose-built institutions are a feature of the mid-19th century. Two good examples are the Eastern Dispensary, Leman Street, Whitechapel (founded in 1783; rebuilt by G H Simmonds in 1859) and the Queen Adelaide Dispensary, Pollard Row, Bethnal Green (built in 1865–6, by Lee & Long, a firm who subsequently specialised in hospital design — a modest example of the increasing specialism among mid-Victorian architects) (Fig 3).

Fig 3. The Eastern Dispensary, Leman Street, Whitechapel

In spite of local efforts to address the immediate needs of the more overcrowded districts of mid-Victorian London, there was a desperate need by 1855 for administration of matters on a

Fig 4. The Pumping Station at Abbey Mills, Stratford

city-wide scale. In that year was established the Metropolitan Board of Works as the first London-wide authority — one of several initiatives of the 1850s to reform local government as a whole. Its lasting built legacy was the Main Drainage project, perhaps the most celebrated engineering success of the period, planning for which got underway from 1855. In that year Michael Faraday described the Thames as 'an opaque, pale brown fluid. Near the bridges the feculence rolled up in clouds so dense that they were visible at the surface, the whole river was for a time a real sewer'. Three years later in 1858 the stench during the hottest summer on record drove the members from the Houses of Parliament and forced the passing of an act to allow work to begin to the designs of Sir Joseph Bazalgette. A visible consequence of this grand scheme were the pumping stations, including that at Abbey Mills, Stratford of 1865–8 by Charles Driver in an extravagant Byzantine style (Fig 4).

The Board of Works also began to play an instrumental role in slum clearance in the 1850s, though more often than not as a by-product of street improvements, which led the way for the appearance of another new urban building type that would become a distinctive feature of London for the rest of the century: improved working class dwellings. Small schemes of dwellings had first been erected in the 1840s. Prototype examples of two-storey cottage dwellings had been exhibited by Henry Roberts at the Great Exhibition and the principle can be seen reworked into a surviving five-storey scheme at St George's Buildings in Bourdon Street, Mayfair (1852–3), with a communal, open staircase and cast-iron balconies providing access to the flats at each level (Fig 5). But the ten years after 1855 saw the emergence of several charitable societies and philanthropic building companies such as the Peabody Trust (founded 1863) who built on a more ambitious scale. The first Peabody buildings, at Commercial Street, Spitalfields, by H A Darbishire, still survive.

So much then for some of the distinctive new building types to emerge in the years before and after LAMAS's foundation; what can be said of the style of this period? The answer, as the buildings already noted here can attest, is entertainingly diverse. After the dominance of classicism in the public buildings and polite architecture of the early 19th century, the early Victorian decades saw a proliferation of more ornate styles. The Grecian style of the British

Fig 5. St George's Buildings in Bourdon Street, Mayfair

Museum, for example, though very much in vogue in the 1830s when building began, was out of step by the time it was completed in the 1850s. The New Palace of Westminster (1837–69) provides a complete contrast in style but a similar experience in the speed of passing fashion. The competition for its design in 1834 had required submissions in 'Gothic or Elizabethan' dress and was won by Sir Charles Barry, one of the leading architects of mid-19th-century London, who was assisted in the details of the design by the fervent and scholarly Gothicist A W N Pugin. The latter's publications, *Contrasts* (1836) and *True Principles* (1841), provided the ideological rigour to promote Gothic as a 'national', patriotic style which through its medieval associations connoted a chivalric tradition — the law, learning, and religion. By 1855 the Palace of Westminster was still only partially complete and even by then its particular brand of Tudor or Perpendicular Gothic was passing from favour. It is clear from the diversely treated façades of the proliferation of purpose-built town halls, vestry halls, and district boards of works offices, which emerge after the Metropolitan Management Act of 1850 throughout the suburbs, that this 'Battle

of Styles' was not easily resolved. Classicism maintained its popularity but now through revival of Italian Renaissance styles, most famously in the design of the Foreign Office (competition 1856–7, built 1862–75), which was begun to a Gothic design by George Gilbert Scott but was eventually executed, for pragmatic reasons, in the style of the Cinquecento.

Although in such secular buildings there was no determination about the appropriateness of a single style, debates around church architecture were by 1855 far more clearly defined. London's suburban expansion by this date had required new churches but the products of the early 19th-century church building acts were notable chiefly for their economy of construction and emphasis inside on large galleries designed for hearing sermons. By 1855 churches of a very different character had begun to emerge. Many were concentrated in the poorer districts, such as those erected by the Bishop of London's Metropolis Churches Fund (established 1836) in North and East London (ten of them in Bethnal Green alone). Some of these started to exhibit the principles of design espoused by the Roman Catholic Pugin for buildings more medieval in character and specifically in the 'Middle Pointed' style of the later 13th and 14th centuries. These ideas were communicated to the Anglican Church by the Cambridge Camden Society (founded 1839, but from 1845, when it based itself in London, known as the Ecclesiological Society) for the study of ecclesiastical architecture and the promotion of church building and restoration. Churches conforming to these principles can be seen all over London and share common features: they are built of stone (of which London's medieval churches were constructed), with a deep, externally visible chancel; traceried windows with stained glass; and solid and emphatic towers and spires. Their interiors were to be axially arranged, focused on the altar, in its own distinct chancel. Planning was to allow for processions and congregations were to be marshalled into open benches facing east. A typical, perhaps minor, example is St John, Notting Hill, which provides the focus for the Ladbroke estate development but, in contrast to the essentially Italianate character of the surrounding houses, poses as a stone-built village church.

But the 1850s was a transitional period for the Gothic Revival and saw a move away from churches content simply to follow medieval precedent towards a version of Gothic that was avowedly of the 19th century. Two major monuments to this change belong to the 1850s: the Ecclesiological Society's model church, All Saints, Margaret Street, by William Butterfield (1849–59), and G E Street's St James the Less, Pimlico (1859–61), both of which fused German and Italian Gothic. Both churches exploited the aesthetic potential of coloured brick on the exterior, 'structural polychromy', which continued inside with even greater richness in combination with tiles and mosaic. Such treatment can be seen even in quite minor buildings in unexpected parts of London such as a former Presbyterian church, built for Scottish shipbuilders on the Isle of Dogs in 1853 by T E Knightley, which takes the form of a polychrome North Italian brick basilica, or the (now demolished) Crown Life building, designed by the Dublin architects Deane & Woodward in Venetian Gothic for a site in New Bridge Street (1858). The style of the latter in particular shows the growing influence in architecture at this time of the writer and critic John Ruskin, whose publications *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3) were well known by 1855. But there can be no finer example of the freer forms of Gothic initiated in the 1850s than Scott's colossal Midland Grand Hotel (1865–74) with its striking assemblage of French and Italian Gothic motifs.

These buildings, though drawing on historical sources, were the very essence of modern buildings both in the materials and the manner of their construction and function. New varieties of stone and coloured bricks were imported to London by the railways, which also exploited for their own buildings the mid-Victorian innovations in iron and glass construction to achieve the dramatic spans of the roofs covering their platforms and concourses. Iron was widely used also in the construction of the Palace of Westminster, but concealed in Gothic finery. Elsewhere in the 1850s, however, a functional tradition was being established in which these materials could be used without reference to historical styles.

We return to where we began with Tallis's map, which we must remind ourselves gave pride of place in its surrounding illustrations to Paxton's Crystal Palace, built entirely of mass-produced iron and glass. Perhaps we should recognise that this was the greatest monument of the 1850s. Although demounted from its original location

in Hyde Park shortly after the Exhibition, it was in the year of LAMAS's foundation that its immediate legacy was realised with construction of the first museum at South Kensington from the proceeds of the Exhibition. This comprised a tripartite cast-iron frame construction with bow-string trussed roofs and cladding of corrugated iron: an appearance which earned it the cruel soubriquet the 'Brompton Boilers'. It survives, remarkably, reclad in a brick skin by J W Wild (1865–8), as the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood — one reminder of the diverse and innovative character for which London's architecture in 1855 should be remembered.

LONDON MUSEUMS OF THE 1850s

Anthony Burton

We readily assume nowadays that when someone digs up something interesting, the right place for it is in a museum. But, of course, archaeologists themselves took time to come round to this view, and, in the early days of archaeology, there were not many museums that were interested in receiving archaeological material. That was certainly the case in the 1850s. So my examination of London museums at that time will reveal a rather negative picture, so far as archaeology and local history are concerned. All the same, it will be interesting simply to survey the small group of museums that were around in London in the 1850s, and to notice a brash newcomer which then appeared.

Before focusing on London, a quick glance across Britain as a whole will help to set the scene. The first public museum in England, and arguably in the world, was the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, founded by Elias Ashmole in 1677 to house the collections of the Tradescant brothers, and opened to the public in 1683. By the 1850s it had settled into its new building, constructed in 1841–5 to the designs of C R Cockerell. In 1845 the same architect also completed the building begun by George Basevi to house Cambridge University's Fitzwilliam Museum, which grew from collections bequeathed by Viscount Fitzwilliam. The Ashmolean and the Fitzwilliam Museums included antiquities, coins, and paintings. A somewhat earlier university museum was the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow, built in 1804 to house the collections of William Hunter, which embraced natural history and geology, as well as art. These three university museums all adopted a neo-classical style of architecture, presenting themselves as temples of the muses.

Aside from these important public museums, Britain in the early 19th century saw quite a vigorous growth of small private museums, created by the 'Lit-and-Phil' movement. From the mid-18th century onwards, cultured people, usually of the middle classes, came together to found local associations for the study of literature, history, science, and art. They often acquired their own premises, where they would gather together not only libraries (of literature, history, and philosophy) but also collections — of science (usually geology and natural history), of local archaeological material, of local history (ducking-stools and scolds' bridles were favourite items), and indeed of anything that seemed interesting. They called themselves by some such name as 'Literary and Philosophical Institution' (hence the abbreviation 'Lit-and-Phil'), and usually housed themselves in modest neo-classical buildings (such as those in York, Bristol, or Scarborough).

A brief list of the 'Lit-and-Phil' museums set up in the first half of the 19th century will indicate the rapid spread of such museums. There is no comprehensive account of the 'Lit-and-Phil' movement, so this list is mostly derived from a 20th-century directory of museums (Markham 1931):

1813 Newcastle on Tyne
1814 Liverpool
1818 Truro
1820 Bristol; Leeds
1823 York; Whitby
1825 Bath; Canterbury; Inverness
1828 Scarborough
1829 Plymouth
1830 Halifax
1831 Chichester
1832 Saffron Walden
1833 Ludlow
1834 Kelso
1835 Chelmsford; Kendal
1836 Sunderland; Warwick
1840 Huntingdon; Penzance
1842 Stamford
1845 Frome
1846 Lewes
1849 Taunton
1850 Caerleon

These museums witness to a real grass-roots effort of self-improvement in provincial Britain. But inevitably their collections tended to be small, miscellaneous, and easy to make fun of. An art critic in 1855 emphasised the jarring contrasts to be found in such collections.

> ... Pictures and objects of natural history, sculpture and New Zealand war clubs and paddles, bronzes and stuffed birds, illuminated manuscripts and Indian pagods [sic], are jumbled together. They contribute nothing to the formation or benefit of ... artists, or for the guidance of public taste.

Furthermore, because these museums belonged to private institutions, it was hard for the general public to gain admission to them. Our critic says that they 'are as difficult of access as princesses in enchanted castles' (Heath Wilson 1855, 8). Still, they helped to establish a nationwide museum culture in the Victorian period, and provide a background for what we now look at in London.

Moving in on London, we find, pre-eminent in the foreground, the British Museum. This opened to the public on 15 January 1759, and at that time consisted of the core collection of Sir Hans Sloane, bequeathed in 1753, together with two libraries, the manuscripts of the Earl of Oxford and the Cottonian Library. The Government set up the British Museum by Act of Parliament, and housed it in Montague House, Bloomsbury. Though public funds were only grudgingly bestowed on it, it grew rapidly, with the addition of the Royal Library, Sir William Hamilton's Greek vases, Sir Charles Towneley's classical sculpture collection, the Elgin marbles, ethnographical and botanical material collected by Captain Cook and Sir Joseph Banks, and much more in the way of antiquities and natural phenomena. By 1825 it needed larger accommodation, and a new building, designed by Sir Robert Smirke, was begun. It was only completed in the 1840s, so its revised displays would still have been fairly novel for visitors in the 1850s. Still more novel would have been the great round Reading Room, which was con-structed between 1852 and 1857 in the central courtyard.

The British Museum had a reputation for being unwelcoming to visitors. Sir Henry Ellis, who was Director from 1827 to 1856, thought that the museum was too much used, and was against opening in Easter week because, as he said, 'the most mischievous portion of the population is abroad and about at such a time ... the more vulgar class would crowd in ...' (Miller 1973, 139). A member of the vulgar class remembered trying to pay a visit to the Museum on a Saturday: 'Sir Henry Ellis ... very speedily came up to him with, "How dare you, sir, enter *our* house on a Saturday?" and the intruder, with a whispered protest against the pronoun, was glad to escape from the threats of the irate knight' (*The Builder*, 26 July 1873, 579). The British Museum was gradually prised open to visitors. In 1856 it was open free on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, at varying hours depending on daylight: 10 till 4 from November to February; 10 till 5 in March, April, September, and October; 10 till 6 in summer; it also opened on Saturday afternoons in May, June, and July.[1]

The British Museum also incurred criticism because, although its collections ranged over classical and oriental antiquities, natural history, and ethnography, not to mention the national library, it seemed to have no interest in British history, in British antiquities. This neglect evoked vigorous protest from archaeologists, for example Thomas Pettigrew, writing in 1851:

> We are absolutely at this time, in the middle of the nineteenth century, without any collection that can be called truly British. It is true that we have a British Museum, but in vain will you seek, within the walls of that now gigantic building, any collection of British remains. (MacGregor 1998, 128)

And Charles Roach Smith:

> Foreigners had long reproached us for the neglect with which we treated the valuable remains of ancient art illustrative of our history ... They asked, when they visited the British Museum, for the halls and chambers consecrated to British, to Romano-British, to Saxon, to Norman, and to English antiquities; and were astounded when told that such apartments existed not. (MacGregor 1998, 131)

In the course of the 19th century, the neglect was remedied, largely through the efforts of a single curator, Augustus Wollaston Franks. It is just as well that he had a private income, and combined great tact with great persistence, for he had quite a struggle to establish his speciality. At first he had to squat in a corner of the Department of Antiquities. Then, amazingly, after a re-organisation in 1860, he and his British collections were for six years part of the Department of Oriental Antiquities. He finally

became Keeper of a new Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities in 1866 (Miller 1973, 213, 299, 313ff).

Notwithstanding its lapses in coverage, the British Museum prides itself on being a 'universal' museum — one of those museums that tries to embrace the whole of human culture. It fails, inevitably — and in one respect especially it is unlike other universal museums such as the Louvre: it does not embrace Western Fine Painting. That function in London belongs to the National Gallery, which the Government set up as a national museum in 1824. A new building for it, designed by William Wilkins, was opened in Trafalgar Square in 1838. I do not propose to discuss picture galleries. Let us proceed with museums.

The only other London museum in the 1850s that was directly funded by the Government was Sir John Soane's Museum, a curious anomaly. The great architect Soane turned his house, and adjoining houses, in Lincoln's Inn Fields into a highly personal museum, which contained much more than the architectural drawings and models that one might expect an architect to collect. Its constricted rooms accommodated, in artful though bewildering confusion, antique sculptures, vases, and bronzes; stained glass and Gothic fragments 'arranged to resemble a ruined cloister'; sarcophagi from Thebes and Egypt; ancient gems and intaglios; paintings and drawings; busts of Soane's contemporaries; and such personalia as 'a richly-mounted pistol, taken by Peter the Great from the Turkish Bey at Azof, 1699', Napoleonic relics, 'the watch, measuring-rods, and compasses used by Sir Christopher Wren', and gilt ivory furniture that had belonged to Tippoo Sahib (Timbs 1855, 543–4). Remarkably, Soane obtained an Act of Parliament to preserve this museum in perpetuity, and there it still is. It has always been something of a hidden treasure, visited by few. In 1856 you could visit it free on Tuesdays, from 1 February to 31 August, and additionally on Thursday and Friday in April, May, and June, between 10 and 4. Tickets had to be applied for previously, and were sent by post.

A museum that started out as a private enterprise but was eventually taken over by the Government was the India Museum. The East India Company was founded in 1600, to promote trade with India and South-East Asia, and by the end of the 18th century was administering most of India. The Company's headquarters were at East India House in Leadenhall Street, rebuilt in 1799. Here worked Charles Lamb and John Stuart Mill. And here, at the start of the 19th century, a library and museum stumbled into existence, and proceeded to grow, as museums and libraries do. After the Indian Mutiny in 1857–8, the Government nationalised the Company and directly ruled India as a colony. The administration, along with the museum, moved to Whitehall, and eventually, after endless controversy, the museum was dispersed in 1879, the greater part going to the South Kensington Museum. The museum had been first conceived as an aid to trade, which was the main concern of the Company. It aimed to collect natural materials and products from India, but it soon found that enthusiastic servants of the Company were unloading on it all sorts of stuff: 'a long-nosed tapir and birds with exotic plumage from Java; cases crammed with iridescent insects; the "Babylonian Stone" and five bricks which a label credulously described as being "the original bricks which the Israelites were compelled to make without straw"; ... an Oriental opulence of gold and silver ornaments, pearls and gems; spun and woven silks and woollens, canopies, carpets and rugs hanging and draped everywhere' – and what can only be described as colonial loot, such as plunder from the Battle of Seringapatam, including the footstool of Tippoo Sultan's throne, and Tippoo's mechanical tiger, which was always the most popular exhibit (Desmond 1982, 1, 3). In 1856, the Museum was open free every Friday, from 10 to 4.

A smaller museum with a similarly exotic atmosphere was the museum of the London Missionary Society, which had been open to the public from the 1820s. One might visit this to marvel at ethnographical curiosities, but of course it was chiefly intended, as its catalogue stated, to 'excite, in the pious mind, feelings of deep compassion for the hundreds of millions of the human race, still the vassals of ignorance and superstition' and to 'act as a powerful stimulus to efforts ... for the conversion of the heathen' (Altick 1978, 299).

The exotic could also be pursued in London's military museum, the museum of the United Service Institution in Whitehall Yard, set up in 1830 to receive contributions from officers returned from service. It aimed to be, and succeeded in being, 'a microcosm of British military and naval history', but it also had a strong 'ethnological-scientific representation consisting of Chinese

trophies, a range of minerals and mounted birds and animals, and, most prominently, arms and armour from the Eskimos, New Zealanders, Polynesians, and Africans' and 'from Borneo, Java, Ceylon, Punjab and Afghanistan', along with many personal mementoes (Altick 1978, 300). In 1856 this museum was open daily from 10 till 4, provided that you could get a ticket from a member of the Institution.

In London in the 1850s, there were a couple of scientific museums, indirectly funded by the Government. One, the Museum of Practical Geology, was housed in the Government School of Mines in Jermyn Street. Here, in a new building opened in 1851, were to be found not only teaching accommodation for the School, but also the Geological Survey, under the direction of Sir Henry de la Beche, and the Museum of Practical Geology, which he had set up in 1835. This museum provided not only a systematically classified exposition of geology, but also demonstrated what useful products might be made from mineral substances. Thus it had a most interesting collection of English ceramics, which eventually came to rest in the Victoria and Albert Museum. In 1856 you could visit this museum free from 10 till 4 on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays.

A museum with a similar mission to demonstrate the usefulness of natural materials was the Museum of Economic Botany at Kew Gardens. The Royal Botanic Gardens, which, as their name implies, had belonged to the royal family, were taken over by the Government in 1841, and the first Director, Sir William Hooker, created this museum in 1847. The collections still exist, and some small displays drawn from them were visible the last time I looked. In 1856 this museum was open from 1 till 6 on weekdays and from 2 till 6 on Sundays.

As you will realise, there was quite a wide range of museums for a London visitor to see in the 1850s. (Incidentally, I have omitted several medical museums associated with hospitals.) But such a visitor would not have found museums of British and local history. Historic buildings were all around, however. You could visit the Tower of London and see the Armouries. Windsor Castle and Hampton Court were open to the public. The Queen granted free admission to Hampton Court in 1838, though visitors were very strictly disciplined. At first, it was reported, 'the company are led by a guide, who allows them to remain before each picture only during the time spent in pronouncing its subject and painter'. The guides, who deployed a special 'tone of authority', were eventually discontinued, so that visitors could wander at their own pace, but they were still only allowed to look at each picture once (Altick 1978, 417).

You could also seek out the tombs of great men in the cathedrals. By 1856 Westminster Abbey and St Paul's had relaxed their admission charges and let the public in free for the most part. But again discipline could be strict. A *Punch* cartoon (of 25 October 1845) shows a party being taken round Westminster Abbey. Entitled 'A Scamper through Westminster Abbey', the cartoon shows visitors being hustled along by a verger at what was topically described as a 'railroad pace'.

There was in fact one museum devoted to the history of London, and that had been set up by the Corporation of the City of London in the Guildhall in 1826, two years after the foundation of the Guildhall Library. This museum, however, remained very small and obscure, not much of a public attraction. What ought to have gone into it, no doubt, were the great collections of London archaeology made by Charles Roach Smith. But Smith alienated the Corporation, and his collections went instead to the British Museum. The Guildhall Museum eventually received better accommodation in the Guildhall's new buildings of the 1870s, but continued to operate on a very small scale until it was eventually caught up in the creation of the Museum of London.

I have given you a quick tour of virtually all the London museums of the 1850s, with one important exception. We now look at a new museum which arose in that decade: the museum which eventually became the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Its ultimate origins can be traced back beyond the 1850s: in fact, back to 1836, when a Select Committee of the House of Commons on Arts and Manufactures published its report. We need not go into the political background of this: it was the usual mixture of high-minded concern, self-interested lobbying, and sheer chance. But what came out of it was a government-sponsored educational institution. The Government School of Design opened in 1837 in rooms in Somerset House that had previously been occupied by the Royal Academy. For many reasons it failed to flourish, but it did manage to keep limping along. An illustration in the *Illustrated London News* in 1843 shows the students at their drawing-boards.

We can be fairly sure that they were not engaged in inventing ingenious new consumer goods, but just learning to draw. At that time, drawing was learned by copying, so the School bought some pictures and objects for the students to copy. Around the upper walls of the gallery were plaster casts of ancient sculpture. Lower down was a set of copies of Raphael's decorations (the 'grotesques') in the *Loggia* of the Vatican. Packed away in cupboards somewhere were examples of modern manufactures: ceramics, silverware, stained glass. All this material constituted a little museum for the private use of the students. It was to be the nucleus of the V&A.

Probably nothing would have come of the little collection but for a minor civil servant in the Public Records, called Henry Cole. At first glance, you might have dismissed him as no more than a dusty archivist. But he was a friend of John Stuart Mill, and associated with the political group known as the 'Philosophic Radicals'. It turned out that he had a genius for agitation and propaganda. He exercised this in reforming the Public Record service, in helping to set up the Penny Post, and in various interventions in the railway boom of the 1840s. He was a keen journalist, and soon got into publishing. He had antiquarian interests, and in the early 1840s wrote and published a pioneering series of cheap illustrated guidebooks to heritage sites such as Westminster Abbey, Hampton Court, and Canterbury Cathedral. He published attractive and unpatronising children's books; and one of his *jeux d'esprit* was the first Christmas card, which he published in 1843, and which seems to be the feat for which (notwithstanding his huge achievements in other fields) he is still best remembered — on the internet, at any rate.

Through his artist friends, Cole became involved in trying to reform the still struggling Government School of Design, and, to this end, between 1849 and 1852, he published a magazine, *The Journal of Design*, a sort of *Which* guide to good taste. The great opportunity of his life came with the Great Exhibition of 1851. He was one of a group of activists in the Society of Arts who first proposed this exhibition of the consumer goods 'of all nations', and who recruited Prince Albert as their patron. When the Exhibition was over, it was generally acknowledged that Cole had done more than any other man (save the Prince, of course) to make it a success. His reward was to be made head of the Government School of Design, with a free hand to reform and revitalise it.

First of all, he moved it, from cramped quarters in Somerset House to Marlborough House in the Mall (Bonython & Burton 2002; Burton 1999; Physick 1982). This was a royal residence, but surplus to royal requirements at the time. Its ground floor was being used as an art gallery, an overflow from the National Gallery, and Cole took over the first floor and the service wings. A crucial step in his reform programme was that he contrived to elevate the Government School of Design into a minor Civil Service department — the Department of Practical Art, soon renamed the Department of Science and Art. Cole became Secretary of the Department, a top-level civil servant with direct access to ministers. This was to be his power-base for the rest of his career, as he set up a nationwide system of art and science education.

What we are interested in, however, is his establishment in Marlborough House of a public museum, known as the Museum of Manufactures, or the Museum of Ornamental Art (Fig 1). The core of this was the little collection which the School of Design had made for its students. Why did Cole set up this museum? The aim of the School of Design had been to improve the quality of British consumer goods by providing a supply of better-trained designers, but this strategy did not have much effect. Cole realised that it would be unavailing to provide better-designed goods if no-one wanted to buy them. So he set about educating public taste, the taste of the consumers, and the museum was the means by which he hoped to do this. He believed that people would look at the exhibits — furniture, pottery, textiles, silverware, would like what they saw, and would go out and buy the same sort of thing in the shops. He envisaged that the museum would promote the best in modern design, as the Design Council and the Crafts Council do today.

Very soon, however, the museum turned away from the present and towards the past. Cole was not unsympathetic to the view that improvement in the present could be achieved by learning from the past, but it was the young curator whom he appointed to the museum, John Charles Robinson, who pursued the past with an urgent passion. The transformation of Cole's campaigning museum into a historical museum of 'antiques' is not, however, a story to be pursued in this paper. Cole, in his missionary zeal, wanted his museum to extend its influence up and down the country, so he sent out on the

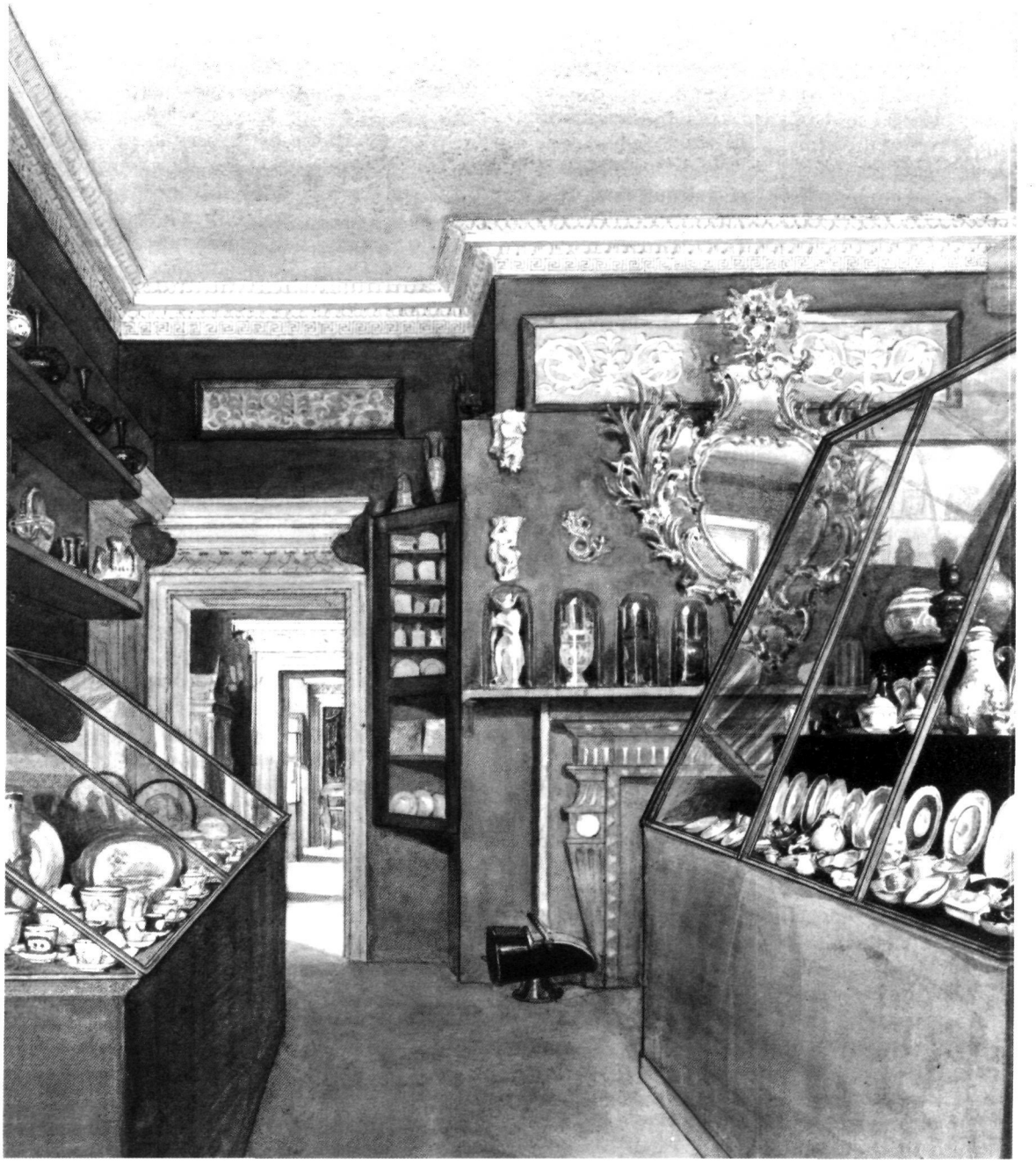

Fig 1. A watercolour view of one of the museum rooms in Marlborough House in the early 1850s (By courtesy of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum)

road a travelling exhibition, the 'Circulating Museum'. And, at the main museum in London, he wanted to bring the people in and engage their interest. The museum was open free to students always, and to the general public on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Saturdays. On Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays the public had to pay sixpence for admission, but, on these days, for another sixpence, they could ask for any object to be taken from its case for closer

examination. Cole was determined that his exhibits should be thoroughly used.

The museum grew and flourished for four years. Then Marlborough House was needed as a residence for the Prince of Wales, and, anyway, his father the Prince Consort had a new scheme in view. The Great Exhibition of 1851 had made a profit, and Prince Albert contrived that this profit should be invested in land in Brompton, in west London — land not yet built upon, and devoted mostly to market gardens. The Prince intended that these acres, now renamed 'South Kensington', should be developed as a new cultural quarter, with museums, learned institutions, and colleges, perhaps a university. There was a good deal of haggling about this project, and, since Albert unexpectedly died in 1861, it never developed quite as he would have wished. At any rate, the first institution to establish itself on this site was Henry Cole's museum: now the 'South Kensington Museum'.

While Cole was on leave, a rather unprepossessing temporary building was run up. Made on a cast iron frame, and clothed in corrugated iron, it was nicknamed 'The Brompton Boilers', because, with its curved roofs, it looked like three huge steam boilers lying side by side. This was to be the new home for Cole's museum collections. Naturally, the art collections which had been on show in Marlborough House occupied a prominent central space. But they were now joined by a great deal of other material which Cole, an inveterate empire builder, gathered in.

There was a Food Collection, originally put together by Thomas Twining as part of an 'Economic Museum', which was intended to instruct the working classes in how to live cheaply but wholesomely. Another new section of the museum was the Educational Collection. This had started out as an Educational Exhibition, promoted in 1854 by the Society of Arts, the campaigning body in which Cole always remained a leading light. A further initiative from the Society of Arts had been a collection of Animal Products, showing all the useful things that could be made from the skin, bone and other spare parts of animals. This too came to South Kensington. At one end of the 'Boilers' was a museum of machinery. This had been created by Benjamin Woodcroft at Prince Albert's behest. It came under the same roof as Cole's collections, but was separately administered, by the Commissioners for Patents.

Cole allotted space to another independent museum, the Architectural Museum, which had run out of room in its current accommodation in some ramshackle lofts in Westminster. This was a museum of plaster casts of architectural ornament, set up by a group of architects headed by Sir Gilbert Scott, in order to train architectural craftsmen for the booming Gothic Revival. It transferred to more spacious accommodation in the new building at South Kensington. Here also could be found a collection of building materials (the 'Museum of Construction'), and an exhibition of contemporary sculpture. Finally, there arrived a collection of paintings, the Sheepshanks gift. This came along at the last minute and was set up in its own building, added to the 'Boilers'. The Sheepshanks Gallery was the first purpose-built museum gallery at South Kensington, and Cole was very proud of it.

The new museum at South Kensington offered to visitors a rather extraordinary mixture of exhibits. In due course, the art collections would come through as the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the machinery collections as the Science Museum, while the other collections were dispersed elsewhere or faded away. The museum had to overcome the disadvantage that it was situated in what then seemed the rather distant suburb of South Kensington. A wood-engraving from the *Illustrated London News* of 1857 (Fig 2) shows the 'Boilers' embosomed in trees, and visitors alighting from carriages in the foreground. Cole went to some trouble to improve the omnibus service from central London.

Cole succeeded in attracting visitors, and not only people from the cultivated and leisured classes. He was particularly keen to attract working people. In an often quoted passage he claimed that 'the working man comes to this Museum from his one or two dimly lighted, cheerless dwelling-rooms, in his fustian jacket ... accompanied by his threes, and fours, and fives of little fustian jackets, a wife, in her best bonnet, and a baby, of course, under her shawl' (Burton 1999, 77). A little patronising, perhaps, but undoubtedly enlightened.

Cole tried to provide orderly and comprehensible displays for his visitors, and also aimed to educate them by various strategies, including lectures. An illustration of a lecture on metalwork (from the *Illustrated London News*, 1870) shows the lecturer surrounded by objects specially brought from the galleries for use as visual aids; these times were, of course, before

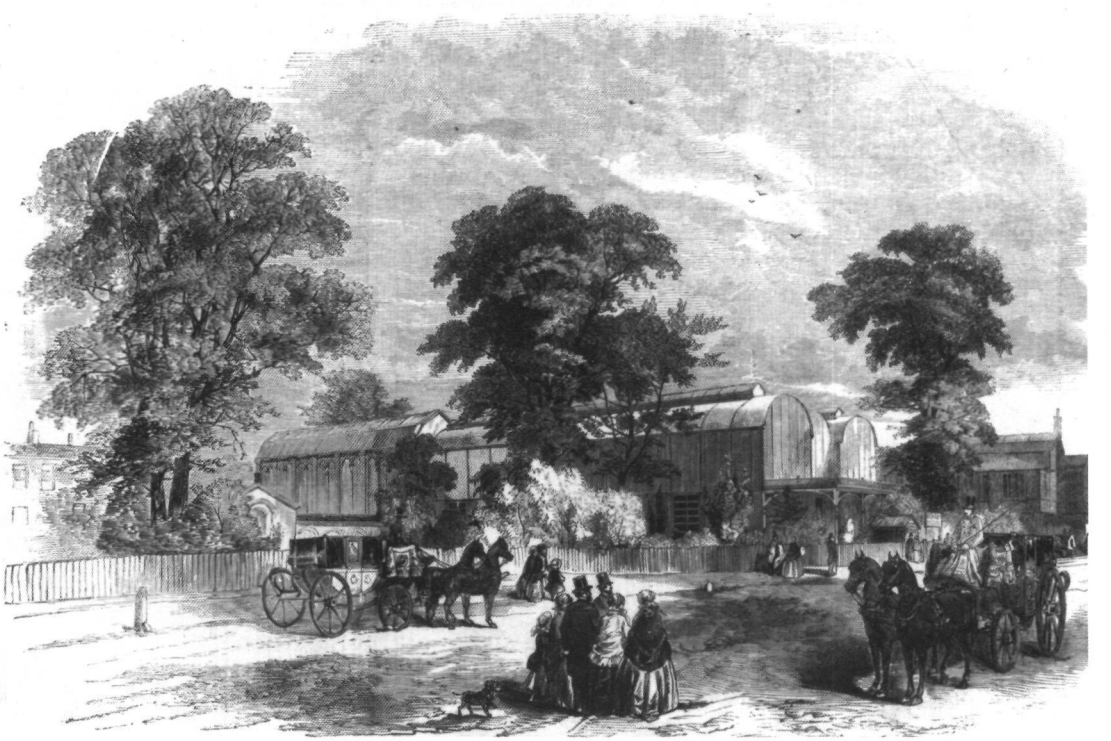

Fig 2. The South Kensington Museum in 1857: in a rural setting, and serving the carriage trade (Illustrated London News, 27 June 1857; by courtesy of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum)

the day of the slide lecture. Sympathetic to visitors' bodily as well as intellectual needs, Cole also provided a restaurant, and was apparently the first museum director ever to offer this now obligatory service.

A guidebook to the museum, published in 1860, shows a bird's-eye view of the museum as it was then. The 'Boilers' are in the right foreground, and in front of them the little restaurant. Across the middle of the site are some old buildings used by the School of Design. Behind, more galleries are gradually extending across the site. Plans in later guidebooks show how the museum gradually expanded under Cole's direction. Cole's problem was that he could get money from the Government only in dribs and drabs, so he had to build in fits and starts. Although he caused many ambitious plans to be made, he never achieved one grand, complete building for the museum. He did succeed in building an imposing main entrance. This survives today, but, far from being the main entrance, is now buried deep in the V&A, overlooking the garden. It was some considerable time after Cole's retirement that the building was finished off. From 1899, the whole of the front of the site was filled up, so that the museum now presents to the world the long façade designed by Aston Webb, which was completed in 1909. Back in the 1850s, the museum was just beginning to grow from the eastern end of this façade.

Henry Cole expressed his views on British museums in a lecture to the Society of Arts in 1873. He asserted that there were three types of museum. One was

> that of the British Museum ... Museums like this ... contain ... vast numbers of useful specimens buried in drawers and cases, adorned with Latin labels; museums wherein the populace rove about with awe, partly at the monstrous objects displayed to their gaze, and partly at the tremendous names which they bear. These museums are only fitted for scientific [i.e. intellectual] persons; they are next to useless to others, unless ... superintendents and curators are willing to descend from their high level.

Perhaps this reminds us of something we heard

about earlier in this paper. Cole went on to describe another type of museum, which, he said,

> is usually seen in small country towns, where dusty cases are arranged in ill-lighted rooms, and are made the receptacles of rubbish brought by resident gentlemen from all parts of the world – one giving a collection of minerals for which he has not room; another, a few drawers of butterflies of which he has grown tired. South Sea islanders' weapons, elephants' tusks, and other spoils of the chase are scattered about in corners and on walls, and the collection of oddments is dubbed a museum.

That too may remind us of something we heard about earlier. In contrast to these is the type of museum exemplified by Cole's own museum at South Kensington — what he called

> the actually useful museum, where the artisan may see illustrations of manufacturing operations, and the artist may find examples of the masterpieces of old. Here everything is neat, orderly, and simple; no object is without a label, which explains clearly what it is; and spectators need not wander about among collections of incomprehensible curiosities...

This, the visitor-oriented, educational museum, was the latest thing in the 1850s, a new development which not only changed the museum scene in London, but was to have an international influence.

NOTES

[1] These and other opening times are derived from *The Almanak of Science and Art Anno Domini 1856.*

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