'A vivid celebration of the city, but also an elegy for its decline, bubbling with statistics and anecdote, from Boadicea to Betjeman' – Richard Holmes in the *Daily Telegraph*, Books of the Year

'Roy Porter, a historian of formidable range, turns to urban history in this marvellously lucid, informative and passionate book … Porter's facts are always at the service of his narrative, which has a finely maintained momentum, balancing statistics with the words of historians, diarists and novelists, poets and churchmen: Pepys, Boswell, Fielding, Walpole, Blake, Mayhew, Wells, Woolf, Spark, Archbishop Runcie … a timely and brilliant book' – Claire Tomalin in the *Evening Standard*

'A very clever, very important and very angry book. It is clever because it is by Roy Porter … much the best and bravest thing he has yet written. It is important because it makes the whole sweep of London's unique history comprehensible and accessible in a way that no previous writer has ever managed to accomplish. And it is angry because it begins and concludes with a slashing, unanswerable indictment of Thatcherite misrule' – David Cannadine in the *Independent on Sunday*

'A lucid and lively chronicle … London is a subject so vast, amorphous and labyrinthine that to write about it demands not merely great knowledge and understanding, but also self-restraint and a cool head. Fortunately, Mr Porter has these qualities in abundance' – Philip Ziegler in the *Daily Telegraph*

'An illuminating and enjoyable work of synthesis' – Keith Thomas in the *Observer*

The cover shows *The Thames and the City of London from Richmond House* by Canaletto in Goodwood House, Sussex (photo: Bridgeman Art Library)

NDON

A Social History

ROY PORTER

'Marvellously lucid, informative and passionate' – Claire Tomalin in the *Evening Standard*

ROY PORTER

LONDON A Social History

Contents

per cent of the city's total population – the source of penury was irregular and seasonal work, in the docks and the great markets:

> The labourers of Class B do not, on the average, get as much as three days work a week, but it is doubtful if many of them could or would work full time for long together if they had the opportunity ... there will be found many of them who from shiftlessness, helplessness, idleness or drink, are inevitably poor ... these it is who are rightly called the 'leisure class' among the poor ... They cannot stand the regularity and dullness of civilised existence, and find the excitement they need in the life of the street.

Above Class B, the labouring poor with more regular employment were, Booth believed, on the road to improvement.

He was right. For all London's evils and iniquities, by the close of the Victorian era 'outcast London' was in the process of being integrated, thanks to a combination of sanitary improvement, mass education, widespread charitable intervention, the gradual growth of public-authority welfare services, the availability of employment, and, not least, rock-bottom food prices. Recent research has been showing that, despite popular stereotypes, London children around 1900 were bigger, stronger and sturdier than they had been half a century earlier. A solid, improving, self-respecting and often patriotic working class was establishing itself, which, for the next two or three generations, was to enhance the metropolis's socio-political stability and prosperity.

Victorian Life

The bigger London grew and the faster it changed, the more it astonished.

Three million five hundred thousand inhabitants; it adds up to twelve cities the size of Marseilles, ten as big as Lyons, two the size of Paris, in a single mass. But words on paper are no substitute for the effect on the eyes. You have to spend several days in succession in a cab, driving out north, south, east and west, for a whole morning, as far as those vague limits where houses grow scarcer and the country has room to begin.

Thus the French observer Hippolyte Taine in his *Notes sur l'Angleterre*, written in the 1860s. Taine found Victorian London a culinary and cultural wilderness, its atmosphere forbidding, disagreeable, deadening:

> A wet Sunday in London: shops closed, streets almost empty; the aspect of a vast and well-kept graveyard. The few people in this desert of squares and streets, hurrying beneath their umbrellas, look like unquiet ghosts; it is horrible. A thick yellow fog fills the air, sinks, crawls on the very ground; at thirty paces a house or a steam-ship look like ink-stains on blotting paper ... after an hour's walking one ... can understand suicide.

Numerous foreigners were of a similar mind. London's remorseless business was more conspicuous than its gaiety; its greyness was insufferable. And yet it was endlessly eye-opening. 'The vast town,' commented Dostoevsky in 1862 – vastness was on everyone's mind – is

> always in movement night and day, wide as an ocean, with the grind and howl of machinery, railways shooting above houses and soon to be beneath them, commercial adventure, disorder superficially unrestrained though in reality controlled by the strictest bourgeois discipline, the Thames befouled, the atmosphere packed with coal dust; the superb squares and parks ... Whitechapel with a populace half-naked, brutal and famished, the city with its vast moneybags.

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The metropolis was too big, it had no soul: thus thought some. Dickens remarked, 'it is strange with how little notice, good, bad or indifferent, a man may live and die in London'. For others that very anonymity was a relief, a liberation. Henry James quit his native Boston for Europe. Leaving France, his first foreign home, he came to England in 1876, and stayed until his death. Oxford charmed, the Cotswolds tempted, and in 1896 he acquired a house in Rye, But, though admitting it was 'difficult to speak adequately or justly of London', it was in the capital that he settled:

It is not a pleasant place; it is not agreeable or cheerful or easy or exempt from reproach. It is only magnificent. You can draw up a tremendous list of reasons why it should be insupportable. The fogs, the smoke, the darkness, the wet ... the ugliness, the brutal size of the place ... the manner in which this senseless bigness is fatal to ... convenience, to conversation, to good manners ... You may call it dreary, heavy, stupid, dull, inhuman, vulgar at heart and tiresome in form ... But these are occasional moods and for one who takes it as I take it, London is on the whole the most possible form of life. It is the biggest aggregation of human life – the most complete compendium of the world.

An Englishman by election – he accepted British citizenship late in life – James took a somewhat perverse pride in London's situation: 'It is a real stroke of luck for a particular country that the capital of the human race happens to be British.'

Yet London was a capital that wasn't a capital. Even Londoners and London-lovers had to admit it was all fragments. 'London is like a newspaper,' ventured Walter Bagehot: 'everything is there and everything is disconnected ... there is no more connection between the houses than between the neighbours in the list of "births, marriages and deaths".' All could be accommodated somewhere. Émigrés invented Londons of their own – Karl Marx became the British Museum's greatest fan; van Gogh spent the happiest year of his wretched life working in Southampton Street, off the Strand, and living in Lambeth; Pissarro preferred Penge – and London was the home of artists, intellectuals, literati and England's Bohemians, in so far as the nation possessed an avant-garde. 'Town life nourishes and perfects all the civilized elements in man,' declared Oscar Wilde in 1891: 'Shakespeare wrote nothing but doggerel verse before he came to London and never penned a line after he left.'

London aroused love and hate. 'That great foul city of London,' exploded Ruskin, 'rattling, growling, smoking, stinking – a ghastly heap of fermenting brickwork, pouring out poison at every pore.' But all agreed it was unique: 'This is a London particular ... A fog, miss,' was Charles Dickens's way of expressing that quality.

For some, London spelt luxury. 'London has become a pleasure lounge for the idlers of the globe,' judged the author of *London of To-day* (1888): 'Americans, Frenchmen,

Germans, Indians, Colonials and persons of leisure and wealth from all parts of the world flock to the capital city during the season.' Its social machinery was well oiled. Lavish shops and plush hotels pampered the rich. Its clubs were exclusive: Taine judged the Athenaeum 'the last word of a high civilization', while Arthur Hayward cited 'the improvement and multiplication of Clubs' as 'the grand feature of metropolitan progress'. In their hallowed halls, Hayward observed,

a man of moderate habits can dine more comfortably for three or four shillings (including half a pint of wine) than he could have dined for four or five times that amount at the coffee houses and hotels, which were the habitual resort of the bachelor class ... during the first quarter of the century.

It was not only bachelors who used the clubs. Their popularity among the married, foreigners observed, called into question the truth of 'home, sweet home'. By their superb comforts, critics jibed, clubs encouraged 'the cult of egoism, the abandonment of family virtues, the exclusive taste for material pleasures, and a deplorable laxity of morals of which the whole nation will someday feel the baneful consequences'.

The Victorian club had its own atmosphere. Georgian precursors like White's were gambling-dens. The new models were solid, sober, even stuffy; they kept up appearances. Indeed, they *had* impressive appearances. The United Service Club of 1827, designed by Nash and sited at the corner of Waterloo Place and Pall Mall East, was the first of a series of grand club houses to sprout in the area (it now, rather fittingly, houses the Institute of Directors). Designed by Decimus Burton, the Athenaeum arose in 1830, its Grecian flavour reflecting the fashion. The Travellers' Club (1829–32) was styled by Barry to resemble an Italian *palazzo*. The grandest was the Reform (1837–41), originally associated with supporters of the Great Reform Bill of 1830–32, its distinguished façade based on the Farnese Palace in Rome. The huge National Liberal Club, with its riverside site in Whitehall Place, was designed by Alfred Waterhouse. Conservatives, by contrast, congregated in the Carlton in St James's.

In a capital where, after George IV, the royal court lacked presence and there were few prestigious institutions of state comparable, for instance, to the Académie Française, clubs spanned the private and the public spheres, while upholding rank and gender exclusivity. 'These impregnable fortresses play a most important part in an Englishman's life,' wrote Monsieur Wey, a sour Frenchman, after dining at the Reform in the 1850s. An Englishman could not bear the vivacity of a Parisian café, he judged:

It is probably this fear that everyone has of compromising himself with a person of a rank too inferior to his own ... that has made almost impossible the organization of those places of public meeting so common in France, where the natural gaiety of the inhabitants manifests itself almost without restraint, and where the presence of women prompts ... grace and proverbial politeness.

Clubs helped keep London a masculine city, and St James's, with its bachelor chambers around King and Jermyn Streets, was its inner sanctum. The reign of the private club did not yield to the social fluidity of restaurants and hotels until the Edwardian era, by when Victorian reserve was turning into a more swaggering lifestyle among patricians and plutocrats, partly through the influence of American and colonial millionaires holidaying in town.

Meanwhile, out in the suburbs, Victorian London acquired its representative middle-class mascot, Charles Pooter, comic hero of George and Weedon Grossmith's *Diary of a Nobody*. A City clerk, Pooter lived with his wife and solitary servant in a semi-detached villa:

My dear wife Carrie and I have just been a week in our new house, 'The Laurels', Brickfield Terrace, Holloway – a nice six-roomed residence, not counting basement, with a front breakfast-parlour. We have a little front garden; and there is a flight of ten steps up to the front door, which, by-the-by, we keep locked with the chain up.

Pooter was funny but true because of his harmlessly snobbish unavailing attempts to keep up appearances in shabby-genteel surroundings. The air of social success was essential, though his circumstances were strained and tradesmen were always duping him. To make the best of a dreary social round, he wove fantasies around life at 'The Laurels'. 'We have a nice little back garden which runs down to the railway,' the opening page of his diary bravely proclaimed:

We were rather afraid of the noise of the trains at first, but the landlord said we should not notice them after a bit, and took £2 off the rent. He was certainly right; and beyond the cracking of the garden wall at the bottom, we have suffered no inconvenience.

Pooter represented City man. Like a hundred thousand of his fellows, he suffered a stifling, taxing working atmosphere requiring punctuality, formal dress, conformity and deference to his betters – all for a pittance, but with the compensation of feeling a cut above the manual workers from whose more vulgar lifestyles the Pooters so carefully distanced themselves. Suburbs like Holloway and Hornsey, or later Penge and Putney, built to cater for Pooters, created scaled-down versions of Paddington or Primrose Hill. The bourgeoisie aped their betters in their pursuit of taste, decorum and anxious gentility.

Pooterish sorts – decent fellows living in the inner, and later the outer, suburbs – were targeted by improving literature, works like *How I Managed My House on £200 a Year* (1864), in which the Victorian clerk and paterfamilias informs his wife that he has found a residence in an expanding suburb 'near Islington':

The house at thirty pounds, which stands in the open space of garden ground, close to the field of forty acres, will be just the thing for us. I should think it would be some years before the now pretty view can be built out. It is only three miles from London, perhaps a little more to the office, but that does not signify. We shall have no neighbours yet, and I have observed very common people do not live in semi-detached houses; they like to congregate near a market, and so ought we, as a matter of economy, but I think fresh air better than very cheap food. So, little wife, it is settled.

The capital's Pooters were attempting to put a chasm between themselves and the swarms of Londoners inimitably depicted (a generation earlier) by the supreme metropolitan journalist Henry Mayhew. He made the city his own. He so loved it, he felt impelled to ascend in a balloon and see the whole at once:

It was a wonderful sight to behold that vast bricken mass of churches and hospitals, banks and prisons, palaces and workhouses, docks and refuges for the destitute, parks and squares, and courts and alleys, which make up London – all blent into one immense black spot – to look down upon the whole as the birds of the air look down upon it, and see it dwindled into a mere rubbish heap – to contemplate from afar that strange conglomeration of vice and avarice and low cunning, of noble aspirations and human heroism, and to grasp it in the eye, in all its incongruous integrity, at a single glance – to take, as it were, an angel's view of that huge town where, perhaps, there is more virtue and more iniquity, more wealth and more want, brought together into one dense focus than in any other part of the earth.

But Mayhew always descended, and mingled with the masses. In a vast outpouring of magazine articles and books, notably *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851–62), he conveyed, like no one before him, save Dickens, the flavour, smells and the very expressions of teeming London. 'All are bawling together – salesmen and hucksters of provisions, capes, hardware, and newspapers, – till the place is a perfect Babel of competition' – this was his word picture of Billingsgate:

'Ha-a-ansome cod! best in the market! All alive! alive! alive O!' 'Ye-o-o! Ye-o-o! here's your fine Yarmouth bloaters! Who's the buyer?' ... 'Oy! oy! oy! Now's your time! fine grizzling sprats! good and cheap! fine cock crabs all alive O!' 'Five brill and one turbot – have that lot for a pound! Come and look at 'em, governor; you won't see a better sample in the market' ... 'O ho! O ho! this way – this way! Fish alive! alive! alive O!'

With his mental tape-recorder, Mayhew thus conveyed the sounds of London. But he also evoked its textures, colours and business:

In the darkness of the shed, the white bellies of the turbots, strung up bow-fashion, shine like mother-of-pearl, while, the lobsters, lying upon them, look intensely scarlet, from the contrast.

Brown baskets piled up on one another, and with the herring-scales glittering like spangles all over them, block up the narrow paths. Men in coarse canvas jackets, and bending under huge hampers, push past, shouting 'Move on! move on, there!' and women, with the long limp tails of cod-fish dangling from their aprons elbow their way through the crowd...

As you walk back from the shore to the market, you see small groups of men and women dividing the lot of fish they have bought together. At one basket, a coster, as you pass, calls to you, and says, 'Here, master, just put these three half-pence on these three cod, and obleege a party'. The coins are placed, and each one takes the fish his coin is on; and so there is no dispute.

At length nearly all the busy marketing has finished, and the costers hurry to breakfast. At one house, known as 'Rodway's Coffee-house', a man can have a meal for 1d, – a mug of hot coffee and two slices of bread and butter, while for two-pence what is elegantly termed 'a tightner', that is to say, a most plentiful repast, may be obtained. Here was a large room, with tables all round, and so extremely silent, that the smacking of lips and sipping of coffee were alone heard.

No mere impressionist, Mayhew was an anatomist of the poor, presenting uniquely detailed analyses of their diet and purchasing habits, their involvement with pawnshops and alcohol, and their streetwise ways with charities. He was an adroit observer of the petty capitalism pervading the metropolis from top to bottom, explaining piece-work, lump-work and contract-work and the domestic system.

London, Mayhew thought, had upwards of 40,000 street people, many extremely poor, making a little from a little. Barefoot children would buy a few pennyworth of watercress at Farringdon, wetting it at the Hatton Garden pump, bunching and selling it for a few pennies. Some had a tray of oranges. Flower-sellers were more suspect: bunches of violets were often a cover for 'immoral purposes'.

Most prominent were the costermongers (from costard, a type of apple). They cried their wares in the streets: 'Strawberries ripe and cherries in the rise', 'Rushes green' (for floors), 'Small coals', 'Old chairs to mend'. Street traders sold larks, sparrows and nightingales, roast chestnuts, baked potatoes, hot eels, muffins and ginger beer, and ink – anything portable. 'Duffers' sold fakes – imitation perfumes and antiques, and falsely painted birds. What distinguished them was their cockney slang, often turning words back to front. Yenep meant a penny, a top of reeb a pot of beer. 'There is the "Cagers" (beggars') cant", as it is called,' Mayhew wrote with John Binny in *The Criminal Prisons of London* (1862):

a style of language which is distinct from the slang of the thieves, being arranged on the principle of using words that are similar in sound to the ordinary expressions for the same idea. 'S-pose now, your honour,' said a 'shallow cove', who was giving us a lesson in the St Giles' classics, 'I wanted to ask a codger to come and have a *glass* of *rum* with me, and smoke a *pipe* of *baccer* over a game of *cards* with some *blokes* at *home* – I should say, *Splodger*, will you have a Jack-sur*pass* of

finger-and-*thumb*, and blow your yard of *tripe* of nosey-me-*knacker*, while we have a touch of the *broads* with some other heaps of *coke* at my *drum*?'

Lastly comes the veritable slang, or English '*Argot*', *i.e.*, the secret language used by the London thieves. This is made up, in a great degree, of the mediaeval Latin, in which the Church service was formerly chanted, and which indeed gave rise to the term *cant* (from the Latin *cantare*), it having been the custom of the ancient beggars to 'intone' their prayers when asking for alms. 'Can you roker Romany (can you speak cant)?' one individual 'on the cross' will say to another who is not exactly 'on the square'; and if the reply be in the affirmative, he will probably add 'What is your monekeer (name)? – Where do you stall to in the huey (where do you lodge in the town)?' 'Oh, I drop the main toper (get out of the high-road),' would doubtless be the answer, 'and slink into the ken (lodging-house) in the back drum (street).' 'Will you have a shant o'gatter (pot of beer) after all this dowry of parny (lot of rain)? I've got a teviss (shilling) left in my clinic (pocket).'

The four volumes of *London Labour and the London Poor* offer a panorama of street traders, street performers and prostitutes, while among the more skilled workers there are descriptions of tailors, shoemakers, hatters, cabinet-makers, toymakers, turners, carpenters, coopers, joiners, sawyers, shipbuilders and weavers. Mayhew chronicled their stories with a Dickensian ear – 'My informant, who is also dignified with a title, or as he calls it a "handle to his name", gave me the following account of himself,' he recorded of a Birmingham-born lad:

The first thing I remembers is being down on the shore at Cuckold's P'int when the tide was out and up to my knees in mud, and a gitting down deeper and deeper every minute till I was picked up by one of the shore-workers. I used to git down there every day, to look at the ships and boats a sailing up and down; I'd niver be tired a looking at them at that time. At last father 'prenticed me to a blacksmith in Bermondsey, *and than I couldn't git down to the river when I like, so I got to hate the forge and the fire, and blowing the bellows, and couldn't stand the confinement no how, – at last I cuts and runs.* After some time they gits me back ag'in, but I cuts ag'in. I was determined not to stand it. I wouldn't go home for fear I'd be sent back, so I goes down to Cuckold's P'int and there I sits near half the day, when who should I see but the old un as had picked me up out of the mud when I was a sinking. I tells him all about it, and he takes me home along with hisself, and gits me a bag and an o, and takes me out next day, and shows me what to do, and shows me the dangerous places, and the places what are safe, and how to rake-in the mud for rope, and bones, and iron, and that's the way I comed to be a shore-worker. Lor' bless you, I've worked Cuckold's P'int for more nor twenty year. I know places where you'd go over head and ears in the mud, and jist alongside on 'em you may walks as safe as you can on this floor. But it don't do for a stranger to try it, he'd wery soon git in, and it's not so easy to git out agin, I can tell you. I stay'd with the old un a long time, and we used to git lots o' tins, specially when we'd go to work the sewers. I liked that well enough. I could git into small places where

Sewer hunting in the 1850s. Engraving by Mayhew

the old un couldn't and when I'd got near the grating in the street, I'd search about in the bottom of the sewer; I'd put down my arm to my shoulder in the mud and bring up shillings and half-crowns, and lots of coppers, and plenty other things. I once found a silver jug as big as a quart pot, and often found spoons and knives and forks and every thing you can think of ... There's some places, 'specially in the old sewers, where they say there's foul air, and they tells me the foul air 'ill cause instantious death, but I niver met with anythink about it, for I've worked the sewers, off and on, for twenty year. When we comes to a narrow-place as we don't know, we

takes the candle out of the lantern and fastens it on the hend of the o, and then runs it up the sewer, and the light stays in, we knows as there a'n't no danger. We used to go up the city sewer at Blackfriars-bridge, but that's stopped up now; its boarded across inside. The city wouldn't let us up if they knew it, 'cause of the danger, they say, but they don't care if we hav'n't got nothink to eat nor a place to put our heads in, while there's plenty of money lying there and good for nobody. If you was caught up it and brought afore the Lord Mayor, he'd give you fourteen days on it, as safe as the bellows, so a good many on us now is afraid to wenture in. We don't wenture as we used to, but still it's done at times. There's a many places as I knows on where the bricks has fallen down, and that there's dangerous; it's so delaberated that if you touches with your head or with the hend of the o, it 'ill all come down atop o' you. I've often seed as many as a hundred rats at once, and they're woppers in the sewers, I can tell you; them there water rats, too, is far more ferociouser than any other rats, and they'd think nothing of taking a man, if they found that couldn't get away no how, but if they can why they runs by and gits out o' the road. I knows a chap as the rats tackled in the sewers; they bit him hawfully: you must ha' heard on it; it was him as the water-men went in arter when they heard him a shouting as they was a rowin' by. Only for the watermen the rats would ha' done for him, safe enough. Do you recollect hearing on the man as was found in the sewers about twelve years ago? – oh you must – the rats eat every bit of him, and left nothing but his bones. I knowed him well, he was a rig'lar shore-worker.

The rats is wery dangerous, that's sartain, but we always goes three or four on us together, and the varmint's too wide awake to tackle us then, for they know they'd git off second best. You can go a long way in the sewers if you like; I don't know how far. I niver was at the end on them myself; for a cove can't stop in longer than six or seven hous, 'cause of the tide, you must be out before that's up. There's a many branches on ivery side, but we don't go into all, we go where we know, and where we're always sure to find somethink. I know a place now where there's more than two or three hundredweight of metal all rusted together, and plenty of money among it too; but its too heavy to carry it out, so it'll stop there I s'pose till the world comes to an end. I often brought out a piece of metal half a hundred in weight, and took it under the harch of the bridge, and broke it up with a large stone to pick out the money. I've found sovereigns and half sovereigns over and over ag'in, and three on us has often cleared a couple of pound apiece in one day out of the sewers. But we no sooner got the money than the publican had it. I only wish I'd back all the money I've guv to the publican, and I wouldn't care how the wind blew for the rest of my life.

Life was tough, and the street people's work exotic. But most were self-sufficient, law-abiding, and fiercely independent. 'Bless your heart the smell's nothink,' Mayhew was told by the man who searched the sewers for anything saleable, 'it's a roughish smell at first, but nothink near so bad as you thinks, 'cause, you see, there's sich lots o' water always a-coming down the sewer. The reason I likes this sort of life is, 'cause I can sit down when I likes, and nobody can't order me about.'

Thanks to Mayhew, and to Thomas Wright's classic *The Great Unwashed* (1868), the complex layerings and status gradations of London's masses are recorded. Alongside the gross distinctions between St Giles and St James, there were also 'aristocracies of rags' – 'how great is the distinction between the layers of straw'!

The streets gave great pleasure. 'I am in very good health,' Mendelssohn wrote home to his family in 1829:

London life suits me excellently. I think the town and the streets are beautiful. Again I was struck with awe when I drove in an open cabriolet yesterday to the City, along a different road, and everywhere found the same flow of life, everywhere green, yellow, red bills stuck on the houses from top to bottom, or gigantic letters painted on them, everywhere noise and smoke, everywhere the ends of the streets lost in fog. Every few moments I passed a church, or a market-place, or a green square, or a theatre, or caught a glimpse of the Thames, on which the steamers can now go right through the town under all the bridges, because a mechanism has been invented for lowering the large funnels like masts. To see, besides, the masts from the West India Docks looking across, and to see a harbour as large as Hamburg's treated like a pond, with sluices, and the ships arranged not singly but in rows, like regiments – all that makes one's heart rejoice over the great world.

No native recorded the pleasures of strolling better than Arthur Munby, the civil servant who got a sexual kick out of working-class women and found unquenchable joy in the toings and froings of street-life. 'I walked up to the New Road [Euston Road], and had a long talk with the old ballad seller opposite S. Pancras church,' he recalled one day:

A very respectable intelligent man, of some education: said he had been there twenty years and brought up a family of nine children on the proceeds of his stall. The trade, he said, was never so good as now: the public concert rooms have created a large demand for popular songs of the day, and the old fashioned ballads sell well too. Has customers of all classes, but mostly young men, shopmen and artisans, who buy sentimental parlour ditties, and servantmaids. These when they first come to London buy the old ballads they've heard at home in the country; but afterwards they choose rather the songs – from English operas and so on – which they hear young missis a playing upstair.

London's streets saw occasional public pageantry, and Victoria's reign culminated in three exceptional state occasions in which Londoners participated: the Golden Jubilee of 1887, the Diamond Jubilee of 1897 and, in 1901, the Queen's funeral. Of these, the 1887 Jubilee was the most brilliant, involving a great gathering of European royalty, a thanksgiving service at Westminster Abbey, and a review of the Volunteers in Hyde Park, which was also the scene of a gigantic party for poor children, each being given a bun and a Jubilee mug. Charity dinners marked the occasion in the East End.

Victorian London saw the Indian summer of that eighteenth-century phenomenon the pleasure garden. The high spot was Cremorne Gardens in Chelsea, opened in 1832 by a man styling himself the Baron de Beaufain. First conceived as a sports club, it was soon offering all kinds of other diversions – pony races, evening dances and ballooning: Charles Green ('the intrepid aeronaut') made an ascent accompanied by a lady and a leopard. But most of the Georgian pleasure gardens disappeared because their sites became engulfed in housing developments and were killed off by residents' objections. The popular Highbury Barn, which drew crowds to its large lamp-lit open-air dance floor, lost its licence owing to local objectors and was closed down in 1876. Vauxhall Gardens were built over in 1859 by the main-line railway into Victoria.

The Metropolitan Fairs Act of 1871 stated that 'fairs are unnecessary, are the cause of grievous immorality and are very injurious to the inhabitants of the towns where they are held'. Hampstead Heath and Blackheath, however, continued the fun of the fair as popular cockney bank-holiday resorts, with sports and slides and donkey rides. More distant fairs in places like Epping Forest attracted day-trippers, and the Derby Day excursion to Epsom was as much for the roundabouts as the races.

Semi-rustic sports continued, including cricket. In 1811 a three-day county match for a purse of 500 guineas was staged between the ladies of Surrey and the ladies of Hampshire. 'The combatants were dressed in loose trousers,' Richard Phillips's *Monthly Magazine* reported, 'with short-fringed petticoats descending to the knee, and light flannel waistcoats with sashes round the waist.' Hampshire won. From mid-century, sport grew more professional and better organized. Football, rugby and cricket gradually assumed familiar forms, the creation of teams like Arsenal giving cultural expression to works and local loyalties.

London Zoo flourished. Established in 1828 on the north side of Regent's Park, it boasted the world's largest animal collection. Decimus Burton planned the layout, and the animals were augmented by those of the Tower menagerie. In August 1851 a staggering 145,000 visitors – most up for the Exhibition – went to the Zoo, the chief attraction being a four-ton hippopotamus, judged by Macaulay 'the ugliest of the works of God'.

Though squeezed by propriety and the police, many traditional amusements survived. Under George IV cock-fighting, dog-fights and ratting were all in vogue, attracting, like horse-racing, wide clienteles, from the criminal to the cream. Cock-fighting was banned in 1849. Public hangings remained a popular spectacle: more than 30,000 people would assemble at Newgate, and up to £25 might be paid for a room with a good view. After 1868 the hangings took place behind prison walls. Newgate had a 'horrible fascination' for Dickens. It crops up in *Barnaby Rudge*; in *Oliver Twist*, in which Fagin waits for the end, in the Condemned Hold, behind 'those dreadful walls';

and in *Great Expectations*, in which Pip is taken inside 'the grim stone building', to view the yard where the gallows are kept and 'the Debtors' Door, out of which culprits come to be hanged'. It was finally demolished in 1902 to make way for the Central Criminal Court.

Commercial leisure culture spawned shows and events. A great 'orama' craze began with panoramas, moving on to dioramas, cycloramas, cosmoramas and kineoramas. An early peep-show was the St James's Street Cosmorama. This possessed fourteen peep-holes set in the walls and fitted with convex lenses to magnify different scenic effects dramatized by special lighting. Jacques Daguerre, inventor of photography, ran a Diorama in Park Square East, one of Nash's fashionable new terraces. It opened with immense pictures of Canterbury Cathedral, eighty feet long and forty feet high, exhibited to spectators in a revolving chamber. You could also see 'Etna in Sicily under Three Effects, Evening, Sunrise and an Eruption', and 'Moving Pictures of the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles, and Constantinople'. The Colosseum, opened in 1826, was a huge circular building in Regent's Park by Decimus Burton. It offered a vast panoramic view of London as seen from the top of St Paul's and had, in addition, a Hall of Mirrors, a Gothic aviary, and a Swiss Chalet with a panorama of Mont Blanc. Then there were Burford's Panorama and Wyld's Globe, both in Leicester Square, providing exhibitions of the sights of the world, and the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, holding 'upwards of Fifteen Thousand Natural and Foreign Curiosities, Antiques, and Productions of the Fine Arts', belonging to William Bullock. In 1815–16 Bullock made £35,000 by a display of Napoleonic relics, including the Emperor's bullet-proof carriage.

Waxworks were firm favourites, especially Mrs Salmon's famous exhibition in Fleet Street. Madame Tussaud started in Paris in 1780, exhibited in the Lyceum Theatre in 1802, and then moved to the Baker Street Bazaar.

Scores of other shows attracted audiences. Perennially popular was Astley's Circus in Westminster Bridge Road. For concerts there were Covent Garden; the Italian Opera House, Haymarket, which became Her Majesty's Theatre; and the Hanover Square Rooms, where the Royal Academy of Music gave its first concert in 1823, and Liszt and Mendelssohn later performed.

All manner of other events had their day. In the 1870s roller-skating was all the rage; in the 1880s Cruft's Dog Show was born. Charles Cruft became James Spratt's assistant in 1860, selling dog food in Holborn. His 'First Great Terrier Show' at the Royal Aquarium, Westminster, in 1886, attracted 500 entries. From 1891 the name Cruft's Dog Show was used.

But amidst all these entertaining odds and ends – some spectacular, some tawdry – one spectacle stood out. To display Britain to the world, and vice versa, the Great Exhibition

was staged in 1851. In a rather English way, it was designed not by a professional architect but by the Duke of Devonshire's gardener, Joseph Paxton, who had earlier erected a stupendous glass conservatory at Chatsworth. In July 1850 the *Illustrated London News* published his revolutionary design for an immense exhibition hall of iron and glass. Construction began in Hyde Park in September. By January 1851 the number of men employed rose to 2,112. They fixed 2,300 cast-iron girders on to 3,300 columns, and emplaced 900,000 square feet of glass, mass-produced in standard units, into 202 miles of wooden sash bars. Five hundred painters worked from cradles which ran along the building's thirty miles of gutters. The Crystal Palace was a high-tech triumph, with all its glass and its tubular iron pillars that doubled as drains. Above all, it was factory-made, prefabricated in standard sections. It was dazzling.

In February the doors were thrown open, at 1s a head (Friday 2s 6d and Saturday 5s). The average daily attendance was over 40,000. Queen Victoria made eight visits in the twelve weeks before the official opening and went thirty-four times afterwards – Dickens, by contrast, went just twice.

The 19,000 exhibits – Raw Materials; Machinery and Mechanical Inventions; Manufactures; and Sculpture and Plastic Art – formed the greatest array yet seen by men. There were the largest pearl ever found and the Koh-i-Noor diamond, engines of every description, carriages, china, glass and cutlery, including a knife with 300 blades. It was meant to be a showcase for Britain – though the quality of some French, Belgian and German goods was ominous.

Six million people visited this 'galaxy of splendour'. Thomas Cook conveyed some 165,000 of them – railway excursions made the Great Exhibition an astonishing triumph, and brought vast business to London. 'Thirty years ago,' *The Times* declared, 'not one countryman in one hundred had seen the metropolis. There is now scarcely one in the same number who has not spent a day there.' As usual, *The Times* got its figures all wrong, but the general point was true.

Everyone made money – business people, the government, and even the Exhibition Commissioners, who used the profits to turn South Kensington into a cultural quarter. The Exhibition attracted working-class and middle-class alike, and all the dire fears of vice and revolution proved unfounded. So popular was the Crystal Palace that resistance developed to its removal. A company was formed to re-erect it elsewhere, and Sydenham was chosen. Two railway stations, High Level and Low Level, were constructed to bring the millions. Destroyed by fire in 1936, little now remains but the life-size models of prehistoric monsters – the megalosaurus and the ichthyosaurus – looming amidst the foliage on an island in a lake.

A mini replica was the Alexandra Palace, north of Hornsey, named after the Princess of Wales. Gutted by a fire just after it opened, it was rebuilt in 1875. Equipped with one of the world's largest organs, the concert hall held 14,000 people.

A bold venture that flopped was the plan to build London's greatest pleasure grounds at Wembley. Served by the Metropolitan Railway, the site was intended to include an iron tower 1,000 feet high to dwarf the Eiffel Tower. It reached a paltry 200 feet before being demolished in 1907. But London acquired yet more monster halls and pleasure domes. Olympia was opened in 1886, and Earl's Court pleasure ground in 1894, with a Great Wheel and Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Olympia housed Barnum's circus in 1889, but in the next year it became a huge rink with the revival of roller-skating. Nearby the Royal Albert Hall went up, capable of holding 10,000 and destined to play a huge part in the musical life of London, particularly with the later Promenade Concerts.

Under Walpole's licensing act of 1737, London had two patent theatres, at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, and later acquired a third, Her Majesty's, in the Haymarket, which specialized in Italian opera. Around 1800 Drury Lane declined, but Covent Garden shone under the Kembles. Occasional Shakespeare, classic comedies, English opera, and some new plays dominated the bills; then in the 1830s Covent Garden led a Shakespeare revival.

In the free-trade spirit, the Theatres Act (1843) essentially de-licensed the theatre: henceforth the Lord Chamberlain was to withhold his licence only 'in the interest of good manners, decorum or the public peace'. This permitted the surge of the Victorian theatre, and the years after 1870 saw the building of the commercial West End familiar today. The cutting of Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury Avenue in the late 1880s, and the formation of Piccadilly Circus, produced prestigious sites for the Lyric, the Royal English Opera House (now the Palace Theatre), the Duke of York's, Wyndham's, the New (now the Albery), the Apollo, the Globe, the Queen's, and the Prince's (now the Shaftesbury). The opening of Aldwych and Kingsway in 1905 resulted in a new Gaiety (now demolished) and the Aldwych and Strand theatres.

Theatre was hugely popular. The music-halls and theatres sprinkled round the West End and City could hold around 300,000 people – giving attendances of up to 100 million a year. Size spelt the heyday of the actor-manager, including the first stage knight, Sir Henry Irving, manager of the Lyceum from 1878 to 1902: Ellen Terry was his leading lady. Great actor-managers such as Harley Granville-Barker and Herbert Beerbohm Tree continued until the First World War, and, despite the cinema's challenge, theatre-building occurred in central London as late as the 1920s, including the Fortune, the Piccadilly, the Duchess, the Cambridge, the Phoenix and the Whitehall, and the reconstruction of the Adelphi and the Savoy.

Gilbert and Sullivan made the fortune of the impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte. He first produced *Trial by Jury* at the Royalty Theatre in Dean Street, Soho, going on to form a Comedy Opera Company which staged *The Sorcerer*, *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance*. In 1881 he opened the Savoy Theatre in the Strand with *Patience*.

He went on to build the ornate Royal English Opera House in Shaftesbury Avenue and the Savoy Hotel, naming suites after the Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

But not all the theatres were in the West End. In early Victorian times Shoreditch – the original home of London's theatre – was theatrically energetic. Popular at mid-century in the East End was the 'penny gaff', a makeshift theatre descended from the theatrical booths held at London's many fairs, staged in converted warehouses or similar premises, holding a couple of hundred rowdy young spectators. Performances were advertised by garish street posters, and a band would play to draw in the people. The usual offering consisted of two twenty-minute plays – usually melodramas, with titles like *Seven Steps to Tyburn* or the *Bloodstained Handkerchief* – with a song in the interval. The audience would throw missiles on to the stage – or halfpennies. In *A Hoxton Childhood*, A. S. Jasper described being taken to an East End theatre around 1900 by his sister Jo:

Sometimes on a Monday night she would come home from work and if she had a few coppers left over from the week-end she would say to Mum, 'Get yourself and the kids ready, we're going up to the Brit.' This was the old Britannia Theatre in Hoxton. Jo loved the dramas that were performed there. If Mum could afford it we had a bag of peanuts or a ha'penny bag of sweets. We went in the 'gallery' for two pence – half price for us kids. Among the dramas I remember was 'The Face at the Window' – real horrible. Others were 'Sweeny Todd', 'Maria Marten', 'Why Girls Leave Home' ... Sometimes we went to Collins Music Hall or the Islington Empire. That was different. They always had variety shows. We saw Harry Champion, Vesta Tilley, the two Bobs, Hetty King, comedians of all sorts and stars of the day.

London had always abounded in inns and taverns, such as the Cock, specializing in steaks and chops, and the Cheshire Cheese, serving beefsteak pudding on Saturdays. Such hostelries had traditionally been for all. The Victorian era saw things change. With new snobberies and the emergence of restaurants and hotels, better people deserted the old drinking-haunts. The pub emerged for working men – and, alongside pubs, the gin-palaces. 'Gin drinking is a great vice in England,' observed Dickens in *Sketches by Boz*:

but wretchedness and dirt are greater and until you improve the homes of the poor, or persuade a half-famished wretch not to seek relief in the temporary oblivion of his own misery, with the pittance, which, divided among his family would furnish a morsel of bread for each, ginshops will increase in number and splendour.

Pubs generated an entertainment culture of their own. 'I went down to Tothill Street, Westminster, to examine a place there which advertises itself as "The Albert Saloon",' Arthur Munby recorded. He found thirty or forty people sitting on benches, drinking porter and smoking.

At the end of the room was a cracked square piano ... a young woman sat on a broken chair, with her back to the audience, strumming on the piano with unmeaning monotony. Three other young women, without bonnets and wearing cheap muslin gowns & jackets, sat among the people ... There was no curriculum of entertainment: every now & then one of the young women would say, 'I think I'll sing a song,' and would mount ... to the stage, and warble some 'Aunt Sally' or other harmless popular thing; the pianist strumming ever as usual. Sometimes the daubed canvas dropscene was raised, and a stage of about 6 feet by 10 was displayed, where one of the ladies performed a few conjuring tricks, or – on one occasion – a statuesque group of very mild & unexceptionable kind was represented by a woman and a child ... I came away ... much gratified with the rude picturesqueness and propriety of the place.

Out of such pub entertainments arose the music-hall. Its main ingredient was variety, a succession of individual turns – singers, conjurors, dancers, illusionists, acrobats, quick-change artists, strong men, monologue-reciters, eccentrics. Music was the mainstay. Singers appeared in character, and audiences joined in.

Enterprising publicans paid local singers to take part, and the master of ceremonies became an important ingredient, introducing the performers and exhorting patrons to fill their glasses. The catalyst was the new law of 1843 allowing concert rooms attached to pubs to be licensed for musical entertainment. Rapid developments followed, culminating in grand purpose-built music-halls. The Canterbury Hall in Lambeth, built by Charles Morton in 1854–7, is often called the first music-hall: it set the style for others such as the Old Mo in Drury Lane, the Panorama in Shoreditch, Wilton's in Wellclose Square, and the Cambridge in Bishopsgate. The Canterbury had brilliant gas lighting, lavish décor, vast chandeliers, an open platform stage, and rows of dining-tables with waiters serving food and drink. The chairman would lead the singing. Customers stood drinking at the bars, free to come and go. On stage, the singers wore evening dress.

Music-hall created the variety show, with star performers. Dan Leno's patter, Marie Lloyd's 'A Little of What You Fancy' and 'Oh Mr Porter', Charles Coborn's 'Two Lovely Black Eyes', Lottie Collins's 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay' – all became renowned. Sentimentality went down well, and so did jingoism: in 1897 Arthur Reece's 'Sons of the Sea' told the Germans that, though they might build a navy, they could not 'build the boys of the bulldog breed/Who made Old England's name'.

Centred on Hoxton, Shoreditch and Whitechapel, music-hall had become big business. In Hoxton Street stood the Britannia Theatre; MacDonald's, also in Hoxton Street, opened in 1864, and the Varieties, in Pitfield Street, in 1870. But by 1900 pub-based music-halls had been eclipsed by gorgeous variety palaces, with proscenium-arched stages and fixed seats in rows. Magnates like Oswald Stoll and Edward Moss were looking for family audiences to fill their giant West End Coliseums and Hip-

podromes, while the puritanical tendencies of the London County Council forced drink out of the auditorium. Battles were fought over the notorious promenades at the Empire Leicester Square and the Alhambra, both used as pick-up points for tarts. And, although the first London cinema was not opened until the new century, it was at the Alhambra that the first successful film was shown. Recording the 1896 Derby, won by the Prince of Wales's horse Persimmon, it was greeted with wild enthusiasm, the audience demanding the film be repeated over and over again.

London had always been Britain's beacon of learning and science. The Royal Society was chartered in 1662, while in 1778 the first specialist scientific society was created when James Smith bought the collections of the Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus and formed the Linnean Society to promote natural history. At Burlington House the Linnean rubbed shoulders with other learned societies: the Royal Astronomical Society, the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Geological Society, most dating from the early years of the nineteenth century.

In 1754 the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce was founded: it has occupied its present home in John Adam Street ever since the house was built in 1774 as part of the Adelphi complex. It helped organize the Great Exhibition of 1851 – and the Festival of Britain a century later. Aiming at the popularization of science, the Royal Institution was founded in 1799 in Albemarle Street. First employed as assistant to Humphry Davy, its later Director Michael Faraday delivered popular Christmas lectures as well as making major discoveries in electromagnetism.

On the other side of the 'two cultures' divide, the Royal Academy had been founded in 1768 as a school of art and an exhibition centre. For nearly a century it was London's only public training-school for artists, although private establishments were also set up. What is now the Royal College of Art began in 1837 as a school of design and 'practical art' to serve industry.

With the Royal Academy developing a name for conservatism, the torch of change was taken up by the Slade School of Fine Art, opened as part of University College in 1871 and named after the art collector Felix Slade. Numbering among its pupils Walter Sickert, Augustus John and Stanley Spencer, its location contributed to the arty flavour of Bloomsbury, home of painters, writers and Bohemian intellectuals. Two schools founded in 1896 attest the Victorian interest in crafts: the Central School of Art and Design, established by the London County Council, and the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts, founded by private philanthropy. The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) was set up in 1904 by the actor-manager Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree.

London had lacked a university. This was rectified when there opened in Bloomsbury

in 1826 what became known as University College – or, as detractors styled it, 'that godless institution in Gower Street' – admitting non-Anglicans, who were excluded from Oxford and Cambridge. Anglicans retaliated with King's College a couple of years later. The University of London itself was created in 1836 to set examinations and grant degrees to students from both colleges. Other parts of the present London University came later. The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) was set up in 1895 on the instigation of Sidney Webb with money left by the Fabian Henry Hunt Hutchinson. Imperial College was formed out of three separate colleges in 1907, specializing in technological education.

The University of London's charter of 1858, allowing external students to sit its examinations, resulted in the rapid expansion of Birkbeck College, which had started life in 1824 as the London Mechanics' Institution, offering evening education to working men. Renamed in 1866 the Birkbeck Library and Scientific Institution, in recognition of its founder, the physician George Birkbeck, it became part of the university in 1920. In 1878 the University of London opened its examinations to women and thereafter admitted two women's colleges: Bedford College, founded in 1849 by Mrs Elizabeth Jesser Reid – convinced that we should never have better men till men had better mothers – and named after its original Bedford Square site, and Royal Holloway College, opened by Queen Victoria in 1886.

Part-time adult education expanded. Early moves were linked with religious movements, like Quintin Hogg's Youth's Christian Institute (1882). Arising at the same time as the City and Guilds Institute, Hogg's institute developed into the Polytechnic of Regent Street, offering full-time courses in practical and commercial education; the City and Guilds concentrated on part-time technical courses. 'Mutual improvement' societies, private schools and evening schools flourished, for instance the 'Camden Hall Evening School for Young Men', teaching book-keeping, arithmetic, reading and writing, etc.

Schools proliferated – elementary and advanced; religious and secular. In the 1860s there were reckoned to be 860 public day schools in the capital, some 1,700 private schools, about 700 Sunday schools and 100 evening schools. Girls' education had traditionally lagged: in the 1860s there were only three endowed secondary and nine proprietary schools for girls in the whole of London, containing fewer than 1,000 pupils. But girls' schools were improving. In 1848 F. D. Maurice founded Queen's College in Harley Street, for girls and mature women, a year before Mrs Reid opened her ladies' college in Bedford Square.

Miss Frances Buss set up her first school in her father's house in Camden Street in 1851. The syllabus included natural philosophy, Latin and branches of science, as well as more basic subjects. Twenty years later she established Camden School for Girls. Her forty pupils were the daughters of copy clerks, tailors, civil servants, builders and

grocers; she found their ignorance of general knowledge 'beyond belief'. Her school was run on the lines of a boys' public school; discipline was strict, and the aim was to prepare girls for public examinations and acceptance at universities, for training as teachers, and for professional careers.

Education of the poor had traditionally been wretched, and in the hands of a hotchpotch of dame schools and Church and charity schools. In the 1840s in Bethnal Green there were 8,000 to 10,000 children without daily instruction. It was for children such as these – excluded from denominational schools by their 'rude habits, filthy condition and their want of shoes and stockings' – that the ragged schools were intended. In 1844 the Ragged School Union came into being under Lord Shaftesbury. By 1858 there were 128 ragged schools in Middlesex alone, with 11,632 pupils. Yet, even at school, children might learn little. In many of the schools of the National Society and the British and Foreign School Society one master was in charge of 200 or more boys. Because of demand for child labour, the average age for leaving school in East London in 1845 was ten. Thousands of parents were said to be 'either too indifferent, or too ignorant, or too vicious, or too little able to command their children, ever to avail themselves of such educational opportunities as existed'.

This changed after the 1870 Education Act, when elementary education became compulsory, to be provided by locally elected school boards. Hundreds of imposing school buildings were erected. They even caught the eye of Sherlock Holmes. 'It's a very cheering thing to come into London by any of these lines which run high and allow you to look down upon the houses like this,' he told Dr Watson:

I thought he was joking, for the view was sordid enough, but he soon explained himself. 'Look at those big, isolated clumps of buildings rising up above the slates, like brick islands in a lead-coloured sea.' 'The Board schools.' 'Light-houses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules, with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future.'

Libraries too were lighthouses. Circulating libraries and private subscription libraries were popular. The London Library was founded in 1841 by men of letters including Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill, aiming to provide members with 'good books in all departments of knowledge'. Provision of public libraries was made possible by the Public Libraries Act of 1850, but the vestries' response was so laggardly that, for thirty years after the Act, the parishes of St Margaret and St John in Westminster provided the only rate-aided library in the capital. Finally others followed, encouraged by benefactors such as the sugar tycoon Sir Henry Tate (also founder of the Tate Gallery) and the Scottish-born American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie.

Other institutions arose promising public edification. The National Gallery was founded in 1824 after George IV and Sir George Beaumont persuaded the government

to buy the collection of the Russian-born merchant and philanthropist John Julius Angerstein. A gallery was built on the north side of Trafalgar Square. The National Portrait Gallery was added in 1856; the Tate Gallery was opened in 1897.

Above all, the profits of the Great Exhibition created the South Kensington museum-land. Eighty-eight acres facing Hyde Park were to house the four great museums and, in due course, the Royal Colleges of Art, Organists and Music, such learned societies as the Royal Geographical Society, and the Imperial College of Science and Technology. The Victoria and Albert, begun in the 1850s and first called the South Kensington Museum – the present name as well as façade came later – was the first to appear, followed by the Natural History (1873–81), Science (1907) and Geological (1933–5) Museums. (The Royal Albert Hall was a private development, though part of the same cultural movement.) South Kensington expresses High Victorian confidence in progress, the arts and sciences, and, perhaps above all, education. Opposite in Hyde Park, under a Gothic canopy, Victoria's Prince Consort sits in gilt bronze holding in his hands the catalogue of the Great Exhibition of 1851 and presiding over 178 marble statues of artists and four large statuary groups symbolizing Agriculture, Manufacture, Commerce and Engineering.

If Victorian London gloried in the arts and sciences, its growing irreligion shocked the godly. 'What is St Paul's?' Henry Mayhew asked a London costermonger: 'A church, sir, so I've heard, I never was in church.' Religion had no hold upon London's masses. The cleric William Walsham How remarked that East Enders thought of religion 'as belonging to a wholly different class from themselves', associated 'with a prosperity they envy, and a luxury which they resent'.

Three surveys (1851, 1886 and 1903) documented this popular paganism. East and South London had the nation's lowest church attendance. In working-class inner areas fewer than one in five attended a place of worship. London was no city of God: on Sunday 30 March 1851 only 874,339 of London's population of 2,362,236 attended any form of public worship.

The middle classes, of course, went to church religiously, but neither the Church of England nor any of the Protestant sects achieved much following among the masses. This drove William Booth to found the Salvation Army. Originally a Wesleyan lay preacher, he became convinced that only the poor could save the souls of the poor, and in 1865 he launched his 'Christian Mission for the Heathen of our own Country', from which the Army later evolved. By the 1880s the Salvation Army had achieved phenomenal growth – underlining the inability of the other Christian bodies to break through social barriers.

Eminent Victorians were shocked less by poverty than by prostitution and criminality.

Prostitution flaunted itself in Victorian London. In 1859 2,828 brothels were known to the police, though the *Lancet* thought London housed over twice that number and 80,000 prostitutes. The trade was high-profile because it mainly took the form of streetwalking. Near the Bank of England prostitutes were said to stand in rows like hackney coaches, while by the Ratcliff Highway and Shadwell High Street whores strolled about 'bare-headed, in dirty-white muslin and greasy, cheap blue silks with originally ugly faces horribly seamed with small-pox, and disfigured by vice'. The Haymarket was known as 'Hell Corner'. After a walk down the Haymarket and the Strand in the 1860s, Hippolyte Taine reported that

every hundred steps one jostles twenty harlots; some of them ask for a glass of gin; others say, 'Sir, it is to pay my lodging.' This is not debauchery which flaunts itself, but destitution – and such destitution! The deplorable procession in the shade of the monumental streets is sickening; it seems to me a march of the dead. That is a plague-spot – the real plague-spot of English society.

Child prostitution was a scandal. Indeed, a high proportion of the capital's criminals were children – neglected, prowling the streets, begging and stealing. 'They are to be found,' Mayhew observed, 'in Westminster, Whitechapel, Shoreditch, St Giles's, New Cut, Lambeth, the Borough, and other localities. Hundreds of them may be seen leaving their parents' homes and low lodging-houses every morning, sallying forth in search of food and plunder.' As they grew up, they grew more skilful; some turned to picking pockets, house-breaking and burglary, or to prostitution. A girl with a pretty face might count herself lucky if she landed a toff, who might set her up in a St John's Wood villa or some leafy neighbourhood and see that she was educated. 'As for their virtue, they lose it as one loses his watch who is robbed by the highway thief,' wrote such a woman to *The Times* in 1858, on a working woman's life: 'Their virtue is the watch and society is the thief. These poor women toil on starvation wages, while penury, misery, and famine clutch them by the throat and say "Render up your body or die." '

Pooter's London loved hearing about crime scares from the newspapers. In 1867 a new dimension was added with the bombing of Clerkenwell prison and the attempted rescue of Fenian prisoners, while a garrotting outbreak hit the headlines, it being reported that the 'more brutal and inexpert thieves press the fingers of both hands into the victim's throat, others use a short stick, which is passed across the throat from behind, and hauled back at both ends'.

But most notorious were the 'Ripper' murders. The first took place in the early hours of 31 August 1888 in Buck's Row (now Durward Street), Whitechapel. Polly Nicholls, a gin-soaked doss-house inmate, was found with her throat cut. The second victim, Annie Chapman, was killed a week later half a mile away in Hanbury Street. Then one

night, 30 September, two more unfortunates (Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes) were carved up with a knife. Finally, Mary Kelly met the most violent end of them all after taking a man back to her dingy room in Miller's Court, off Dorset (now Duval) Street. These murders created hysteria. More than 600 plain-clothes policemen were called in. Their failure to catch the culprit led to the resignation of Sir Charles Warren, the ineffectual Police Commissioner, who at one point was pursued across Tooting Common by bloodhounds he was training to track the Ripper.

Statistical shortcomings leave it unclear whether Victorian fears about crime waves had the slightest substance. Mayhew's vivid accounts of London's underworld – with characters such as 'Swindling Sall' and 'Lushing Loo' – suggest what was probably true: there were few hardened criminals but thousands routinely needing to bend the law in order to survive. Steal or starve was the law for the poor.

Many took it on themselves to redeem rogues and rescue fallen women. Missions were set up, like the London City Mission, established in 1835, and the Open-Air Mission. Members toured London preaching temperance and salvation. Yet London was undergoing a notable transformation, becoming sober and orderly. The spread of gas lighting made the streets safer by night. Pall Mall had been illuminated as early as 1807; by 1841, it was claimed, 'the metropolis now burns gas in every square, street, alley, lane, passage, and court', and thereby 'half the work of prevention of crime was accomplished'. The establishing of the Metropolitan Police created a comprehensive system of official regulation. The early Victorian capital affords us pictures of a culture of despair, poverty and punishment: Fagin, Bill Sikes, Oliver Twist in the workhouse, and the boy Dickens himself toiling in Warren's blacking-factory while his father languished in the Marshalsea for debt. By the dawn of the twentieth century photographs of slumland are telling a different story: poverty, privation and poor health are everywhere present, but a new domestic orderliness is suggestive of the transformation of outcast London into an integrated proletariat.

Events like the Ripper murders fixed the gaze on one particular quarter: the East End. Between St Katharine's and the London Docks, the desperately unfortunate sought refuge in the narrow, rotten houses behind the main streets. Their occupants pursued vile and grotesquely unsavoury trades. Mudlarks and juvenile thieves infested the river and the violent jungle around the Ratcliff Highway. Women sieved a livelihood from refuse mountains piled up on waste ground, sorting out rags and bones. The most disgusting of these occupations was the pure-finder. 'Pure', or dog-shit, was used in dressing leather, and old men and women gathered it as a final resort, rather than enter the workhouse. A bucketful bought a day's lodging and food. Images like these – half true, half exaggerated – dominated the travellers' tales or anthropological findings of those who ventured east to the dark continent beyond Aldgate.
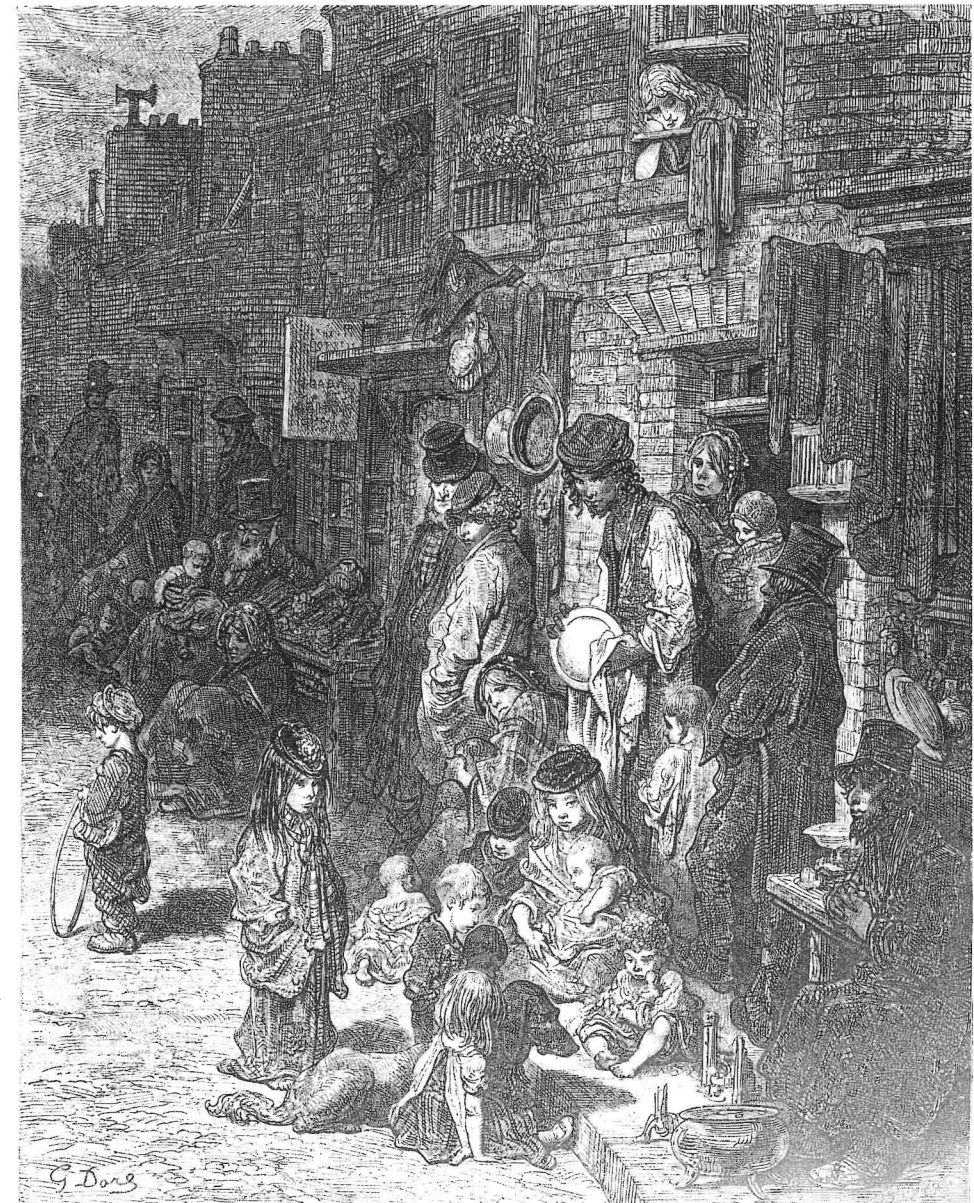
Gustave Doré's evocation of Whitechapel, from *London*, 1872

The East End had the worst slums, the worst overcrowding, the worst death rates. It also housed London's immigrants. From the eighteenth century London's Jewish population expanded. Wealthy immigrants from Spain and Portugal (Sephardim) had settled in the City under the later Stuarts, and they were joined under William III and

Anne by Ashkenazim from Germany, Poland and the Netherlands. In Duke's Place, close to Houndsditch and Aldgate, the Ashkenazim established their first Great Synagogue. By 1850 London's Jewish population had increased to about 20,000, and in the following thirty years it more than doubled, peaking in the 1880s as refugees poured in from central Europe, Poland and Russia – some of them fleeing pogroms. Many accepted wretched earnings in the sweatshops. Tailoring, however, was only one of the trades followed by the immigrant Jews: many were employed by furriers, jewellers, or the furniture trade; they made cigars, umbrellas and coconut matting; and thousands were engaged in street trading from stalls and barrows.

In May 1884 an investigation into the sanitary conditions of 'the Polish colony of Jew tailors' found 'close upon 30,000 Russo-Polish Jews huddled together in districts that were already overcrowded':

In Emily Place ... we found five persons living in one room, while in another house we came upon a Jewish potato dealer who kept his wife, five children and huge stock of potatoes all in one room measuring 5 yds by 6. There was one bed in the room and probably some of the family slept on the floor.

By 1901, 42,032 Russians and Poles were resident in Stepney – a figure exceeded by only five towns in Poland itself. Among these exiles were radicals such as the co-operativist Prince Peter Kropotkin and Rudolf Rocker, the intriguing German anarchist who (though a Gentile) edited the Yiddish *Arbeiter Fraint* from Stepney Green. But for most, economic survival and success were paramount. The teenaged Montague Burton passed through Whitechapel in 1900 on his way from Lithuania to Leeds, to become the world's largest men's clothing distributor. Lew and Bernard Winogradsky, who arrived in Brick Lane in 1912 from Odessa, ended up as Baron Grade and Baron Delfont of Bethnal Green. The property tycoon Charles Clore attended the same elementary school as the Winogradsky boys in Spitalfields. The young Jacob Bronowski discovered science in Whitechapel Library. Jewish communities spread outwards: synagogues were established in Dalston (1885), Stoke Newington (1903), Finsbury Park (1912), Stamford Hill (1915) and Golders Green (1922).

The East End had other immigrants too. The Chinese began settling in Limehouse before 1850, arriving as seamen or ships' launderers. By 1890 sailors from Shanghai were colonizing Pennyfields, Amoy Place and Ming Street, while those from Canton and southern China chose Gill Street and Limehouse Causeway, slightly further west. The Irish also crowded into dockland.

But the East End became principally associated with the cockney. Derived from the middle English *cokeney*, meaning cock's egg, a misshapen egg, the word had originally meant a townee; banteringly it came to mean a Londoner. The cockney had not always been an *East Ender*: he was originally a Londoner in general. Not necessarily working-class, the true cockney was smart, wearing flash attire, perhaps a battered silk hat – the image of the London lad: bright, sharp, never-say-die, streetwise. 'The cockney ... is the supreme type of Englishman,' observed Edwin Pugh in 1912,

in his sturdy optimism, in his unwavering determination not only to make the best of things as they are, but to make them seem actually better than they are by adapting his mood to the exigencies of the occasion, and in his supreme disdain of all outside influences.

By Pugh's time the working-class East Ender had become the cockney, often quite jingoistic about London. Just as the Jewish community had its novelists – notably Israel Zangwill, whose *Children of the Ghetto* (1892), subtitled *A Study of a Peculiar People*, documented life in the Petticoat Lane neighbourhood, with its street sellers and owners of sweat shops, rabbis and scholars, old and young, beautiful and ugly – Arthur Morrison chronicled the cockney. 'Who knows the East End?' asked Morrison in his *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894). His *A Child of the Jago* (1896) centred on a famous slum clearance of the 1890s, when Nicol Street and its courts and alleys around Arnold Circus, Stepney, were destroyed and replaced by blocks of flats. 'This street is in the East End,' opens *Tales of Mean Streets*:

There is no need to say in the East End of what. The East End is a vast city, as famous in its way as any the hand of man has made. But who knows the East End? It is down through Cornhill and out beyond Leadenhall Street and Aldgate Pump, one will say: a shocking place, where he once went with a curate; an evil plexus of slums that hide human, creeping things; where filthy men and women live on penn'orths of gin, where collars and clean shirts are decencies unknown, where every citizen wears a black eye, and none ever combs his hair.

The classic East Ender was rebellious, irreverent, brazen – 'bolshie'. But he was not conventionally 'political'. Some became socialists, but many were xenophobes, or simply cynical. 'In Farringdon Road, you will run across the more traditional Cockney,' reflected H. J. Massingham, surveying the *London Scene* in 1933:

whose astuteness, nonchalance, easy indifferent fellowship, tolerance, casual endurance, grumbling gusto, shallowness, unconcern for anything but the passing moment, jackdaw love of glitter, picaresque adaptability and jesting spirit make up a unique individual.

By then, the cliché cockney was primarily associated with street markets, or with certain speech habits (including the famous rhyming slang noted by Mayhew) – Eliza Doolittle was phonetically pinned down to Lisson Grove by Professor Higgins in the first act of Shaw's *Pygmalion*. As the East End grew more integrated – through trams and buses and commuting – life and art grew confused. The true cockney became the music-hall cockney, the stage cockney, the film cockney, harking back to a previous generation – that of George Robey and Albert Chevalier, of 'Knocked 'em in the Old

Kent Road' and 'The Coster's Serenade' fame. Recently cockneys live only in nostalgia: 'Fings ain't what they used to be.'

The East End came under intense scrutiny. The moneyed, the educated and the holy came from the West End, from Oxford, from the pulpits, to gaze, explore, deplore, reform, redeem. Samuel Barnett pioneered the idea of 'settlements'. The idealistic young Arnold Toynbee begged the forgiveness of the poor of London for the remissness of the élite. 'We – the middle classes, I mean, not merely the rich – we have neglected you,' Arnold Toynbee confessed to the working men who attended his East End lectures in the 1870s:

instead of justice we have offered you charity, and instead of sympathy, we have offered you hard and unreal advice; but I think we are changing ... I think that many of us would spend our lives in your service. You have – I say it clearly and advisedly – you have to forgive us, for we have wronged you; we have sinned against you grievously – not knowing always; but still we have sinned, and let us confess it; but if you will forgive us – nay, whether you will forgive us or not – we will serve you, we will devote our lives to your service, and we cannot do more.

Toynbee turned guilt into institutions – the Whitechapel Library, the Whitechapel Art Gallery, and Toynbee Hall itself, that mission to the poor, symbol of the white man's burden in darkest Stepney. The success of Toynbee encouraged others. In 1884 the Warden of Keble College, Oxford, established Oxford House in Bethnal Green, run on Church of England lines. The Canning Town Women's Settlement (1892); St Mildred's House, Isle of Dogs (1897); St Hilda's East, Bethnal Green (1889); St Margaret's House, Bethnal Green (1889) all followed.

Movements like Toynbee Hall show the paradoxes of late-Victorian London, a world of two cities in which the poor were described as degenerate while being sentimentalized as cockneys. It is easy to sneer at the do-gooders, yet the work of discovery was an important moment in London's coming to know itself. 'It is flat, it is ancient, dirty and degraded' – here is a mid-century view of Bethnal Green, as recorded by William Cotton, the indefatigable banker and philanthropist, Bishop Blomfield's 'lay adjutant':

its courts and alleys are almost countless, and overwhelming with men, women, boys, dogs, cats, pigeons, and birds. Its children are ragged, sharp, weasel-like; brought up from their cradle – which is often an old box or an egg-chest – to hard living and habits of bodily activity. Its men are mainly poor dock labourers, poor costermongers, poor silk weavers, clinging hopelessly to a withering handicraft, the lowest kind of thieves, with a sprinkling of box and toy makers, shoe makers, and cheap cabinet makers. Its women are mainly hawkers, sempstresses, the coarsest order of prostitutes, and aged stall keepers. On Sundays the whole neighbourhood is like a fair.

Dirty men in their sooty shirt-sleeves, are on the house-tops, peeping out of little rough wooden structures, built on the roofs to keep their pigeons in. They suck their short pipes, fly their fancy birds, whistle shrilly with their forefingers placed in their mouths, beat the sides of the wooden building with a long stick like a fishing rod, and use all their ingenuity to snare their neighbour's stray birds.

Thanks to such works of exploration, it became possible for London to discover that it possessed a single identity, and to set about the communal endeavour of public improvement. The generations from Victoria's Jubilee to the affluent 1960s were to witness a remarkable breaking-down of traditional barriers, an equalizing process, and a new mobility both physical and social.