

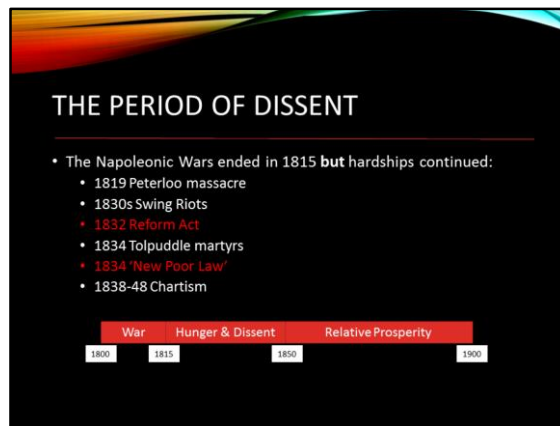


- **Social Realism in Victorian Painting – two hour lecture**
- In order to discuss social realism we have to discuss what was happening during the nineteenth century and how it was represented.
- Paintings depicting the poor were very unusual at the beginning of the nineteenth century but they grew in popularity as the Victorian period progressed.
- This lecture explores that development and asks why it occurred.
- The Victorians were starkly divided between two nations, the rich and the poor. The rich invented charity as a way of dealing with the existence of the poor. In 1846 **Richard Redgrave** painted ***The Sempstress*** highlighting one aspect of the problem of the poor and starting a new genre of painting—social realism. This lecture discusses the social issues and the development of social realism over the Victorian period.

### Notes

- After portraits and landscapes, genre painting was the most popular type of painting in Britain.
- Early in the century genre or subject painting told a simple story which often made a moral point but as artists started to represent the harsher aspects of society the category became more controversial.
- However, from the middle of the century **Richard Redgrave** and **William Powell Frith** started to paint a different type of modern-life painting that showed the complexity of the interacting Victorian class system. This was done in a **light-hearted way** that made the paintings extremely popular as engravings.
- Journalist **Henry Mayhew's** ***London Labour and the London Poor*** (1851–62) wrote the first detailed analysis of the poor.
- **Thomas Robert Malthus** (1766-1834) published *An Essay on the Principle of Population* in which he observed that sooner or later population will be checked by famine and disease, leading to what is known as a **Malthusian catastrophe**. This is because population multiplies geometrically and food arithmetically; therefore, the population will eventually outstrip the food supply.

He wrote in opposition to the popular view in 18th-century Europe that saw society as improving and in principle as perfectible. 'The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man'. As an Anglican cleric, Malthus saw this situation as divinely imposed to teach virtuous behaviour. Malthus wrote that population growth will always be limited by the ability to produce enough food, that the population will always increase if the food supply increases and the only way to keep the size of the population in line with food production inevitably involves misery and vice. Malthus believed that any attempts to help the poor were doomed in the long-term and so he criticized the Poor Laws and supported the Corn Laws (which introduced a system of taxes on British imports of wheat which increased the price of bread).



- For those of you that heard my talk on 'The Politics of Early Nineteenth Century Landscape Painting' in some way this is a continuation but with a **focus on paintings of social realism** rather than landscapes.
- My emphasis is on the paintings but I need to set the scene historically so that the conditions of the poor can be understood.

### The Peterloo Massacre (or Battle of Peterloo)

- The end of the **Napoleonic Wars** in **1815** had resulted in periods of famine and chronic unemployment, exacerbated by the introduction of the first of the Corn Laws. By the beginning of 1819, the pressure generated by poor economic conditions, coupled with the relative lack of suffrage in Northern England, had enhanced the appeal of political radicalism. In response, the Manchester Patriotic Union, a group agitating for parliamentary reform, organised a demonstration to be addressed by the well-known radical orator Henry Hunt. Shortly after the meeting began local magistrates called on the military authorities to arrest Hunt and several others on the hustings with him, and to disperse the crowd.
- The massacre occurred at **St Peter's Field, Manchester**, England, on 16 August 1819, when **cavalry charged with sabres drawn** into a crowd of **60,000–80,000** that had gathered to demand the reform of parliamentary representation. Fifteen people were killed and 400–700 were injured. The massacre was given the name Peterloo in an ironic comparison to the Battle of Waterloo, which had taken place four years earlier.
- Historian Robert Poole has called the Peterloo Massacre one of the defining moments of its age. In its own time, the London and national papers shared the horror felt in the Manchester region, but Peterloo's immediate effect was to cause the government to crack down on reform, with the passing of what became known as the Six Acts. It also led directly to the foundation of *The Manchester Guardian* (now *The Guardian*), but had little other effect on the pace of reform.
- After the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, a brief boom in textile manufacture was followed by periods of chronic economic depression, particularly among textile weavers and spinners (the textile trade was concentrated in Lancashire).

Weavers who could have expected to earn 15 shillings for a six-day week in 1803, saw their wages cut to 5 shillings or even 4s 6d by 1818.

- Events such as the **Pentridge Rising** (1817, 300 agricultural workers), the **March of the Blanketeers** (1817 intended weavers march on London) and the **Spa Fields** (1816, Islington, 10,000, electoral reform) meeting, all serve to indicate the breadth, diversity and widespread geographical scale of the demand for economic and political reform at the time.

### Swing Riots

- The Swing Riots were a **widespread** uprising by agricultural workers; it began with the **destruction of threshing machines** in the Elham Valley area of **East Kent** in the summer of **1830**, and by early December had spread throughout the **whole of southern England and East Anglia**.
- As well as the attacks on the popularly hated, labour-displacing, threshing machines the protesters reinforced their demands with wage and tithe riots and by the **destruction** of objects of perceived oppression, such as **workhouses and tithe barns**, and also with the more surreptitious **rick-burning**, and **cattle-maiming**. The first threshing machine was destroyed on Saturday night, 28 August 1830, and by the third week of October more than 100 threshing machines had been destroyed in East Kent.
- The anger of the rioters was directed at three targets that were seen as the prime source of their misery: the tithe system, the Poor Law guardians, and the rich tenant farmers who had been progressively lowering wages while introducing agricultural machinery. If caught, the protesters faced charges of arson, robbery, riot, machine breaking and assault. Those convicted faced imprisonment, transportation, and ultimately execution.
- The Swing Riots had many immediate causes, but were overwhelmingly the result of the progressive impoverishment and dispossession of the English agricultural workforce over the previous fifty years, leading up to 1830. In parliament Lord Carnarvon had said that the English labourer was reduced to a plight more abject than that of any race in Europe, with their employers no longer able to feed and employ them.
- The name "**Swing Riots**" was derived from the name that was often appended to the **threatening letters** sent to farmers, magistrates, parsons, and others, the fictitious Captain Swing, who was regarded as the mythical figurehead of the movement. The Swing letters were first mentioned by The Times newspaper on 21 October 1830.
- The protests were notable for their **discipline** and the customary protocols favoured by the crowds, characteristics which were very much part of the tradition of popular protest going back to the eighteenth century. The structural reasons for the Swing 'riots' (or risings) are relatively straightforward: **underemployment, low wages, low levels of relief**, and competition for winter employment from **machinery**.
- Many protestors found **sympathy in middle-class radicals** who encouraged protesters to spread far from their original sources. Further, early sentences

by magistrates against the rioters, even those who destroyed threshing machines, were fairly light. Thus, riots continued into 1831.

### **Tolpuddle martyrs**

- The Tolpuddle Martyrs were a group of 19th century Dorset agricultural labourers who were arrested for and convicted of swearing a secret oath as members of the *Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers*. The rules of the society show it was clearly structured as a friendly society and operated as a trade-specific benefit society. But at the time, friendly societies had strong elements of what are now considered to be the predominant role of trade unions. The Tolpuddle Martyrs were subsequently sentenced to transportation to Australia.
- Before 1824/25 the Combination Acts had outlawed "combining" or organising to gain better working conditions. In 1824/25 these Acts were repealed, so trade unions were no longer illegal. In 1832, the year of a Reform Act which extended the vote in England but did not grant universal suffrage, six men from Tolpuddle in Dorset founded the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers to protest against the gradual lowering of agricultural wages in the 1830s caused by the surplus supply of labour in an era when mechanisation was beginning to have an impact on agricultural working practices for the first time. This was a particular problem in remote parts of southern England, such as Dorset, where farmers did not have to compete with the higher wages paid to workers in London and in the northern towns experiencing the Industrial Revolution. They refused to work for less than 10 shillings a week, although by this time wages had been reduced to seven shillings a week and were due to be further reduced to six shillings. The society, led by George Loveless, a Methodist local preacher, met in the house of Thomas Standfield.
- In 1834 James Frampton, a local landowner, wrote to the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, to complain about the union, invoking an obscure law from 1797 prohibiting people from swearing oaths to each other, which the members of the Friendly Society had done. James Brine, James Hammett, George Loveless, George's brother James Loveless, George's brother-in-law Thomas Standfield, and Thomas's son John Standfield were arrested, tried before Judge Baron John Williams in *R v Lovelass and Others*.<sup>[1]</sup> They were found guilty, and transported to Australia.
- They became popular heroes and 800,000 signatures were collected for their release.<sup>[3]</sup> Their supporters organised a political march, one of the first successful marches in the UK, and all, except James Hammett (who had a previous criminal record for theft) were released in 1836, with the support of Lord John Russell, who had recently become Home Secretary. Four of the six returned to England, disembarking at Plymouth, a popular stopping point for transportation ships.
- Hammett was released in 1837. Meanwhile the others moved, first to Essex, then to London, Ontario. Hammett remained in Tolpuddle and died in the Dorchester workhouse in 1891.

### **Chartism**

- Chartism was a working-class movement for **political reform** in Britain which

existed from **1838 to 1858**. It took its name from the **People's Charter of 1838** and was a national protest movement, with particular strongholds of support in the north of England, the east Midlands, the Potteries, the Black Country and south Wales. Support for the movement was at its highest in 1839, 1842 and 1848 when petitions signed by millions of working people were presented to the House of Commons. The strategy employed was to use the scale of support which these petitions and the accompanying mass meetings demonstrated to put pressure on politicians to concede manhood suffrage. Chartism thus relied on constitutional methods to secure its aims, though there were some who became involved in insurrectionary activities, notably in south Wales and Yorkshire.

- Before the **1832 Reform Act** voting was public, few could vote and more than half of all MPs were elected by just 154 voters. Many of the new fast growing towns such as Manchester and Leeds had no MP of their own. The 1832 Reform Act removed many 'rotten boroughs' increased the franchise slightly and added 67 new constituencies.
- The **People's Charter** called for six reforms to make the political system more democratic:
  - A vote for **every man twenty-one years of age**, of sound mind, and not undergoing punishment for a crime.
  - The **Secret Ballot** – To protect the elector in the exercise of his vote.
  - **No Property Qualification for Members of Parliament** – thus enabling the constituencies to return the man of their choice, be he rich or poor.
  - **Payment of Members**, thus enabling an honest trades-man, working man, or other person, to serve a constituency; when taken from his business to attend to the interests of the country.
  - **Equal Constituencies**, securing the same amount of representation for the same number of electors, instead of allowing small constituencies to swamp the votes of large ones.
  - **Annual Parliament Elections**, thus presenting the most effectual check to bribery and intimidation, since as the constituency might be bought once in seven years (even with the ballot), no purse could buy a constituency (under a system of universal suffrage) in each ensuing twelvemonth; and since members, when elected for a year only, would not be able to defy and betray their constituents as now.
- Chartism can be interpreted as a continuation of the 18th century fight against corruption and for democracy in an industrial society but attracted considerably more support than the radical groups for economic reasons including wage cuts and unemployment.
- After the passing of the **Reform Act 1832**, which **failed** to extend the vote beyond those owning property, the political leaders of the working class made speeches claiming that there had been a great act of betrayal. Only 700,000 extra people could vote. This sense that the working class had been betrayed by the middle class was strengthened by the actions of the Whig governments of the 1830s. Notably, the **hated New Poor Law** was passed in 1834, depriving working people of outdoor relief and driving the poor into workhouses, where families were separated. It was the massive wave of opposition to this measure in the north of

England in the late 1830s that gave Chartism the numbers that made it a mass movement.

- 1838-1848 were years of high unemployment. The **depression of 1842** led to a wave of strikes, as workers responded to the wage cuts imposed by employers.
- "**1842** was the year in which more energy was hurled against the authorities than in any other of the 19th century"
- From the mid-1840s employment increased, food prices came down and people had higher wages. There was an Anti-Corn Law League and a Ten-Hour Movement to reduce the length of the working day.
- The **Corn Laws** were introduced in 1815 and removed in 1846.
- Fergus O'Connor was elected to Parliament in 1847.
- There were three great petitions drawn up by the Chartists in 1839, 1842 and the largest in 1848.
- Chartism suffered from internal problems.
  - There were two leaders, William Lovett and Fergus O'Connor and they disagreed on tactics. Lovett wanted peaceful persuasion by respectable working men and O'Connor's charismatic rhetoric implied physical force. He was very popular, people named their children after him. In Newport in November 1839 soldiers killed 22 Chartists.
  - There were many small groups scattered over the country and communication was difficult.
  - They all agreed on the six points but disagreed on many other issues such as improved education, sobriety laws and improved working conditions.
  - Initially middle-class and working people were supporters but after Chartism became linked to violence the middle-class supporters left and with less money the movement started to fail.
- In 17 hours, 13 clerks had apparently counted 1.9 million signatures; O'Connor expressed scepticism that such a task could have been completed by such a small number of people in such a short time. If pseudonyms such as 'Victoria Rex' and 'No Cheese' were used, this did not necessarily mean these signatures were forgeries; for some Chartists it was necessary to keep their identities secret from employers.
- After the 1848 demonstration it was presented by the press as a 'fiasco' but the demonstrators viewed the peaceful demonstration with pride. The aggressive militarism of the Government had been unnecessary.
- Reform Acts were passed in 1832, 1867 (extended the franchise), 1872 (made the ballot secret), 1884 (extended the franchise to all home owners), 1884 (extended the franchise to two-thirds of men), 1918 (abolished property qualification for men and allowed women over 30 to vote), 1928 (extended franchise to all women).
- **Did Chartism fail?** In one sense they did as voting reform took a long time to bring about but it created a powerful statement of the rights of ordinary (working and

middle-class) people. Over the next 70 years all of the Chartist demands were passed into law except for annual elections.





George Morland (1763–1804), *The Comforts of Industry*, before 1790, 31.50 x 37.60 cm, National Galleries of Scotland  
 George Morland (1763–1804), *The Miseries of Idleness*, before 1790, 31.60 x 37.30 cm, National Galleries of Scotland

- There was a massive move in the nineteenth century from the farm to the town. At the beginning 75% worked on farms and 25% in towns and by 1900 this was reversed, 75% lived and worked in towns and only 25% remained in the countryside.
- In the early eighteenth century there were about 180 peers of the realm and a few thousand gentry who were gentlemen and were landowners and country squires. They became high-ranking clergy, military officers and civil officers. The second rank was the 'middling sort', mostly tradesmen. They were people who made money from working and some were more wealthy than the gentry but their status was lower. At the top of the second rank were barristers and clergymen and at the bottom farmers and shopkeepers. The third rank, at the bottom of society, were the labourers who ranged from skilled artisans at the top to vagrants at the bottom, these are what I am calling the 'poor'. It is difficult to know for certain but at the beginning of the eighteenth century perhaps half the population were so poor they needed some form of charity to survive.
- So let us start by looking at the rural poor but from the point of view of the gentry and the 'middling sort'.

### The 'Deserving' and 'Undeserving' Poor

- The distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor is often presented as a Victorian idea but it was illustrated by William Hogarth in his series called 'Industry and Idleness' showing the lives of two poor apprentices one of whom becomes Lord mayor of London through hard work and the other leads a life of crime and is hanged at Tyburn.
- This pair of pictures by Morland shows the 'Miseries of Idleness' and the 'Comforts of Industry'. Instilling the twin virtues of industry and sobriety were seen as a way to prevent revolution and to increase agricultural productivity. His aim of highlighting the moral shortcomings of domestic life shows the influence of William Hogarth (1697-1764). The idle poor have only a bone left to eat but the empty cask and pitcher suggest an earlier

indulgence in alcohol suggesting these people have only themselves to blame and their lack of self-control is to blame for their impoverished state and a tragic fate awaits them.

- **The irony is that Morland was a notoriously heavy drinker** and debtor who spent the final years of his life enduring intermittent bouts in prison and eventually died from alcoholism aged 41. Morland's flamboyant lifestyle became the subject of four anecdotal biographies immediately after his death.
- These paintings are not representative of Morland's entire output which was seen by his contemporaries as bordering on the 'unpatriotic and unsafe'.

### Notes

- Morland began to draw at three and was an honorary member of the Royal Academy at ten. It is said his father locked him in an attic and forced him to copy paintings but Morland hid some drawings and lowered them out of his window at night. His friends would sell them and they would spend the money on drink. By the age of 17 he was well known among dealers and artists of repute and when he left home he started a life of hard work and hard drinking almost without parallel in the history of art. He married Anne Ward and during the 1780s was a reformed character. **Anne Ward** a beautiful and virtuous woman who was deeply attached to him despite his profligacy. She was the sister of James Ward whose *Gordale Scar* used to be prominently exhibited at Tate Britain. He broke with his wife and started drinking again although he paid her an allowance for the rest of his life.
- His art was so popular that, although he received only a fraction of what each painting was worth he could easily live for a week on a day's work. He was besieged by dealers who came to him with a purse in one hand and a bottle in the other. The amount of work he got through was prodigious. He would paint one or two pictures a day, and once painted a large landscape with six figures in the course of six hours. Every financial demand that was made upon him was paid by a picture that was worth many times the value of the account to be settled.
- In November 1799, Morland was at last arrested for debt, but was allowed to take lodgings 'within the rules,' and these lodgings became the rendezvous of his most discreditable friends. During this confinement he sank lower and lower. He is said to have often been drunk for days and to have generally slept on the floor in a helpless condition. He was released from debtors prison but his health was ruined and he died in 1804 aged 41. His wife died three days later from convulsive fits brought on by the news of his death according to Walter Gilbey in his *George Morland: His Life and Works*.
- In his last eight years he painted 900 paintings and over 1,000 drawings and over his life he painted over 4,000 pictures.

### References

[https://www.nationalgalleries.org/object/NG\\_1835](https://www.nationalgalleries.org/object/NG_1835)

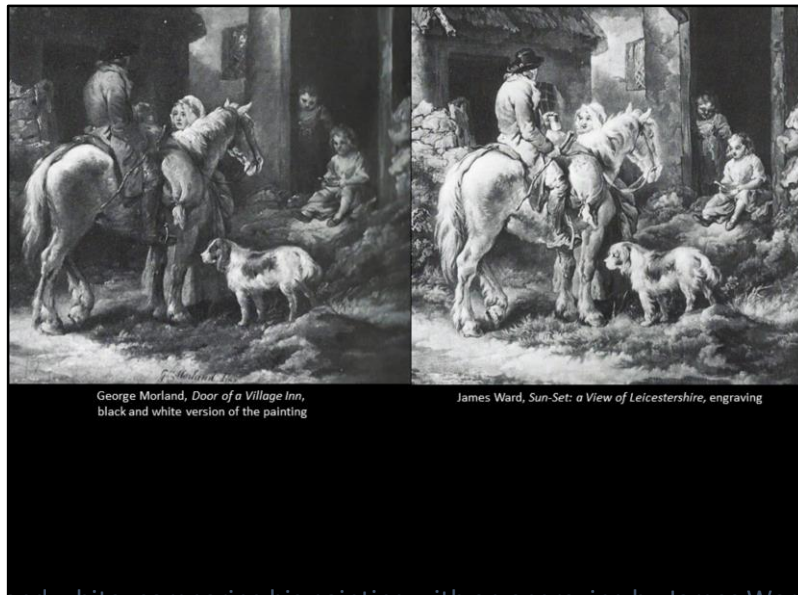
Michele L. Miller, 'J. M. W. Turner's *Ploughing Up Turnips, near Slough*: The Cultivation of Cultural Dissent', *The Art Bulletin*, 1995, p. 581



George Morland (1763-1804, died age 41), *Door of a Village Inn or A Traveller Resting at a Cottage with a Boy Burning Weeds to the Left*, 1790s, Tate Britain

George Morland (1763-1804, died age 41), *A Traveller Resting at a Cottage with a Boy Burning Weeds to the Left or Door of a Village Inn*, 1790s, Tate Britain

- There were very few artists representing the real conditions in the countryside. Most paintings showed an idyllic, pastoral scene. But there were other ways of seeing the land. A few artists, such as **George Morland** saw rural poverty and created popular art by representing the lives of the poor.
- This is an genre painting, that is one showing a group of people engaged in some activity. Often the activity has a moral lesson but that was rare with Morland, here a traveller has stopped at a cottage or an inn for a pint of ale.



George Morland, *Door of a Village Inn*, black and white version of the painting

James Ward, *Sun-Set: a View of Leicestershire*, engraving

Detail, black and white, comparing his painting with an engraving by James Ward

- A detail from the painting is shown on the left and an engraving of the painting by James Ward is shown on the right.
- The engraving and prints were called *Sun-Set: a View of Leicestershire*.
- This is an example of '**spot the difference**'. On the left is the painting in black and white and on the right an engraving produced by his **brother-in-law** James Ward (1769-1859) RA, painter of animals and an engraver (he painted *Gordale Scar*, 1814-5, 'sublime' and enormous English Romantic work in Tate Britain, died in poverty).
- Look at the **left hand child** in the doorway and the **woman's face**. Morland was the most direct representation of the poor. There is **no idealisation**. The woman serving the farmer has a blank, **depressed expression**. The child on the left looks as if it is from a **horror movie**. The art historian John Barrell describes them as '**broken in spirit**'.
- James Ward has created an **engraving** from the painting which he thought would **sell better**. The engravings sold for between 3s 6d (17.5p) and 21s (just over a pound) to a wide market. In the engraving the woman and child are **smiling and welcoming** and John Barrell makes the point that their cheerful expression and the better condition of their clothes and surroundings would have reassured the viewer about the conditions and ultimately the governability of the poor at a time of increasing unrest.
- Ward has even **fluffed up** the hair of the **horse** and the **dog** to make them look more lively and alert and the seated child has a **larger necklace** and a **bigger bowl of soup**.
- The reality was the countryside was **not a pleasant place** to work for the poor, which is why many went to the cities and towns to find work despite the appalling conditions.
- Let us next look at how Constable and Turner handled the politics of the period.



David Wilkie (1785-1841), *The Village Holiday*, 1809-11, Tate Britain

### Humour and the Poor

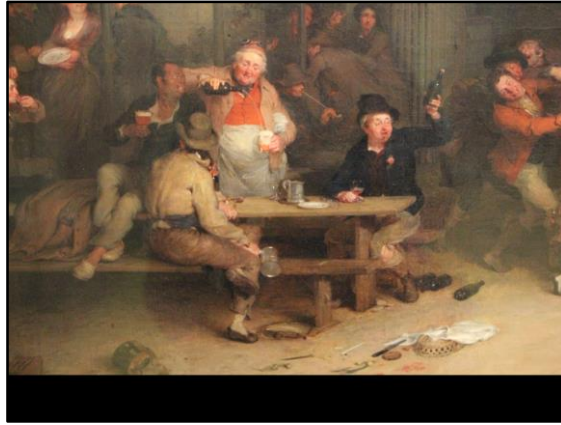
- The other approach taken by artists is to present the poor humorously.
- Wilkie first called the painting *Public-House Door*, then *Alehouse Door* (more polite), then *Village Holiday* and finally *Village Festival* (a title often used by Teniers).
- Scottish born **David Wilkie** became a **star** of the London art world. Much admired for his **moralising** and **humorous** narratives of everyday life. He is **virtually unknown today**. This is about virtue and vice, in this case drink.
- It was exhibited in **1812** and bought by John Julius **Angerstein**, an important collector, for **900 guineas**. After his death 38 of his finest paintings were **bought** by the British government to form the nucleus of the collection of the **National Gallery**. Until the National Gallery was built in Trafalgar Square, the works were displayed in his town house in Pall Mall.
- Sir George Beaumont bought *The Blind Fiddler* in 1808 for 50 guineas and then wrote to Wilkie enclosing a cheque for an additional £50 as the rising fame of Wilkie made Beaumont feel in his debt. Wilkie returned the cheque although only three years previously he had been so poor he considered returning to Scotland.

Key point: genre painting changed enormously during the nineteenth century.

### David Wilkie (1785-1841)

- Born in Fife, the son of a Reverend. Trained in **Edinburgh** and painted in the style of **David Teniers the Younger** (Flemish, Antwerp, 900 paintings) stories of common life.
- Went to London 1805 aged 20 and enrolled in **RA School**. No money so turned to **portraiture** and a genre subject was commissioned and accepted by the RA and hung in prime position.

- Patron Sir **George Beaumont**, by 1807 President Benjamin West already considered him a great painter.
- ARA 1809 **RA 1811**.
- In 1820 he was commissioned by the Duke of Wellington to paint **Chelsea Pensioners** (1822) for which he paid 1,200 guineas cash.
- His mother and eldest brother died in 1824 and his other older brother died in 1825. Both brothers left children to be taken care of. He had long been prone to **nervous illness**, brought on by anxiety and by 1825 he had become **too tense paint** and he travelled abroad.
- His **European travels** resulted in a looser less detailed style.
- He was made **Painter in Ordinary** to George IV (following Thomas Lawrence) and William IV the same year (1830) and then Queen Victoria. He found portraits difficult and failed with Victoria.
- He was knighted in 1836 and made chevalier of the Légion d'honneur in 1841.
- He went to the **Holy Land** in 1840 and made many sketches and his style may have changed again on his return but he **died suddenly** on the **steamer home** and was buried at sea.
- He **never married** and was a private man.



Reviews at the time commented on the people in the painting.

*London Society*, 1863,

***'The landlord on the left pouring out ale with the air of one who knows the exact height and the precise angle at which to poise the bottle and manoeuvre the glass is a jolly, ruddy, well-to-do specimen of a host of the olden time. He does not disdain to crack a joke even with these tipsy revellers to the intense delight of the negro, who roars out his admiration so lustily as to call down upon himself a rebuke from the countryman who is waiting for his ale.'***



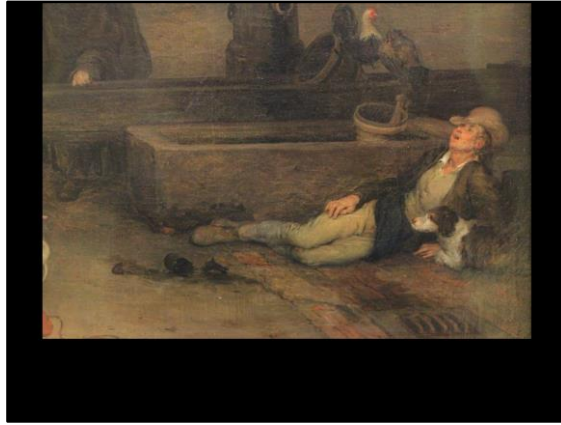


A man tries to decide whether to go home to his wife or stay for another drink with his friends.

London Society, 1863

*'...the half-drunken rustic with the smock-frock, whom Wilkie always speaks of as 'the principal figure' and his wife who is trying to drag him away from his riotous companions, from whom he parts with unmistakable reluctance. Detached the man's head loses something of its character; but on the whole it is the least satisfactory in the admirable group of which it is the centre. Wilkie acknowledged that this head 'puzzled him beyond everything' and that he 'could not get satisfied with it.' The wife is an exquisite conception. She is still pretty-the outline is handsomer in the sketch than in Wilkie's picture-but her face is worn and anxious her dress untidy. The village belle has been mated to one who was in his youth the village beau; but the club-room has proved more attractive than the home, and here are the old signs of a dissipated husband making a slatternly wife. The mischief has as yet only reached the first stage. Alone, his case would seem hopeless; but there is a something in her face that leads us to believe that there are better days in store for both.'*





- *London Society*, 1863

*'The old dame whose pale sad face contrasts so strikingly with the rubicund visage of the landlord is, in the picture, standing by the pump, looking mournfully at the sot, her son, who is stretched at length beside the horse-trough'*



- Although was see this as a painting with a moral message concerning the evils of drink at the time and during the nineteenth century it is described as a jolly, friendly scene of an inn that reviewers would love to visit.
- A **different description** was provided by *The Saturday Magazine*, 1842, Volume 20, page 50,

*This picture represents the circumstances likely to occur at the door of a village alehouse on a warm summer evening when the labours of the day are done and its fatigues have tempted some of the villagers to take something more than their needful repose.*

*It consists of three principal groups and several subordinate ones scattered about the scene in a somewhat unskilful and unsatisfactory manner, as far as relates to mere composition, but full of the most rich and admirable detail.*

***The centre group represents contest between two parties a set of halt tipsy merrymakers and a village housewife and her daughter as to which shall get possession of the person of an idle husband, whom the latter have come to fetch home. There is a homely and pathetic truth in the expression of the wife that is delightful. Anybody but Wilkie would have made her a shrew. The imploring expression of the daughter-which is conveyed by the air and attitude alone, her face not being seen-is also admirable.***

*These are richly but perhaps somewhat too forcibly contrasted with the coarse merriment of the boozers who wish to retain their companion. The principal figure in this group the husband is the last expressive part of it. It seems a matter nearly of indifference to him whether the contest is decided for go or stay. The colouring of this group is exquisite in every part: perhaps superior to any thing else from the hand of this artist The*

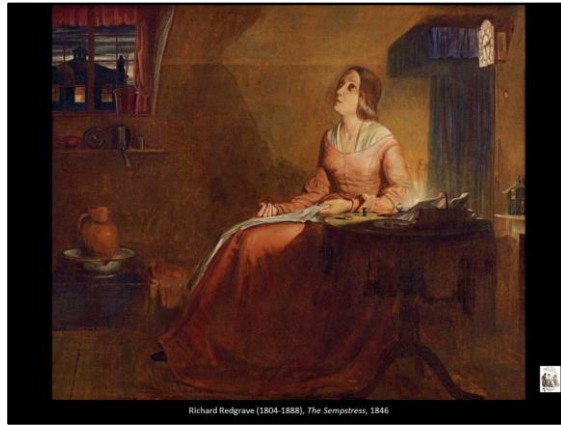
*left-hand group of the three is even more rich in the expression appropriate to the subject, than the one just described. The face of the sot who is holding up the bottle is absolutely perfect. It is unquestionably superior in its way to any one face that has proceeded from the pencil of any artist living or dead with the exception of two or three others by Wilkie himself.*

***That of the landlord also who is pouring out the ale and who seems to contrive to keep himself just sober enough to make his guests tipsy is no less true than rich. The black who is the third of this group is not so good he is not black but red. It is very rare to see this artist sacrifice truth to harmony of effect: he had better left the head out altogether than have done so in this instance.***

*The third principal division of the composition occupying the right corner contains two or three exquisite morceaux both of colouring and expression. The girl holding the fat infant is an admirable study, designed with infinite ease, and coloured with great sweetness. Indeed the colouring of many parts of this picture in breadth sweetness and purity is perhaps superior to any other from this painter, whose forte certainly does not lie in that department of his art. And, in fact, it is only of individual parts that the above is true even with regard to this picture.*

*As a whole it is scattered, confused and unsatisfactory in this respect. The only other portion of this group which requires particular mention, is the face, figure and whole deportment of the nice old woman who is just finding her idle drunken son half asleep behind the horse trough. The sight, painful as it evidently is to her, is scarcely capable of moving her from that staid gravity which becomes her age and character, for she is evidently one of the matronly oracles of the village, and perhaps the schoolmistress.*

*The secondary groups in this picture do not demand any detailed description. The fault of this work and it is a great one is a want of unity and compression in the composition and consequently a want of general compactness and singleness of effect. **Unlike one of Teniers great works of this kind, it tells like two or three different pictures, instead of like one consistent and necessarily connected whole. The immense size of the buildings as compared with that of the figures increases this defect. The work however, displays infinite talent, both of mind and of hand; but certainly more of the latter than of the former.***



Richard Redgrave (1804-1888), *The Sempstress*, 1846

Key point: This painting defined a new style of art.

### The Sempstress

- This painting is **the fountain head** of a whole tradition of social realist painting in Victorian England.
- This painting is based on a poem of the same name and the two had a profound effect.
- You can see it is 2:30 in the morning and the sky is streaked with moonlight. The lit windows opposite indicate that the same thing is happening all over London. The seamstress's eyes are swollen and inflamed as she must do close work by the light of a candle. The morsel of food on the plate indicates she has to eat while she is working and on the mantelpiece you can see medicine bottles. One has a label saying 'The Mixture' and it is supplied by Middlesex Hospital so she is unwell.
- This is one of the first paintings in which art is used to campaign for the poor. Richard Redgrave did not come from a wealthy family and his sister had been forced to leave home and find a job as a governess. She became ill when in service and had to be nursed by his family until she died. It was painted in 1843, the year that *Punch* appeared and in the Christmas issues there was a poem that struck a nerve. By Thomas Hood and called *The Song of the Shirt*. It began:

*With fingers weary and worn  
With eyelids heavy and red  
A Woman sat, in unwomanly rags  
Plying her needle and thread –  
Stitch! stitch! stitch!  
In poverty, hunger and dirt,  
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch*

*She sang the "Song of the Shirt"*

- The verse that inspired Redgrave. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1844 (this is the 1846 version). The poem continues that she is sewing a shirt but also her own shroud.
- Redgrave was an Academician, art director of the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A), received the cross of the Legion of Honour and was surveyor of crown pictures for 24 years and produced a 34 volume catalogue. He declined a knighthood in 1869.
- It is impossible today to **understand the impact** it had. Thackeray described it as '***the most startling lyric in our language***'. It was set to music, the subject of a play and of many sermons. Sempstresses often went blind and if a single stitch was wrong their wages were docked. Articles appeared saying British citizens were being subjected to a **form of slavery** and a German living in England called **Friedrich Engels** showed a study he had written of the **horrors** of the situation to a **friend** living in **Paris called Karl Marx**.
- Redgrave had created a **new category of painting** but it is not based on visiting the poor but the interior is borrowed from a 17th-century Dutch work and the **swollen eyes** looking **heavenward** is typical of many Baroque images of **swooning saints**. Redgrave realised that unless he made the subject **respectable** it would not be accepted. He **succeeded** brilliantly.



A favourite subject of the Victorians was the 'fallen women'. They were obsessed with the fallen woman. Women were expected to be pure and innocent yet were believed to be driven by emotion, like children. As a consequence it was believed they had to be protected by men and the best place for them was in the home where they could not come into contact with any influences that would lead them astray.

Poor women were a problem as they had to mix in the world so they were expected to be innocent and work in safe professions such as sewing.



Augustus Egg, *Past and Present No. 1 - Misfortune*, 1858, Tate Britain  
 See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus\\_Egg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_Egg)

### **Past and Present**

The same fate could befall a married woman if she was unfaithful.

The following is taken from the Tate's description of the painting. 'The theme of the triptych is the discovery of the woman's infidelity and its consequences. In this first scene the wife lies prostrate at her husband's feet, while he sits grimly at the table and their children (the older girl modelled by William Frith's daughter) play cards in the background. The husband is holding a letter, evidence of his wife's adultery, and simultaneously crushes a miniature of her lover under his foot. The setting is an ordinary middle-class drawing room, but closer observation reveals that the room is full of symbols.

- Egg was clearly influenced in his approach by Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* of 1853 (Manchester City Art Galleries).
- The house of cards is collapsing, signifying the breakdown of the couple's marriage. The cards are supported by a novel by Balzac - a specialist in the theme of adultery.
- An apple has been cut in two, the one half (representing the wife) has fallen to the floor, the other (representing the husband) has been stabbed to the core.
- As a parallel, the two pictures on the wall depict the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (labelled *The Fall*); and a shipwreck by Clarkson Stanfield (labelled *Abandoned*). The couple's individual portraits hang beneath the appropriate image.
- In the background of the picture the mirror reflects an open door, denoting the woman's impending departure from the home.
- The position of her arms and the bracelets round her wrists give the impression that she is shackled. In Victorian England a man could safely take a mistress without fear of recrimination, but for a woman to be unfaithful was an unforgivable crime. As Caroline Norton, an early feminist, wrote, 'the faults of

women are visited as sins, the sins of men are not even visited as faults' (quote in Lambourne, p.374).

The set of pictures was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858 with no title, but with the subtitle, "August the 4<sup>th</sup> - Have just heard that B - has been dead more than a fortnight, so his poor children have now lost both parents. I hear she was seen on Friday last near the Strand, evidently without a place to lay her head. What a fall hers has been!"

In Victorian England a man could safely take a mistress without fear of recrimination, but for a woman to be unfaithful was an unforgivable crime. As Caroline Norton, an early feminist, wrote, 'the faults of women are visited as sins, the sins of men are not even visited as faults'





Augustus Egg, *Past and Present No. 2 - Prayer*, 1858, Tate Britain

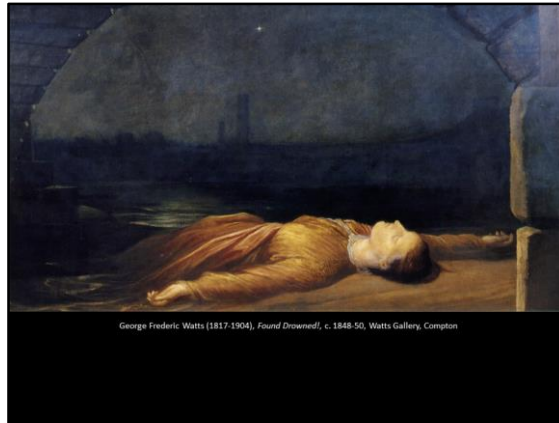
The second painting shows a night scene, several years later, in a dark and sparsely-furnished bedroom shortly after the death of the heartbroken husband. The children are older now: the younger one kneels in a white nightgown, weeping into the lap of the elder, who sits in a black mourning dress, looking out of a window at rooftops and a clouded moon. The same small portraits of the husband and the wife decorate the bedroom wall.



Augustus Egg, *Past and Present No. 3 - Despair*, 1858, Tate Britain

The third painting is also a night scene. The details of the cloud and moon show it is the same evening as depicted in the second painting. The fallen wife is resting in the detritus-strewn shadows beneath the Adelphi Arches, by the River Thames. She clutches a bundle of rags from which protrude the emaciated legs of an infant, perhaps the fruit of her affair, either asleep or dead. Posters on the wall ironically advertise two contemporary plays, 'Victims' by Tom Taylor and 'The Cure for Love' by Tom Parry, both tales of unhappy marriages, and also 'Pleasure excursions to Paris', perhaps a reference to the novel by Balzac in the first picture. She looks up from her place in the gutter to the moon and stars above.

A similarly watery destination for fallen women was depicted in Rossetti's *Found*, GF Watts's *Found Drowned* and Abraham Solomon's *Drowned! Drowned!*, all inspired by Thomas Hood's 1844 poem, *The Bridge of Sighs*.



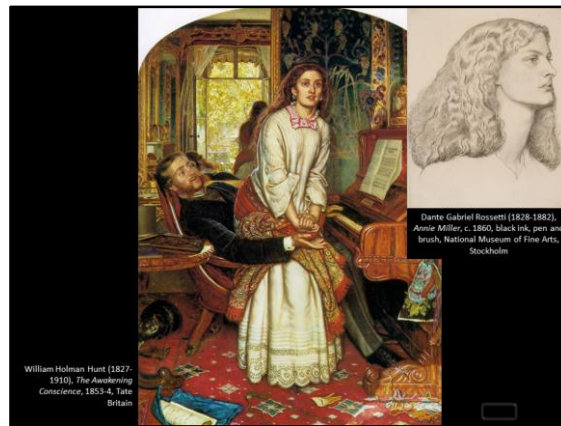
George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), *Found Drowned!*, c. 1848-50, Watts Gallery, Compton

- It was painted when Watts returned from Italy but was **not exhibited** for 20 years.
- This is one of four social realist pictures that Watts painted between 1848 and 1850.
  - *Under a Dry Arch* c. 1845-50, the most brutal. In London 1 person out of 20 had no food or shelter.
  - *The Irish Famine* c. 1845-50
  - *The Seamstress* c. 1845-50
- '**Found Drowned**' is a **legal term** used in a coroner's inquest and the heading used in newspapers to report bodies that had been found in the Thames who were typically women. This woman looks as if she has just been pulled from the Thames as her feet are still in the water.
- There is a chain and heart shaped locket in her hand suggesting the cause of her suicide. The setting is under **Waterloo Bridge**, well known for illegal suicide and the drama is increased by her outstretched pose, illuminated face and the star which suggest she is a **martyr** to the injustice of the way in which women were treated in society.
- Her plain clothes suggest poverty and in the distance we see the heavily industrialised south bank near **Hungerford Bridge** contrasting the wealth of capitalism with the despair brought about her poverty.
- This was one fate that befell a woman that had fallen on hard times. The other was prostitution which was the other scandal in Victorian London.
- Henry Mayhew (1812-1887), *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851, 4<sup>th</sup> volume 1861 on prostitutes, thieves and beggars), detailed interviews first published in the *Morning Chronicle*. A significant part of the population had no fixed abode, outsiders and migrants teemed through the streets. All goods were transported by cart, there were thousands of street traders called costermongers. He describes now obsolete trades such as gathering snails for food, collecting dog dung for tanneries (pure finders) and sewer-hunters who such for metal. See

<https://archive.org/details/londonlabourlond04mayh>

- Mayhew estimates the number of prostitutes as 50,000 in 1793 when the population was 1 million. The police estimate 8,000 and the Bishop of Exeter 80,000. 50,000 in 1 million is 1 in 20 of all women (including children). 105 women were born to every 100 men, which is 50,000 per million excess women who cannot earn a living.

Key point: Watts painted four social realist paintings between 1848 and 1850



William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *The Awakening Conscience*, 1853-4, Tate Britain

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Annie Miller*, c. 1860, black ink, pen and brush, National Museum of Fine Arts, Stockholm

Key point: a controversial painting about an important social problem from a different angle

### The Awakening Conscience

- The inspiration for this painting was **Proverbs**: 'As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart'.
- Some critics misinterpreted this painting, one thought it was a **brother and sister** playing the piano but the real meaning was quickly determined. It is a gentleman with his mistress (she does not wear a wedding ring) in the room he has rented for their meetings. Hunt hired a room at Woodbine Villa, 7 Alpha Place, **St John's Wood** to provide an authentic interior.
- As they play the piano and sign Thomas Moore's *Oft in the Stilly Night* together she has a sudden spiritual revelation. She gazes into the **garden** reflected in the mirror representing **God's work on earth** and **redemption** is possible signified by the **ray of sunlight** in front of her.
- The painting is full of symbolic elements that are intended to be read.
  - The **cat** toying with the broken winged bird symbolizes her plight,
  - The man's **discarded glove** warns that the likely fate of a cast off mistress is prostitution.
  - The **tangled skein** of yarn signifies the complex situation in which she is trapped.
- Ruskin wrote to *The Times* on 25 May 1854, 'the very hem of the **poor girl's dress**, at which the painter has laboured so closely, thread by thread, has story in it, if we think how soon its pure whiteness may be soiled with dust and rain, her outcast feet failing in the street'.

- The model is **Annie Miller** (1835-1925), a barmaid Hunt met when she was **15**. He **fell in love** with her and wanted to **marry her** but only if she **educated herself** when her was away in the **Middle East**. When he was away and contrary to his instructions she **sat for Dante Gabriel Rossetti** and this caused a **rift** between them on Hunt's return. She became involved with 7<sup>th</sup> **Viscount Ranelagh** (pronounced ran-er-lah) and Hunt broke off their engagement. She was going to sue for **breach of promise** by Ranelagh's cousin Captain Thomas Thomson **fell in love** with her. And they married in 1863. Years later Hunt met her on Richmond Hill 'a buxom matron with a carriage full of children'. She **died aged 90** in **Shoreham-by-Sea**. It is not known whether she became 'gay' (i.e. a prostitute) but one art historian (Jan Marsh) believes it is likely she remained 'pure'.



- The theme of the fallen woman was becoming increasingly popular at the time that Rossetti began his picture *Found*. Conceived in 1851, it was described by Helen Rossetti as follows,  
*"A young drover from the country, while driving a calf to market, recognizes in a fallen woman on the pavement, his former sweetheart. He tries to raise her from where she crouches on the ground, but with closed eyes she turns her face from him to the wall."*
- The fall is described in Genesis Chapter 3 and in John Milton *Paradise Lost* (1667).
- God creates Adam and Eve, the first man and woman. God places them in the Garden of Eden and forbids them to eat fruit from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil". The serpent tempts Eve to eat fruit from the forbidden tree, which she shares with Adam and they immediately become ashamed of their nakedness. Subsequently, God banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, and places cherubim to guard the entrance, so that Adam and Eve will not eat from the "tree of life".
- In Victorian society a fallen woman was one who had lost her chastity. Women had few employment opportunities outside marriage and so in times of financial hardship some women turned to prostitution. More generally it was a woman who transgressed social norms such as by being educated or eccentric or, for example, female dancers and performers.
- As a result of rapid urbanisation there were many prostitutes in cities. Estimates vary from 7,000 (Police Department) to 80,000 (Society for the Suppression of Vice).



## THE CREATION OF VICTORIAN CHILDHOOD

Three aspects of childhood are considered:

- The deserving poor child
- The sentimental child
- Children in advertising





William Collins (1788-1847), *Rustic Civility*, 1833, V&A

Key point: poor children being shown at leisure was acceptable if they were civil

Sentimental scenes of children were popular with collectors and the public.

### Child Mortality

- The important thing to realise is that **in 1840, 1 in 6 children died before the age of one and one third before five**. In **slums half** of all children died before the age of five. Parents loved their children as much as today and without contraception most women were more or less **permanently pregnant**. This meant **everyone was in mourning**, had been in mourning or had friends in mourning for dead children.
- Surprisingly, if we **remove child mortality** then, despite what you often read, **life expectancy was similar to today**. **Degenerative disease** was **very low** compared to today (e.g. **heart diseases, cancer, dementia, diabetes, arthritis**). The reason was that everyone had a **lot of exercise and a healthy diet**. People did not die of degenerative diseases **but of infections** that can be cured today.
- The general view was that **children were naturally infidels** and had to be **taught Christian values**. This meant they had to be **rescued from the poor**. Children were treated **very strictly** and subject to **punishments** that historians now class as torture. Children who worked in **factories** were on average **six inches shorter** than those who did not and the average eighteen-year old factory boy was five feet three inches tall.
- One study of the poor in Bolton (1834) found of a total weekly wage of £1 8s 5d over £1 was spent on food, thirty pounds of bread, twenty pounds of potatoes and three pounds of flour. 3s 5d went on rent including coal.

Other items included cheese, butter, bacon, meat, sugar, tea, salt, soap, candles and tobacco but all small quantities. Their diet was **deficient in protein, iron and vitamin C**. Note that there were **no green vegetables**, they did not become available until the 1850s.

- As a result the children of the poor were **stunted**, might suffer from vitamin deficiencies such as **rickets** and as a result looked very different from the children of the wealthy. It was not until the twentieth century that children of different social backgrounds began to develop in a similar way.
- In this painting, we see three rustic children **holding a gate open** for a gentleman whose presence is indicated by his **shadow**. Poor children had generally been shown at work, for example in Gainsborough's pictures of children, but here they are **at leisure**. They are also displaying a natural civility. This painting is not ironic, **Collins was a Tory** and **opposed** to the **Reform Bill** and what this picture is saying is that the **poor do not need the vote** as they are **well off**, have **leisure time** and are **naturally subservient** to gentlemen.

#### William John Thomas Collins (1788-1847)

- William Collins was a **genre painter** whose work was **more highly valued than that of Turner or Constable**.
- He trained at the Royal Academy School and went on to become a popular painter of landscapes and rustic genre scenes.
- He travelled extensively in Britain and abroad, particularly in **Italy**, and these journeys are reflected in the subjects of his pictures.
- He was particularly fond of representing **children**.
- He became an **RA in 1820** (aged 32) and exhibited at the **RA every year from 1807 to 1846 (39 years, 124 pictures)**.
- He married the sister of **Margaret Sarah Carpenter (1793-1872)**, a British portrait painter who was very famous in her time but unknown today. She exhibited at the **RA from 1818 to 1866 (48 years)** and was awarded a £100 a year pension by Queen Victoria.
- The eldest of his two sons was **William Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) the novelist** and author of *The Woman in White* (1859) and his other son Charles Allston Collins (1828-1873) the Pre-Raphaelite painter whose *Convent Thoughts* was attacked in *The Times* but defended by Ruskin and who gave up painting in 1857 as it gave him stomach pains (he died of stomach cancer in 1873).



John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *My First Sermon*, 1863, Guildhall Art Gallery  
 John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *My Second Sermon*, 1864, Guildhall Art Gallery

Key point: by the 1860s 'childhood' as we understand it today had been created by the Victorians

### John Everett Millais

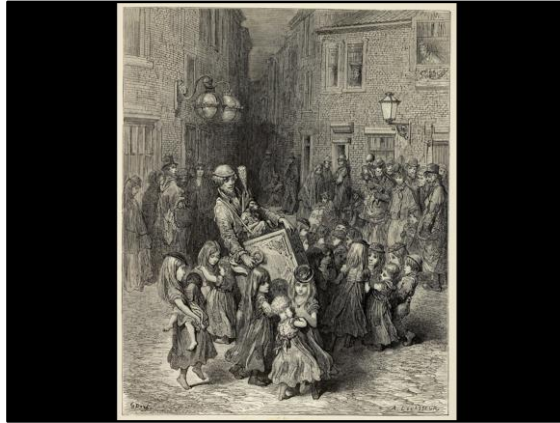
- The model was Millais' five-year old daughter **Effie** and she is sitting in one of the old high-backed pews in **All Saints Church, Kingston-on-Thames**, which Millais hurried to paint in December 1862 shortly before they were removed. The *Art Journal* wrote, '**One of the happiest works this artist has ever painted**'.
- Millais was so pleased with the finished painting that he painted a copy in just two days working from morning to night without a break. He sold the copy for £180 immediately.
- After the success of *My First Sermon* at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1863, Millais painted a companion showing the same little girl - his daughter Effie - after the **novelty has worn off**. In his speech at the next Royal Academy Banquet, the Archbishop of Canterbury claimed it as a warning against '**the evil of lengthy sermons and drowsy discourses**'.
- *My Second Sermon* followed on the phenomenal success of Millais' painting *My First Sermon*. One critic noted: 'Everybody is rejoiced to recognise, sitting in the same place as last year, the little girl, now dear to many a heart, who then was listening...in rapt attention.' Both images were widely reproduced as **prints**.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury is reported to have said, 'Art has, and ever will have, a high and noble mission to fulfil.... we feel ourselves the better and the happier when our hearts are enlarged as we sympathise with the joys and the sorrows of our fellow-men, faithfully delineated on the canvas; when our spirits are touched by the playfulness, the innocence, the purity, and may I not add (pointing to Millais' picture of *My First Sermon*) the piety of childhood'.

### The Creation of the Modern Child

Millais and other artists painted many pictures of children which have caused art historians (Robert Polhemus in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination* discussing Millais's *The Woodman's Daughter* based on Coventry Patmore's poem in which Maud gets pregnant by the squire's son and commits suicide) to make a number of general points:

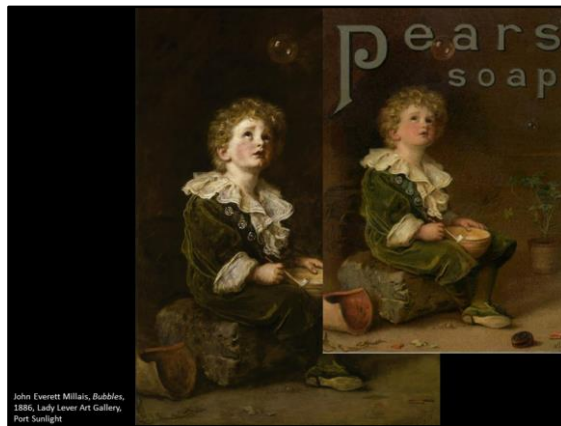
- They create a **new relationship** between adults and children which intensifies the **fascination with childhood**
- They express a strong cultural desire to **idolize** children and represent them as **beautiful**
- They often identify **faith** with childhood
- They honour childhood as a time of **innocence** and potential virtue
- They make the **well-being** of children a touchstone of good
- They portray children as desirable but **time-doomed** and a menaced state of being
- They present children as **adorable** but also **vulnerable** requiring **vigilant adult concern**
- They often **eroticize and sexualize** childhood (although not in these paintings)
- They imply a **child's experience** is a **predictor** for later life
- They place children in a **narrative** that extends beyond childhood and so conceives it retrospectively implying psychoanalytic insight
- They turn ideas about 'proper' social station and class division into problems

The overall effect is to treat the child as an object onto which adult fantasies of innocence, morality, faith and nostalgia are projected.



Gustave Doré (1832-1883), 'An Organ-Grinder', *London: A Pilgrimage*, 1872

- In 1869, Blanchard Jerrold suggested to Doré that they work together to produce a portrait of London. Jerrold had obtained the idea from *The Microcosm of London* produced by Rudolph Ackermann, William Pyne, and Thomas Rowlandson in 1808. Doré signed a five-year contract with the publishers Grant & Co that involved his staying in London for three months a year, and he received the vast sum of £10,000 a year for the project. Doré was mainly celebrated for his paintings in his day. His paintings remain world-renowned, but his woodcuts and engravings, like those he did for Jerrold, are where he really excelled as an artist with an individual vision.
- The completed book, *London: A Pilgrimage*, with 180 engravings, was published in 1872.



John Everett Millais, *Bubbles*, 1886, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight

- In about 1807 **Andrew Pears** (1770-1845) developed the first transparent yet foaming soap that was a cosmetic aid and kind to the complexion. In the early nineteenth century his company became famous among the wealthy and the soap was endorsed by artists such as Lillie Langtry. Their marketing was always clever and appealed to the masses. **Thomas Barratt** (who married the granddaughter of Andrew) convinced Millais to give up rights to his painting *Bubbles*. Millais, who was wealthy and successful, was worried about being exploited and 'selling out' but he agreed and was very happy with the campaign. He was later attacked (by Marie Corelli in *The Sorrows of Satan*) for prostituting his talent and defended himself by saying he had sold the copyright so could not control the use.
- The art world was **scandalised** about this use of fine art and the argument continued into the twentieth century **until Andy Warhol** united fine art and mass marketing. Barratt pears said he spent **£30,000** on the campaign and millions of reproductions would hang in homes around the world.
- The campaign was part of a **racist message** 'The first step towards lightening the white man's burden is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness'.
- *Bubbles* was originally called *A Child's World* and the model was his five-year old grandson **William Milbourne James**. James (1881-1973) became an Admiral, politician and author. His mother was Effie, daughter of Millais. The painting dogged his life and he was often called 'Bubbles'.
- *Bubbles* was based on early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch paintings in the **vanitas** tradition. Vanitas painting remind the viewer of the transience of life. There is a young **plant** on one side and a **broken pot** on the other and the boy stares at a **large bubble** that is about to burst. It was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery and bought by Sir William Ingram of the *Illustrated London News*. It was seen in the paper by Thomas Barratt the managing director of A&F Pears, who had married Mary Pears, the eldest daughter of Francis Pears, the head of the company. Barratt was the father of **modern advertising** with his slogans, use of visual impact, testimonials and children and then the *Pears Annual* (first edition 1891) and *Pears Cyclopedia* (1897).

THE POOR



Samuel Luke Fildes (1843-1927), *Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward*, 1874, Royal Holloway College

- In 1834 a new Poor Law was introduced and was welcomed by the wealthy as they thought it would reduce the cost of looking after the poor, take beggars off the streets and encourage poor people to work hard to support themselves.
- The new Poor Law resulted in the establishment of workhouses where the conditions were designed to be worse than the worse slums of the poor to discourage them from seeking benefits.
- However, the slums were so appalling that the conditions in even the worse workhouses could not match them without causing a public outcry. The poor hated and feared the workhouse so much that there were riots in northern towns.

## Notes

### **Luke Fildes**

- Samuel Luke Fildes was an English painter and illustrator who was born at Liverpool and trained in the South Kensington and Royal Academy schools.
- The Houseless Poor Act (1864) permitted homeless people to sleep in the **casual wards of workhouses**. In this painting, Fildes shows a group of poor people queuing up to receive one of the prized tickets handed out by the police that allowed them to sleep in the workhouse. The original drawing was first published in *The Graphic* newspaper with information about the Act.
- Fildes, wrote:
 

*I had been to a dinner party, I think, and happened to return by a police-station, when I saw an awful crowd of poor wretches applying for permits to lodge in the Casual Ward. I made a note of the scene, and after that often went again, making friends with the policeman and talking with the people themselves. The was my chance, and I at once began to make studies for my Graphic picture. From that I elaborated the large canvas afterwards exhibited at the Academy.*
- The artist got to know some of the people he met in the line and invited them to his house to sit for him so these are portraits of the poor but we do not know their



names.

### **Poor Law 1834**

- "Following the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, a uniform public strategy for helping the poor, based on the development of workhouses, emerged but the primary aim of the act was to reduce the poor rates. This was to be accomplished by making the conditions in the workhouses so harsh that the poor would be dissuaded from applying for relief. This was done by largely adhering to a policy of providing a living standard below that of the poorest labourer.
- The grudging benefits of the workhouse system were to be available to those who lived in the Parish. As a result, no aid was available to those who might need very short term help, beggars, tramps, wayfarers and what Victorians referred to as "casuals" or "vagabonds." By 1837, however, it was apparent that something needed to be done to provide assistance, particularly for those indigent wayfarers from other parishes. The Poor Law Commissioners recommended that this should be provided as short term shelter (usually for a single night) and a meal in return for work. In addition to the wayfarers, there were those local, urban homeless who were unwilling to go into the workhouse. This might have been because they valued their freedom or, more probably because conditions in the workhouse were seen as being more onerous than being on the street or even in gaol. Rather than claim workhouse relief they might take a night's accommodation in a casual ward in order to avoid foul weather or to get the meagre supper that was provided.
- Those who sought such short term accommodation were separated from the longer term residents of the workhouse confined to the "casual" wards. According to Norman Longmate, the "standard policy" which was developed to deal with such short term applicants was "to make the vagrant's life so disagreeable that he would hesitate to come back."

### **References**

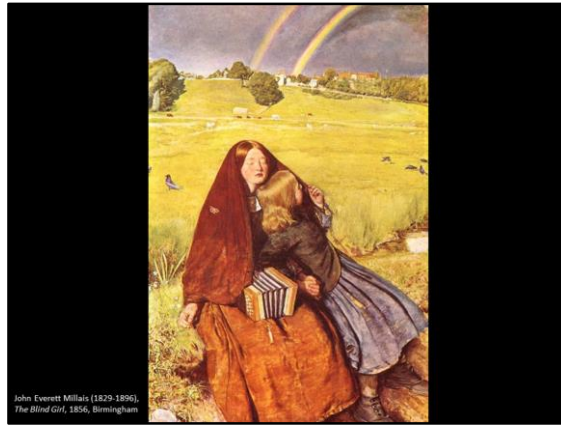
See <http://vichist.blogspot.co.uk/2012/12/the-victorian-casual-ward.html>

James Greenwood, 'A Night in a Workhouse', *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 12, 13 and 15, 1866, <http://ia600309.us.archive.org/23/items/anihtinaworkhouse/workhouse.pdf>



Henry Wallis (1830-1916), *The Stonebreaker*, 1857, Birmingham Art Gallery

- This is the other result of the workhouse where stone breaking was a common task given to men.
- It is believed that Wallis painted it as a commentary on horrors resulting from the **Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834** which discouraged any form of relief for the poor and introduced the workhouse.
- Henry Wallis's *The Stonebreaker* was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858.
- The man is wearing **agricultural labourer's clothes** so it shows what happened to out-of-work **rural workers**.
- Many critics assumed the man was **sleeping** after a hard day's work and although Wallis never confirmed it there are many indications that the work has **killed him**.
- The frame was inscribed with a line paraphrased from Tennyson's *A Dirge* (1830): "*Now is thy long day's work done*"; the muted colours and setting sun give a feeling of finality; the man's posture indicates that his hammer has slipped from his grasp as he was working rather than being laid aside while he rests, and his body is so still that a stoat, only visible on close examination, has climbed onto his right foot.
- A **grim painting** of a grim subject.
- Wallis's father's name and profession are unknown as when his mother remarried the wealthy architect Andrew Wallis in 1845 Henry took his name. He enrolled in the Royal Academy School in 1848 and studied in France and was a friend of the Pre-Raphaelites.
- Henry Wallis is best known for *The Death of Chatterton* (1856). When Wallis was short of money he painted another version of *The Death of Chatterton*. He once said that dead poets are more saleable than dead labourers (referring to *The Stonebreaker*) His next major work, *The Stonebreaker* (1857, exhibited in 1858), consolidated his reputation as a true Pre-Raphaelite.



John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *The Blind Girl*, 1856, Birmingham

Key point: the 'deserving poor' were acceptable

### The Blind Girl

- Two itinerant beggars assumed to be sisters.
- One is a musician with a concertina on her lap and they are resting by the wayside after a rainstorm before travelling to **Winchelsea**, visible in the background.
- It has been interpreted as an **allegory** of the **senses** and the **rainbow** has been interpreted in **Biblical terms** as a sign of God's covenant (Genesis 9:16 'Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth').
- Note that a **double rainbow** is rare and caused by a double reflection in each rain drop. Because of the double reflection the colours of the secondary rainbow should be **inverted** with **red on the inside**. The area between the two rainbows should be darker than the rest of the sky. This is called **Alexander's band**, after Alexander of Aphrodisias (200 CE, taught in Athens and wrote commentaries on Aristotle's work) who first described it



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Last of England*, 1855, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

- As I mentioned, 1.5 million people **emigrated** from Ireland but many people were emigrating from England to find a better life not just hungry farm workers but also the middle-class. One reason was the gold rush in Australia in 1851 (the Californian gold rush was 1848-55).
- In *Last of England* by Ford Madox Brown we see a **middle-class couple** with a **baby**.
- The man was modelled on Brown himself and the woman on his wife Emma.
- The model for the **fair-haired child eating** the apple was Brown's daughter **Catherine** (Cathy) born in 1850.
- The hand of the **baby** was supposedly modelled by their second child, their son **Oliver**.
- Although Brown was never officially one of the seven Pre-Raphaelites they were all close friends. In 1852 one of the group, the sculptor **Thomas Woolner** (1825-1892) was forced through lack of work to emigrate to Australia and this is thought to have inspired this painting. Woolner returned after a year and became a successful sculptor and was elected to the Royal Academy in 1875.
- Emigration was at a peak in 1852 and **350,000** people left that year. Brown himself considered emigrating to India to find a better life.
- Another trigger was the discovery of **gold** in Australia (Victoria gold rush was 1851 onwards) and California (1848 onwards). The work was extremely arduous and most made little money from gold although a few, such as Samuel Brannan in California, made a fortune from selling equipment to the miners.
- Like the Impressionists Brown  **painted** the scene **outside** in his garden and in his diary Brown noted that the '*...ribbons of the bonnet took me 4 weeks to paint.*'
- Brown loved to pose on the **coldest** days with snow on the ground in order to achieve the right degree of **blue skin**.
- According to his biographer '*He was the first painter in England, if not the world to*

*attempt to render light exactly as it appeared to him.'* (biography, Ford Madox Brown)

### **Notes**

- There are two versions, one in the Fitzwilliam Cambridge (1860, red cape) and the other in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (grey cape). A small watercolour replica of the Birmingham version is in the Tate. There is also a fully worked study and a detailed compositional drawing.
- All are in the form of a tondo, or round panel. The circular, porthole theme is reinforced by all the circular elements of the painting.
- 1,900 tons of gold were mined in Victoria in the nineteenth century paying off the national debt and helping to create the British Empire.
- Through his brutal honesty of vision and acute representation of light and colour he presents us with a universal theme of loss, travel, fortitude, love and despair hinting at Mary and Joseph and their flight out of Egypt.
- Its representation of irresistible destiny and tragedy is as remorseless as *King Lear*.
- On completion it sold for £150 to dealer David White.
- His courtship was unconventional, when he started the painting in 1852 he had been living with Emma for three years, Catherine was born in 1850 and they married in 1853.
- In 1859, *The Last Sight of England* as it was then known was sold by Benjamin Windus to Ernest Gambart for 325 guineas.
- It was voted Britain's eight favourite painting in a BBC poll.



John Thomson, *Street Life in London*, The 'Crawlers', 1877

### The Crawlers

A crawler is someone who **begs from beggars** and literally **crawls** from place to place. The book writes,

*Huddled together on the workhouse steps in Short's Gardens, those wrecks of humanity, the Crawlers of St. Giles's, may be seen both day and night seeking mutual warmth and mutual consolation in their extreme misery. As a rule, they are old women reduced by vice and poverty to that degree of wretchedness which destroys even the energy to beg. They have not the strength to struggle for bread, and prefer starvation to the activity which an ordinary mendicant must display. As a natural consequence, they cannot obtain money for a lodging or for food. What little charity they receive is more frequently derived from the lowest orders. They beg from beggars, and the energetic, prosperous mendicant is in his turn called upon to give to those who are his inferiors in the "profession." Stale bread, half-used tea-leaves, and on gala days, the fly-blown bone of a joint, are their principal items of diet.*

They sit **on hard stone steps** day and night in wind and rain and get **little sleep**. She is looking **after the baby** from 10 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon for a **cup of tea** which she does not always get. Many of the crawlers were previously **middle class people** who fell on **hard times**. This woman's **aim** is to **earn a few shillings** in order to travel to the hop fields in order to **save about a pound**. With this she could **start work again**, her **son** could get his **clothes** out of the **pawnshop** and **get a job** and she would **rent** a little **room** in order to have an **address** so she could get a **job**.

**John Thomson** gradually acquired a clientele of the fashionable rich during the 1880s and eventually a royal warrant in 1881.



Gustave Doré (1832-83), *Dudley Street, Seven Dials*, 1872, illustration for Douglas Jerrold's *London: A Pilgrimage*

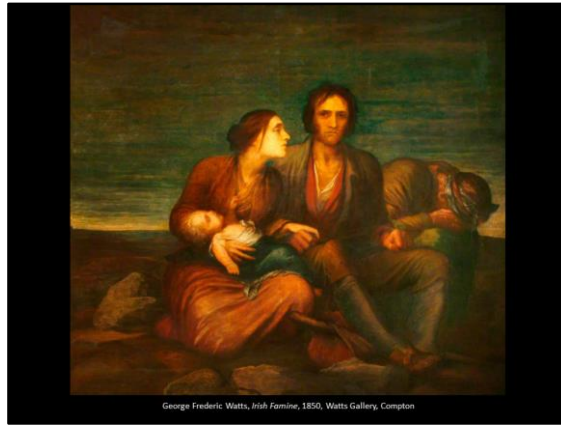
- Illustration of a street market in Dudley Street, Seven Dials, from 'London: a Pilgrimage' by Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré, 1872. Seven Dials was a slum area near Covent Garden. Jerrold talks the squalor and hopelessness of the area and says that "In the street market of Drury Lane the mark of misery seems to be upon every man, woman, and child."
- Busy street scene in Seven Dials, Covent Garden; children litter the street, blocking the way of an approaching carriage; small shops line the right of the street, with shoes laid out around the openings to the cellars below houses, the vendors seated below ground within opening, only their heads visible from the street.
- The book was characterised as 'the wonder and horror of the age'.
- Paul **Gustave** Louis Christophe **Doré** (1832–1883) was a French artist, printmaker, illustrator and sculptor. Doré worked primarily with wood engraving. He started work in France as a caricaturist and went on to illustrate books including Lord Byron and the English Bible in 1866. This later led to a major exhibition of his work in London in 1867 and in 1869 Blanchard Jerrold suggested they work together on a book about London. The completed book, ***London: A Pilgrimage*** was published in 1872. It enjoyed commercial and popular success, but the work was disliked by many contemporary critics. Some of these critics were concerned with the fact that Doré appeared to focus on the poverty that existed in parts of London. Doré was accused by The Art Journal of '**inventing rather than copying**.' The *Westminster Review* claimed that 'Doré gives us sketches in which **the commonest, the vulgarest external features are set down**.' The book was a financial success, however, and Doré received commissions from other British publishers.
- Doré was overwhelmed by the seething mass of humanity in London and his meticulous execution provides pictures of deeply unsettling frankness. He had a photographic memory and hated to be seen drawing in public so he lurked in doorways and worked in the evening and the morning. He provided a nightmare

vision of the London poor leading some critics to conclude they should all be **herded into labour camps, a programme of mass sterilization introduced to prevent the degeneration of the race, and one writer recommended the 'extermination of the unfit as a class'.**

### **References**

- Jeremy Paxman, *The Victorians*





George Frederic Watts, *Irish Famine*, 1850, Watts Gallery, Compton

- We have seen *Found Drowned*. This is another of the four social realist paintings of 1848-50. They were only shown privately.
- The Irish **Great Famine** was from 1846 to 1850 and resulted in the **deaths of 1 million** and the emigration of a further million, about 20-25% of the population. The cause was potato blight but Ireland was still exporting **30-50 shiploads of food** a day to Britain, more than enough to feed the population. Some historians therefore describe it as **genocide** and it eventually led to Irish independence in the next century (1921, law 1922, David Lloyd George and Michael Collins).
- Watts **falling spirits** and **ill health** fed into a series of social realist canvases depicting problems of Victorian society at the time.
- He fell in **love** with **Virginia Pattle** but she married Viscount Eastnor and Watts travelled to Ireland with the poet Aubrey de Vere.
- Virginia was one of the eight Pattle sisters (Adeline (eldest), Eliza, Julia, Sara, Maria, Louisa, Virginia and Sophia). Julia Pattle (the 'ugly duckling') married Charles Cameron and took up photography in her later life. Maria married John Jackson and one of their children, born in India, was Julia Prinsep Duckworth Stephen (née Jackson), a renowned beauty, niece of Julia Margaret Cameron and mother of Virginia Woolf. Her parents had both been married previously so she grew up with brothers and sisters from three marriages. Julia had first married Herbert Duckworth and Sir Leslie Stephen had first married Harriet Marian (Minny) Thackeray, a daughter of William Thackeray (novelist who wrote *Vanity Fair*).



William Edward Lockhart (1818-9), 'Grand Rally, Kennington Common, 10 April 1848', Royal Collection, 10 April 1848, Royal Collection

- Social conditions for most people from the beginning of the nineteenth century to mid-century were appalling and in Ireland they were even worse.
- It was a time of revolution across Europe and on 10 April 1848 an enormous crowd gathered on Kennington Common.
- There was a Chartist meeting and a petition with **six million signatures** was handed in to Downing Street. A disaster and possible revolution was avoided by hair's breadth.

### Notes

- **Revolution - on Monday 10 April 1848 a revolution** almost took place in England. The **Chartists** arranged a rally for that day to present a petition to Parliament.
- 74 years later my Mother was born where you see those large houses on the left.
- In the morning people started to arrive by train and walk from all over London and they gathered on **Kennington Common**. The organiser, Feargus O'Connor an MP said there were 300,000 but the Government said it was only 15,000. Historians generally agree there were about **20,000 to 50,000**. It was a **peaceful** demonstration and the organisers intended to hand in the petition a 5.7 million signatures to Parliament. Between 85,000 and 170,000 special constables and soldiers were prepared to **do battle** to prevent the demonstration from crossing back over the Thames. The **special constables** included **Gladstone, Robert Peel** and, most **strangely, Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte**, the future **Napoleon III**. The army had cannons prepared to open fire. Any small incident or skirmish could have resulted in a riot and many deaths but in the event the **crowd melted** away and by two o'clock the crowd was gone and only a few boys playing ball games remained. There were skirmishes on **Blackfriars Bridge (1769)** and many arrests were made and at one point **sabres were drawn** by the cavalry but the violence was contained. Waterloo Bridge and Charing Cross Bridge were toll bridges and the special constables enjoyed the afternoon lounging and 'enjoying the pleasures of a pipe' (from *Illustrated London News*). Feargus O'Connor was allowed to take the petition to the new Palace of Westminster.
- The same year there were uprisings and revolution across Europe and there were attempts at armed uprisings in England but for reasons **historians cannot agree** on the Chartists movement slowly **faded away**. It is not because reform took place, it was another **19 years** before the **Second Reform Act (1867)** doubled the male franchise to

about **one third** of adult males.

- The other aspect of Victorian life was revolution or the **fear of revolution**. In France the Orleans monarchy had been overthrown in February 1848.
- **Link:** To return to art, the Kennington Common demonstration was watched by the artists John Everett **Millais** and William **Holman Hunt** and six months later (an evening in early September, 9<sup>th</sup> was Saturday) they founded the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood with **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** (who was living with Hunt) in Millais's parents house at **83 Gower Street**. On the 20 August they met to examine Lasinio's engravings of the Campo Santo frescoes at Pisa. **James Collinson**, **Frederic George Stephens**, poet and critic **William Michael Rossetti**, and sculptor **Thomas Woolner** joined to form a seven-member-strong brotherhood.
- Mr. Hunt says—and he must be correct—that the **word Præraphaelites** “had first been used as a term of contempt by our enemies”. Rossetti added ‘Brotherhood’ which he preferred to ‘clique’ or ‘association’. ...

### Notes

- **Chartists.** Vote for every man over 21 (not undergoing punishment for a crime), secret ballot, no property qualification for MPs, payment of MPs, equal size constituencies, annual elections.
- **Voting.** Second Reform Act (1867) doubled the male franchise to about one third of adult males. Women did not gain the same voting rights as men until 1928.
- **Waterloo Station.** 11 July 1848, three months later, Waterloo Bridge station opened. It was designed by William Tite and built over marshy ground. Waterloo Station was intended as a temporary station to be extended into the City and so sub-stations were created in a ramshackle way and it became the butt of music hall jokes. At one point there were three stations, South (now platforms 1 and 2, nicknamed Cyprus station), Central and North (nicknamed Khartoum Station) with overlapping platform numbers. The line for Waterloo East went above one of the platforms (2 now 4). The entire station was rebuilt and opened in 1922. From 1897 there was an adjoining Necropolis Company station that ran trains to Brookwood Cemetery bearing coffins for 2/6 but it was destroyed in World War II. More people go in and out of Waterloo station each year than the entire population of the UK (96 million).
- **Kennington Common** was a sacred place of national assembly from ancient times (sharp bend in the River Effra, strategic mound or tumulus now levelled, fork in main road from London Bridge). It was the South London equivalent of Tyburn (now Marble Arch). **Kennington Park** was created in 1854, the first park in south London, to prevent it being used again for large meetings.
- The photograph was taken from the top of the **Horns Tavern** where Feargus O'Connor met the police. Looking across to the '**Oil of Vitriol Manufactory**' (Sulphuric acid). 'A manufactory for oil of vitriol, on the east side of Kennington Common, occupies three acres of ground; and between that and the Kent-road are, a smelting-house for lead and antimony, a tannery, a manufactory for glue, another for tobacco-pipes, with manufactories for floorcloth and for carriages.'
- **William Kilburn** opened his portrait studio on London's Regent Street in 1846. He was commissioned to make daguerreotype portraits of the Royal Family between 1846 and 1852 as the **Royal Photographer**, and was awarded a prize medal for his photographs at the 1851 Great Exhibition. The Chartists who took their name from *Magna Carta* were the first British national working class movement. Their meetings had a carnival-like

atmosphere.

- **Petition.** House of Commons clerks said the petition was 'only' 1.9 million valid signatures but they did not have time to count them all. Some of the names were amusing or forged. The Chartists were a source of fun for the media and it discredited the petition as it included falsely signed names of Queen Victoria, Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington and names such as Mr Punch, Pugnose and No Cheese.
- **Feargus O'Connor** never recovered from the indignity and went insane four years later as the result of syphilis. O'Connor never married, but had a number of relationships and, it is believed, fathered several children. He is said to have drunk a bottle of brandy a day. Early historians attributed the failure of the Chartist movement to O'Connor but more recently he has been reassessed in a more favourable light. He died in 1855 and is buried at Kensal Green Cemetery.
- **Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte** was wealthy and lived in London from 1838, attempted a coup in 1840 and was imprisoned in France, escaped to London in 1846, returned to Paris after the February revolution but went back to London on 2 March and returned to Paris on 24 September after receiving more votes than any other candidate in Paris. He was therefore in London during the June days Uprising in Paris and so could not be associated with it. On 2 December 1848 Louis Napoleon was elected President of the Second Republic largely on peasant support. Exactly four years later he suspended the elected assembly and established the Second French Empire which lasted until 1871.
- **Ireland.** The Act of Union of 1800 created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801. Opposition during the nineteenth century was mainly Roman Catholic. Charles Parnell campaigned for autonomy within the Union or 'Home Rule'. The Home Rule Bill of 1914 excluded the six counties of Ulster. Ireland became independent in 1921.



William Powell Frith (1819-1909), *Ramsgate Sands (Life at the Seaside)*, 1852-4

- Before *Ramsgate Sands* Frith depicted figures from history or literature but this was the **first time** the **contemporary Victorian crowd** had been painted. The idea of **painting modern life** was a **revolutionary idea** of the Impressionists inspired by the writing of Charles Baudelaire but Frith's pictures **predates** the Impressionists by **twenty years**.
- Many of Frith's fellow artists were against the idea of painting modern-life and one called it '**a piece of vulgar Cockney business**' and another '**a tissue of vulgarity**'. However, **the public loved it** and it was an immediate **enormous success**. It was one of the few paintings at the Royal Academy for which a **guard rail had to be installed** to keep the public back – the ultimate sign of success. In all, Frith had six guard rails over the years.
- It was bought from the artist by Messrs Lloyd who sold it to **Queen Victoria** the same year, 1854, for **£1,000**, the same price he paid but he retained reproduction rights and Frith may have earned as much as £3,000 from the sales. Although this was the price they paid they retained engravings and print rights so it was a highly lucrative deal. Victoria had **stayed in Albion House** (built 1789) in Ramsgate before she became Queen. This is the highest house in the middle of Frith's painting. Victoria stayed in Ramsgate aged 16 she nearly died of typhoid and Sir John Conroy forced a pen into her hand to try to force her to sign authority to him, she resisted.
- Victoria had also entered the sea from a **bathing machine** in **Osborne**, Isle of Wight for the first time in **1847**. She wrote in her  
*'drove down to the beach with my maid & went into the bathing machines, where I undressed & bathed in the sea (for the 1st time in my life), a very nice bathing woman attended me. I thought it delightful till I put my head under water, when I thought I should be stifled.'*  
*Queen Victoria's Journal, 30 July 1847*
- It was inspired by a **holiday Frith** and his family took to Ramsgate in **1851**. He always painted from **real people** and liked to use friends and family as he found

professional models often turned up drunk and had no sense of responsibility. The artist included a **self-portrait** (peeping over the shoulder of the man on the far right), while the **little girl** paddling in the centre staring directly at the painter is thought to have been his **daughter**. He also shows himself, if I display his portrait can you **find him**?

- My professor at the Courtauld devoted a large part of her **doctoral thesis** to this painting and she **examined and analysed every person** and their **social role** within society. Seaside holidays or weekends had become possible with the advent of the railway. Trains first reach Ramsgate in 1846 and although it involved changing at Canterbury the old station was in the centre of the town near the beach.
- The bathing machines had a curtain that could be lowered to sea level but **men** were allowed to **bathe nude** until the 1860s. Some resorts employed a **dipper** whose job was to **push people under water** and then help them back into the bathing machine. The machine was developed in Margate about 1750 when most people bathed naked. Legal segregation of bathing areas ended in 1901 and the machines became extinct by 1820. Poorer people from London came to the seaside by train and as they could not afford bathing machines they often bathed naked. In 1874 a **rector wrote** in his diary that he had to adopt the **detestable custom of bathing in drawers**, he wrote, *'If ladies don't like to see men naked why don't they keep away from the sight?'* Boys and young men would **bathe naked** even in the **Edwardian Era** but **middle class girls and women** always had to be **fully covered** with clothes that did not expose their shape.
- Frith is showing a world of mixed sexes, ages, classes and occupations but he maintains the important **class distinctions** and generally the lower classes are shown as deferential and respectful. There is an intellectual air among the entertainment and **seven women are reading books**. One man is an **idler** and another appears to be **flirting** and two people are potentially voyeurs with telescopes watching women bathing. However, one is an old man and the other a young girl. No bathers are shown in the painting and there are no coarse or vulgar displays.
- Granite Obelisk (known as the Royal Tooth Pick) erected 1822 to commemorate the departure (1820) and safe return of King George IV from Ramsgate Harbour. He was so pleased with his reception he named it a 'Royal Harbour' (the only one). Beyond the obelisk is the Royal Harbour, important during the Napoleonic Wars. The first railway was 1846.
- Augustus Pugin, George du Maurier, James Tissot, Vincent van Gogh, Wilkie Collins and Jane Austen stayed in the town.
- Frith went on to paint many other scenes of everyday life such as *The Derby Day* (1858) and *The Railway Station* (1862) for which Frith was paid an astonishing **8,000 guineas**.
- **So 15 years before Claude Monet (1840-1926) was brave enough to paint a modern-life railway station (*La gare Saint-Lazare*, 1877) Frith was making a fortune from the same daring subject matter.**

- Key point: an important painting that reflected Victorian life

### **William Powell Frith (1819-1909)**

- Born in **Yorkshire** to a house steward and cook and his parents took a keen interest in art.
- He was sent to **school in Dover** where he indulged in drawing.
- His formal training was at the **Sass Academy** and then the **RA School** in 1837 (aged 18).
- His **father died** and his mother moved to London and he **made money** **portrait** painting (Lincolnshire farmers at 5-15 guineas).
- Member of **the Clique**, which included **Augustus Egg, Richard Dadd** and **Henry O'Neil** and rapidly established himself as a genre painter.
- His painting was at **odds with the RA** but his character and incident, sparkling detail and high finish made his work popular and suitable for engraving.
- 1840 travelled abroad and had his first painting exhibited at the RA.
- ARA 1845 and RA 1852 (aged 33).
- He was friends with **Charles Dickens** and centre of the literary life of London.
- In 1851 he visited **Ramsgate** and decided to take a commercial risk investing in *Ramsgate Sands (Life at the Seaside)* and it was a success and sold to Lloyd then Queen Victoria for £1,000.
- His second panorama, *Derby Day* was a stroke of genius, few paintings have ever earned such universal acclaim.
- **He had a wife with 12 children and a mistress with 7.**
- **He was an artist with a well developed business sense and he remained in the news throughout his life.**
- **Six of his paintings** had to be **railed off** and his three most important works, *Ramsgate Sands*, *Derby Day*, and *The Railway Station*.
- He was criticized for his **artistic philistinism** by **John Ruskin, Whistler** and **Oscar Wilde**, and later **Roger Fry** and he was a **staunch reactionary** criticising the Aesthetic Movement, Oscar Wilde and Impressionism.



Luke Fildes (1843-1927), *The Doctor*, 1891, Tate Britain  
His name is pronounced to rhyme with 'childs'.

### Did Chartism Fail?

- After the 1848 demonstration it was presented by the press as a 'fiasco' but the demonstrators viewed the peaceful demonstration with pride. The aggressive militarism of the Government had been unnecessary.
- Reform Acts were passed in 1832, 1867 (extended the franchise), 1872 (made the ballot secret), 1884 (extended the franchise to all home owners), 1884 (extended the franchise to two-thirds of men), 1918 (abolished property qualification for men and allowed women over 30 to vote), 1928 (extended franchise to all women).
- **Did Chartism fail?** In one sense they did as voting reform took a long time to bring about but it created a powerful statement of the rights of ordinary (working and middle-class) people. Over the next 70 years all of the Chartist demands were passed into law except for annual elections.

### Fildes, *The Doctor*

- Perhaps what lifts a work of art from the 'merely' sentimental is a better understanding of the social circumstances and intent behind the painting. An academic reading is much more difficult if we become 'entangled' in the emotions of a work. For example, this is Luke Fildes's painting *The Doctor* (1891), depicting a night vigil beside a child. When I saw this painting at the Tate with a group of art historians the **feminist view** was that it shows the **power** of the **male doctor**. The way he **sits** reminds us of **Lorenzo de' Medici** carved by **Michelangelo** (1520-1534, tomb of Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino, containing figures of Dawn and Dusk). The figure



has been nicknamed *Il Pensieroso*, '**The Thoughtful One**'. The implication is that the doctor is a different class, a thinking class, and the poor people are dependent on him for physical salvation as they depend on their priest for religious salvation.

- In 1890, Sir **Henry Tate** (1819-98) **commissioned** a painting from Luke Fildes, the subject of which was left to his **own discretion**. The artist chose to recall a **personal tragedy** of his own, when in 1877 his first son, Philip Luke, had died at the age of one in his Kensington home. Fildes' son and biographer wrote,

*'The character and bearing of their doctor throughout the time of their anxiety, made a deep impression on my parents. Dr. Murray became a symbol of professional devotion which would one day inspire the painting of The Doctor'.*

- Fildes's painting was also inspired by the professional devotion of **Dr Gustavus Murray** who treated him. But this work shows the moment when a child shows the **first sign of recovery**. The **redeeming light of dawn** is shining on the child. In order to make the picture convincing Fildes **constructed a cottage interior** in his studio. He began **work at dawn** each day to catch the exact light conditions. The image of an ordinary doctor's quiet heroism was a huge success with the late-Victorian public
- Fildes chose a rustic interior with the boy's father resting his hand on the shoulder of his wife whose hands are clasped in prayer. The man is bravely looking into the face of the thoughtful doctor trying to read any sign of recovery. They are poor, there is a scrap of carpet on the floor and their clothes are **ragged** but the child has been given **medicine** and the bowl and the jug of water used to try to reduce his temperature. The **scraps of paper** on the floor could be prescriptions made out by the doctor and now taken. Fildes described the shaft of daylight as signifying the imminent recovery of the child. He wrote,

*'At the cottage window the dawn begins to steal in – the dawn that is the critical time of all deadly illnesses – and with it the parents again take hope into their hearts, the mother hiding her face to escape giving vent to her emotion, the father laying his hand on the shoulder of his wife in encouragement of the first glimmerings of the joy which is to follow'.*

- A year later it was exhibited at the Royal Academy and an engraving was published that sold more than a **million copies in America alone**. It became one of the **most profitable prints** Agnews had ever produced. **Tate paid Fildes £3,000** for the painting and he **donated it and 56 other** pictures as a gift to the nation in 1897 and it became that **start of the Tate** collection.

### Is Sentimental Art Unforgiveable?

- Why do many critics and art historians find sentimental Victorian art unforgiveable? It might be that art historians **look down** on art that **appeals to popular taste** or because the emotional themes – childhood and especially child death, forsaken love, animals, sunsets, heart-rending stories and pathetic scenes – now seem **hackneyed or trivialised**. It is sentimental and so **trivialises deep human emotions**. **Sentiment reduces all emotions to comfort and warmth**. In the **18<sup>th</sup> century** **sentimentality** was the **reliance on feelings** as a **guide to truth** and was much in vogue among the polite. By the end of the **19<sup>th</sup> century** it was seen as **false** and in **modern times**, as **Oscar Wilde** said,

*'A sentimentalist is one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it'.*

- The term 'sentimental' is often associated with Victorian genre painting but I will show that many paintings concerned social issues and morality.
- Alternatively, it could be that we see Victorian subject painting as trying to **manipulate us** by the use of emotion and manipulative images. We are used to being manipulated by **advertising** as so Victorian art could be seen as **debased** by similar motives. In this case not for commercial gain but to **persuade us** that the **religious, social and political systems are in our best interests**. For example, the 'deserving poor' are shown in a way that convinces us that everything is being done to correct the situation.
- Some later critics and art historians even believe that all painting that tries to **tell a story** is **dishonest** because it is **not the job** of the **medium**. Each art should focus on what **best suits the medium** so story telling is the task of writing and painting should be concerned with putting colours on a flat surface.

### **Sir (Samuel) Luke Fildes (1843–1927)**

- Illustrator and genre and portrait painter, was born on 18 October **1843** at 22 Standish Street, **Liverpool**, the fourth of the ten children.
- His **grandmother**, Mary Fildes, was a radical reformer (Manchester Female Reformers Society) who was injured at the **Peterloo massacre**.
- Trained as an **illustrator**. Government Art Training School and RA School.
- Influenced by Millais.
- **Five large social realist paintings**, praised for their realism but criticized as **inappropriate** subject matter for fine art.
  - ***Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward*** (exh. RA, 1874; Royal Holloway College, Egham), 23 freezing adults, children and babies waiting for food and a bed.
  - ***The Widower*** (National Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; reduced version, 1902, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool), man

- looking after five children, one sick
- *Return of a Penitent* (1879, City Hall, Cardiff), a young woman returns to find the old cottage deserted
- *The Village Wedding* (ex Christies, 12 June 1992), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1883, young newly marrieds walking down the street followed by wedding guests
- ***The Doctor*** (exh. RA, 1891; Tate collection)
- Friend **Henry Woods** (1846-1921, painter and illustrator, Neo-Venetian School, RA 1893), married his sister Fanny had six children.
- **Compassionate, caring, loving, affectionate.**
- 1879 associate RA, 1887 RA, knighted 1906.
- Admired by **Van Gogh**, took up portrait late in life but then **only rival** was John Singer **Sargent**.
- Fellow social realist painters included **Frank Holl** and **Hubert von Herkomer**, also **David Wilkie** and **Thomas Faed** and later **Richard Redgrave** and **George Frederick Watts**.



## Further information

My lecture notes are at [www.shafe.uk](http://www.shafe.uk)

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