



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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23-08 SOCIAL CLASS IN VICTORIAN PAINTING

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Samuel Luke Fildes
*Applicants for Admission to a
Casual Ward*, detail, 1874,
Royal Holloway College

Victorian Britain was one of the most unequal societies in modern history, yet that inequality is barely visible in its celebrated painting. This talk examines what the painted record actually shows — and what it suppresses — about the ninety-seven per cent of the population who were poor. From Hogarth's moral allegories to Pre-Raphaelite social realism, from Peterloo to the Foundling Hospital, we follow poverty, labour, and survival across an entire century of British art.



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

This lecture series turns now to one of the most revealing tensions in Victorian culture: the gap between how society saw itself and how most people actually lived. Victorian Britain was a profoundly unequal society. Roughly **97 per cent** of the population were poor, governed by a small élite of landowners and a newly wealthy middle class whose fortunes were built on **industrial revolution** commerce. Despite forming the vast majority, the poor remain the least represented group in Victorian art — yet enough work survives to reconstruct their world with precision. To understand how Victorian society treated poverty, we must begin with the **Elizabethan Poor Law**, still in force at the century's opening. Its assumptions had been shaken, though not yet dismantled, by **Thomas Robert Malthus**, whose **Essay on the Principle of Population**, published in 1798, argued that population grows geometrically while food production grows arithmetically. Catastrophe, he insisted, was the inevitable result. As an Anglican cleric, Malthus read this as a divine mechanism enforcing virtue, and used it to oppose poor relief entirely. The first serious empirical counter to that dismissal came from journalist **Henry Mayhew**, whose **London Labour and the London Poor**, published between 1851 and 1862, gave the Victorian poor a documented, human face for the

first time.

Notes

Welcome, The Victorians were a sharply divided society. It is estimated that the poor made up about 97% of society and they were ruled by a small group of wealthy aristocrats and landowners and a new middle class that had made their fortune from business fuelled by the industrial revolution.

As the largest group the poor are the least well represented in art but there are enough work to build a picture of the Victorian poor. Let us start with the Elizabethan Poor Law as it was still in force at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Notes

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) published An Essay on the Principle of Population (1798) 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 criticised 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).

Journalist Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor (1851–62) wrote the first detailed analysis of the poor.

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Attributed to Robert Peake the Elder (c. 1551–1619), published by George Vertue (1684–1756)

Procession portrait of Elizabeth I of England
c. 1601

Attributed to Robert Peake the Elder (c. 1551–1619), published by George Vertue (1684–1756), Procession portrait of Elizabeth I of England, c. 1601

This painting brings us to one of the most consequential policy decisions of Elizabeth's reign. In **1598** and **1601**, Elizabeth introduced legislation requiring each of England's ten thousand parishes to establish a relief fund for the lame, the ill, the elderly, orphans, widows, and those unable to find work. Landowners paid a tax proportional to their holdings, administered by magistrates with no loopholes. For over **150 years**, England stood alone in Europe in effectively eliminating widespread famine. The system also accelerated the **Industrial Revolution**: young workers could migrate to cities knowing their ageing parents would be supported at home. The arrangement held for two centuries until the **Speenhamland System** of 1795 topped up wages against bread prices, which critics argued incentivised employers to lower wages, and it was eventually replaced by the **New Poor Law of 1834**. The painting itself is attributed to **Robert Peake the Elder**, born in Ipswich around 1551 and trained under the Dutch artist **Hieronimo Custodis**. Appointed court painter to Elizabeth in the 1590s and later to **James I**, Peake became one of the first eminent English painters to command aristocratic patronage in an era when foreign-born artists dominated that space.

Notes

This is Elizabeth I in procession with her court. Around this time, in 1598 and 1601, and near the end of her reign, Elizabeth introduced, for the first time in history, a law making it illegal for a parish to allow anyone to starve to death. This was done by requiring each of the over 10,000 parishes to set up a relief fund to support the lame, the ill and the old, as well as orphans, widows, single mothers and their children, and those unable to find work. Landowners had to pay a tax towards the fund in proportion to the amount of land they owned. The law was administered by magistrates and there were no loopholes to avoid escaping paying the tax.

For over 150 years England was the only country in Europe to put an end to widespread famine. It also helped the industrial revolution take off as young people could leave home to work in the cities in the knowledge that their aging parents would be cared for.

It worked well for two hundred years until high inflation and food shortages resulted in the Speenhamland System (a decision by local magistrates at the Pelican Inn in Speenhamland, near Newbury, Berkshire, on May 6, 1795) which topped up working men's wages based on the price of bread. It was criticised for encouraging employers to reduce wages as they knew they would be topped up and it was replaced by the New Poor Law of 1834.

Robert Peake the Elder was appointed to the court of Elizabeth I and following her death in 1603 to the court of James I. He is considered one of the first eminent English painters in an era when foreign-born artists tended to dominate aristocratic patronage in Britain and his legacy shaped the development of 17th century English painting.

Notes

Queen Elizabeth I preceded by the Knights of the Garter. From left: Edmund Sheffield, later Earl of Mulgrave; Charles Howard, Lord Howard of Effingham and Lord Admiral; George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland; George Carey, Lord Hunsten; unknown knight, possibly Robert Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex; and Gilbert Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, carrying the Sword of State. In the foreground is Edward Somerset, 4th Earl of Worcester, Master of the Horse. Of the four men carrying the canopy only the one in white on the far right has been identified: Worcester's eldest son, Lord Herbert. Source: Strong, Roy. Gloriana. Thames and Hudson, 1987, pp. 154-5.

George Virtue was a nineteenth-century London-based engraver and publisher.

Bio:Peake

Robert Peake the Elder (c.1551-1619) was born in Ipswich, Suffolk and received training from the Dutch artist Hieronimo Custodis. He became a renowned English painter and picture maker who was appointed as a painter to the court of Elizabeth I sometime in the 1590s. He was responsible for creating portraits and decorative paintings for the Queen during the final years of her reign.

He then served as a principal artist at the court of King James I and his most famous works are his portraits of the Stuart royal family, including King James I, Queen Anne of Denmark, and Prince Henry. His portrait style is characterised by rich colours, intricate patterns and jewel-toned details in the clothing and backgrounds. Peake also painted biblical and allegorical scenes as well as designing scenery for court masques.

In addition to his artistic talents, Peake ran a prestigious art academy in London that trained many renowned painters who would go on to influence the English Baroque tradition. Among his most notable pupils were William Dobson, John Hoskins and Sir Robert Peake the Younger, his son who became an esteemed court painter as well.

Peake's artistic influence extended beyond portraiture to costume and theatre design. He is considered one of the first eminent English painters to gain significant recognition in an era when foreign-born artists tended to dominate aristocratic patronage in Britain. His legacy shaped the development of 17th century English painting.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Peake_the_Elder



William Hogarth (1697-1764)
Industry and Idleness
 1747

William Hogarth (1697-1764), *Industry and Idleness*, 1747

William Hogarth, born in 1697 and dying in 1764, made the moral stakes of poverty unmistakably clear in his 1747 print series **Industry and Idleness**, twelve plates that track two apprentices from a shared loom to radically different fates. In **Plate 1**, the contrast is already blunt: **Francis Goodchild** bends diligently over his work while **Thomas Idle** sleeps beside him. Hogarth roots the series in the language of Proverbs, where drowsiness clothes a man in rags and the diligent hand makes rich — a Biblical framework his audience recognised immediately. The trajectories are unsparing. Idle descends into crime and is hanged at **Tyburn** in **Plate 11**, surrounded by a crowd so morally bankrupt that a woman sells his last dying words before he has spoken them. Goodchild, by contrast, rides through the city in **Plate 12** as Lord Mayor of London, sword of state in hand. The series articulates what we might call the **eighteenth-century English dream**: that industry alone can lift a man from poverty to civic eminence, regardless of birth. Hogarth, being Hogarth, simultaneously satirises that belief — but the satire only works because the belief was genuinely and widely held.

Notes

William Hogarth (1697-1764), *Industry and Idleness*, 1747 (12 plates)

Plate 1 – The Fellow 'Prentices at their Looms

Plate 11 — The Idle 'Prentice Executed at Tyburn

Plate 12 – The Industrious 'Prentice Lord-Mayor of London

The Deserving and Undeserving Poor

As I shall explain later a clear distinction arose in the Victorian period between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor but the distinction was understood long before then.

Here William Hogarth in his series called 'Industry and Idleness' shows over a series of 12 plates the lives of two poor apprentices. One is seen here on the left sleeping and the other on the right working hard.

(CLICK) The one (Thomas Idle) sleeping goes on to lead a life of crime and is hanged at Tyburn.

(CLICK) The one (Francis Goodchild) who worked hard becomes Lord Mayor of London. He is the one in the coach holding the sword of state and wearing an outsized top hat.

This is the American Dream in eighteenth-century England, the ability for anyone, whatever their background, to better themselves through hard work. Of course, as it is Hogarth it is also a satire on the belief that hard work always brings such rewards but it does indicate it was a commonly held belief.

Notes

In Plate 11, the woman in the centre is selling his last words even though he hasn't uttered them yet while the drunk to her left is courting her while holding a dog by its tail. On the far right a boy is picking the pocket of the man selling something while his companion wants nothing to do with it.

There is a sign by Thomas Idle that says "Moll Flanders". Moll Flanders is a novel by Daniel Defoe, first published in 1722. It purports to be the true account of the life of Moll, detailing her exploits from birth until old age. She has many husbands and descends into crime although it has a happy ending. The book was occasionally the subject of police censorship.

Proverbs 23:21 "For the drunkard ... shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags".

Proverbs 10:4 – "He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich."

Proverbs 1:27-28 "When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction

cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me".

Proverbs 3:16 "Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.".

References

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industry_and_Idleness



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 Comforts of Industry*, before 1790, 31.50 x 37.60 cm, National Galleries of Scotland

George Morland painted his paired works **Miseries of Idleness** and **Comforts of Industry** as a moral argument about poverty in rural England. The idle family gnaw on a bare bone beside an empty cask — their destitution framed as self-inflicted, the result of drink and lack of discipline. Set against them, the industrious family radiates contentment: a well-dressed father drops coins into his wife's lap, children play, and a baby sleeps soundly. Morland's debt to **William Hogarth** is clear; both artists used domestic scenes to instil the virtues of industry and sobriety, partly as a bulwark against social unrest. The biographical irony is striking. Morland was himself a chronic debtor and heavy drinker who died in **1804** aged just 41, his wife surviving him by only three days. Yet his output was astonishing — over **4,000 paintings** across his career, sometimes completing a large composition in a single afternoon, with dealers arriving at his door holding a purse in one hand and a bottle in the other. This slide also asks us to consider who exactly the poor were. Around **97 per cent** of the population earned under 200 pounds a year, ranging from skilled artisans down to beggars — and by **1900**, three-quarters of them lived and worked in towns rather than the countryside.

Notes

Another example of idleness versus industry, this time in a rural setting. This is by George Morland showing the 'Miseries of Idleness' The idle poor have only a bone left to eat and the empty cask on the right suggests an earlier indulgence in alcohol suggesting these people have only themselves to blame and their lack of self-control has brought about their impoverished state and a tragic fate awaits them. As we shall see this makes them the undeserving poor.

(CLICK) On the other hand, the 'Comforts of Industry' show a smartly dressed well fed family. The father has just returned home with his son and is casually dropping some coins into his wife's lap while the daughter plays with a doll and welcomes her brother home while that baby sleeps contentedly.

The irony is that Morland was a notoriously heavy drinker and debtor who spent the final years of his life in and out of debtors prison and he eventually died from alcoholism aged just 41. Morland was a child prodigy who could draw when he was three and whose father kept him locked away and sold his drawings. He became an honorary member of the Royal Academy when he was 10. His lifestyle was so flamboyant and so unbelievable he became the subject of four anecdotal biographies immediately after his death.

But let me pause here and ask who were the poor?

At the top of society were royalty followed by only about 180 peers of the realm, then a few thousand gentry who were the landowners and country squires followed by the high-ranking clergy—bishops, military officers such as generals and civil servants such as permanent secretaries.

The next rank down was the 'middling sort', mostly businessmen and 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 middling sort were barristers and clergymen and at the bottom farmers and shopkeepers.

Then, at the bottom of society, was the vast majority, about 97%—labourers who ranged from skilled artisans at the top to beggars near the bottom. I say near the bottom because begging was regarded as a profession with its own tricks and skills. 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 as their income was under £25 a year.[1]

The location of the poor is also important, at the beginning of the nineteenth century three-quarters of the population worked on farms and a quarter in towns and by 1900 this was reversed, three-quarters lived and worked in towns and only a quarter remained in the countryside.

Notes

The figure of 97% at the bottom of society is taken from reference [1] page 377. The middling sort is defined as those earning over £200 a year which makes up 3% of the population. Those earning less than £200 a year make up the 97% who could not afford any cultural products, such as books or attending events.

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).

Bio:Morland

George Morland (1763-1804) 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.

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[1] https://hlq.pennpress.org/media/34098/hlq-774_p373_hume.pdf 18th century Cultural Economics



George Morland (1763-1804)
Door of a Village Inn
1790s
Tate Britain, London

George Morland (1763-1804), *Door of a Village Inn*, 1790s, Tate Britain, London

While most painters offered polished pastoral fantasies, **George Morland** carved out a distinct position by depicting rural poverty with unflinching directness. Born in London in 1763, Morland trained under his father before immersing himself in the ale-houses and country lanes that populated his canvases. His short, chaotic life — he died in 1804, perpetually in debt and frequently hiding from creditors — gave him an intimacy with marginal rural existence that few academically trained painters shared. **Door of a Village Inn** is a **genre painting**, meaning it depicts ordinary people engaged in everyday activity rather than mythological or historical subjects. The scene is straightforward: a traveller pauses at a cottage or wayside inn for a pint of ale. There is no overt moral lesson here, which sets Morland apart from the didactic tradition of **William Hogarth** before him. Where Hogarth used genre scenes to lecture, Morland simply observes. The **Tate's** holding of this work confirms its enduring institutional recognition. Morland produced hundreds of such images, and their popularity tells us something important: audiences were ready to look at rural working life, even when the **Royal Academy** preferred them not to.

Notes

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.

References

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/morland-door-of-a-village-inn-n01351>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Morland



George Morland (1763–1804)
Oil on canvas (painting); engraving
(James Ward version)

George Morland (1763–1804)

James Ward, working from a painting by his brother-in-law **George Morland**, produced an engraving titled **Sun-Set: a View of Leicestershire** that fundamentally transforms the social meaning of the original image. Ward, who later painted the enormous Romantic canvas **Gordale Scar** between 1814 and 1815, now held in Tate Britain, understood the commercial market: prints sold for between three shillings and sixpence and a guinea, reaching a wide buying public. Compare the two images carefully. In Morland's painting, the woman serving the farmer carries a blank, depressed expression, and the left-hand child in the doorway, as **John Barrell** argues, looks broken in spirit. Ward's engraving replaces all of that. The woman and child are now smiling and welcoming, their clothes and surroundings look markedly improved, the horse and dog appear livelier with fluffed-up coats, and the seated child gains a larger necklace and a fuller bowl of soup. Barrell makes the point directly: those cheerful faces and tidied circumstances would have reassured viewers about the **governability of the poor** at a moment of real rural unrest. Morland's original refused idealisation. Ward's print quietly erased that refusal.

Notes

This is an example of 'spot the difference'. On the left is the painting that I have converted to 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) an enormous English Romantic work in Tate Britain, became the leading animal painter in England but 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'.

What has happened here is that 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 a guinea (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.

The print was called *Sun-Set: a View of Leicestershire*.



William Beechey (1753-1839)
*Portrait of Sir Francis Ford's Children
Giving a Coin to a Beggar Boy*
1793
180.5 x 150 cm
Tate, London

William Beechey (1753-1839), *Portrait of Sir Francis Ford's Children Giving a Coin to a Beggar Boy*, 1793, 180.5 x 150 cm, Tate, London

Late eighteenth-century British art developed a strong fashion for sentiment — heightened feelings of sympathy and pity expressed across poetry, novels, and painting. **William Beechey's** portrait of **Sir Francis Ford's children giving a coin to a beggar boy**, exhibited at the **Royal Academy in 1793**, appears to belong squarely to that tradition. Two fashionably dressed children in a rural setting lean forward to offer a coin to a ragged, visibly distressed older boy, while a well-groomed spaniel looks on. Yet the painting is deliberate propaganda. **Sir Francis Ford**, a wealthy plantation owner with enslaved workers in **Barbados**, was an outspoken pro-slavery MP. The central argument of the pro-slavery lobby was that enslaved people enjoyed better conditions than England's own urban poor. By commissioning Beechey to show his children, young **Francis** and **Mary Ford**, performing an act of charity, Ford constructed a visual case for his own benevolence — and by implication, for the benevolence he claimed to extend to those he enslaved. The beggar boy, in this reading, is not a subject of genuine concern but a rhetorical device. The painting tells us almost nothing about actual poverty or real charitable practice, and everything about how wealth derived from slavery

sought to justify itself through sentimental imagery.

Notes

Pictures of the poor were popular as there was a fashion for 'sentiment', that is heightened feelings of sympathy and pity and this appeared in poetry, novels and the visual arts. This example is by William Beechey and shows two children giving charity to a beggar.

But all is not what it appears. It was commissioned by Sir Francis Ford and his motive was not sentiment. He was an MP and an outspoken supporter of slavery. He argued that the slaves he owned in Barbados had a better quality of life than the children in English slums. He lived at Ember Court, Thames Ditton, and these are his children Francis and Mary demonstrating how he and his family cared for the poor.

This poor English boy therefore represents in a way a visual argument in favour of slavery as it shows how the Ford family cared for the poor in England and by implication his slaves in Barbados. So this form of propaganda tells us little about the real poor or genuine forms of charity.

Notes

This is a typical early example of how the poor were represented in art. It is Portrait of Sir Francis Ford's Children Giving a Coin to a Beggar Boy, by William Beechey, a well-known portrait painter who exhibited it in 1793.

It is a large oil painting that shows two fashionably-dressed children in a countryside setting encountering an older boy, who is dressed in ragged clothes and visibly in distress. The well-dressed girl leans forward to pass the boy a coin, while a dog (a well-groomed spaniel presumably belonging to the wealthy children) looks up. Such emotive scenes of rural poverty and philanthropic kindness were a feature of British art in the latter third of the eighteenth century.

There were many paintings and prints on this theme as they appealed to the fashion for 'sentiment', that is heightened feelings of sympathy and pity that appeared in poetry, novels and the visual arts. Sir Francis Ford (1758–1801) was a wealthy plantation owner with property in Ember Court, Thames Ditton, Surrey and Lears, Barbados. The Ember Court mansion has long since been demolished and was located where the police sports ground is now situated. Based on the apparent ages of the children they can probably be identified as Francis Ford (1787–1839), later 2nd Baronet, and Mary Ford (died 1872).

Ford was a strong pro-slavery MP in Parliament and the wealth of the children comes directly from the exploitation of slave labour in Barbados. The pro-slavery lobby argued that their slaves enjoyed a better quality of life than the abject poor living in England.

After a long campaign for abolition led by William Wilberforce, Parliament prohibited the practice by passing the Slave Trade Act 1807 which was enforced by the Royal Navy.

William Beechey (1753-1839) was born in Oxfordshire, the son of a solicitor. His parents died when he was young and he was brought up by his uncle who was determined he should become a lawyer. He became a clerk but then rejected his uncle's wishes and joined the Royal Academy School in 1772 aged 19. He is thought to have trained under Johan Zoffany and first exhibited at the Academy in 1776. He moved to Norwich and gained several commissions including civic portraits. In 1787 he returned to London and exhibited a portrait of the Bishop of Carlisle. At this time he painted in the style of Joshua Reynolds. His style suited the conservative tastes of the royal family compared to the flamboyant style of Thomas Lawrence. In 1793 he was commissioned to paint a full-length portrait of Queen Charlotte. He was appointed her official portrait painter and elected an ARA the same year. As a result he received many more commissions, including six royal portraits and in 1798 was made an Academician. An enormous portrait of George III reviewing the troops resulted in him receiving a knighthood. By the turn of the century his style had become much more like that of Lawrence. He fell from royal favour in 1804 but was appointed principal portrait painter to William IV in 1830. In 1836, he retired to Hampstead. He was impetuous and easily angered but was known to be generous and helpful to students including the young John Constable.

Note that in 1789 Thomas Gainsborough died and by that time Joshua Reynolds had stopped painting. When the young Thomas Lawrence exhibited his sensational full-length portraits of Queen Charlotte and the actress Miss Farren in 1790, Beechey's clientele was not much affected since Lawrence's style was much more flamboyant. The turning point in Beechey's life and career was his patronage by the royal family from about 1793. He was known for his lack of extravagance which appealed to those like the king, who regarded Lawrence as too flamboyant and 'eccentric'.

Sir Francis Ford, 1st baronet (an honour between knight and baron), bought Ember (or Imber) Court in 1791 and sold it in c. 1793. Previously it was owned

by George Onslow, Lord Onslow, from 1862 to 1768, and then his son Lord Cranley. At the time of Henry VIII all the land was a deer park for royal hunting. After the king's death the village of Thames Ditton petitioned for the land to be set free and the deer were moved to Windsor Park. Ember Court was described as "a large, plain mansion, the old brick front having been covered with stucco, and wings added in the last [eighteenth] century".

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<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/beechey-portrait-of-sir-francis-fords-children-giving-a-coin-to-a-beggar-boy-t06734>



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

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

Humour offered artists another route into depicting ordinary life, and **David Wilkie** made it the foundation of his career. Born in Fife in 1785, the son of a minister, he trained in Edinburgh before arriving in London in 1805, aged twenty, with almost no money. Within two years, **Sir George Beaumont** had become his patron, and by 1807 the President of the Royal Academy, **Benjamin West**, already ranked him among the finest painters working in Britain. **Village Festival**, exhibited in 1812, shows the scene with typical Wilkie wit: a farmer's wife hauls her drunken husband toward home while his companions haul him back. Contemporary reviewers read it as a warm, jolly inn scene they would happily have visited themselves. **London Society** in 1863 described the landlord pouring ale as a ruddy, well-to-do host of the old school. Yet the painting sits inside a growing cultural argument. In 1833 **Richard Turner** coined the word **teetotaler** in a speech demanding total abstinence from all alcohol — total, with a capital T. Earlier, **William Hogarth** had targeted only spirits in **Gin Lane** of 1751, while celebrating beer as patriotic and wholesome. Wilkie's canvas sits precisely on that shifting moral fault line.

Notes

There is another popular approach taken by artists is to present the less well off and that is using humour.

Scottish born David Wilkie became a star of the London art world painting this sort of work. He was 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.

(CLICK) The wife of a drunken farmer is trying to drag him away from his friends who are trying to drag him back.

Although there is a moral element to the painting it was seen as a jolly snapshot of every day. For example, one magazine wrote,

(CLICK) 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." (CLICK)

(CLICK) London Society, 1863, "The old dame ... standing by the pump, looking mournfully at the sot, her son, who is stretched at length beside the horse-trough".

There was a movement growing against alcohol, which many saw as a fault of the poor, and in 1833 that Richard ("Dicky") Turner gave a speech advocating total abstinence from all alcohol and the word Teetotaller was coined.

Previously, it was only strong spirits that were condemned, you might remember the horrors shown in Hogarth's Gin Lane (1751) compared with the patriotic and healthy Beer Street (1751).

Notes

Teetotaller is a word created by Richard "Dicky" Turner and it was known as "Dicky Turner's word." In 1833, he gave a speech advocating total abstinence from all alcohol, as opposed to abstinence only to "ardent spirits" such as brandy or whiskey. The 'tee' part has nothing to do with 'tea' it was to emphasise the 'total', in other words 'Total abstinence with a capital T'.

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).

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.

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.'

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.'

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.

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 to 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.



Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846)
Punch or May Day
 1829
 150.5 x 185.1 cm
 Tate Britain, London

Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), *Punch or May Day*, 1829, 150.5 x 185.1 cm, Tate Britain, London

Benjamin Robert Haydon painted **Punch or May Day** in **1829**, setting it on New Road in **Marylebone** at a moment when Regency London's social extremes collide in plain sight. Haydon, born in Plymouth in 1786, dedicated his career to large-scale history paintings of noble subjects, yet chronic debt forced him toward commercially minded scenes of contemporary life. He considered calling this picture simply **Life**, which tells you everything about his bruised ambitions. The composition is deliberately layered. A **Punch and Judy** show has blocked the road, nearly causing a marriage coach to collide with a hearse. A wealthy farmer, transfixed by the spectacle, is being pickpocketed while a well-dressed woman distracts a nearby sailor with her shawl and a smile. A child chimney sweep strikes a theatrical pose with his broom. At the right edge, **May Day** morris dancers perform — one costumed as a **Jack in the Green**, a figure rooted in traditional spring festivals where performers wore elaborate tree-like structures. Haydon sent the painting to Windsor hoping the King would acquire it; it was returned. He blamed **William Seguer**, Keeper of the King's Pictures. The work now hangs in **Tate Britain** — an institution Haydon, who killed himself in 1846, would have

greeted with complicated feeling.

Notes

The Middle-Class and the Poor

Another entertaining painting is this one by Benjamin Haydon called Punch or May Day, It is set in Marylebone ('maa-luh-bn') in 1829, the end of the Regency period and shows a mixture of the wealthy and the poor.

(It is set in New Road, Marylebone and it is a little past noon as we can see from the clock of the church.)

Punch is beating his wife and this has drawn the crowds and blocked the road resulting in a marriage coach nearly colliding with a hearse.

Sitting on the kerb is a poor fruit seller who has arranged her meagre fair on a small table.

A more wealthy farmer is so engrossed by the Punch and Judy he does not notice his pocket being picked by a small hand. Notice how the well dressed woman is shielding him with her shawl and distracting the sailor with her smile.

A child chimney sweep is posing like an actor on stage with his broomstick slung across his shoulder.

On the right three figures are Morris May Day dancing. One is dressed as a tree, the other has a blackface and the third is a woman in a red dress holding a spoon or ladle. The Green Man, or, Jack in the Green, is a popular participant in traditional May Day festivals in which a person covers themselves in a tree-like costume, sometime pyramidal or conical in shape. The origin of the blackface boy is unknown but there have been various ideas put forward.

One idea is based on the name, why morris dancing? It is mentioned in the late 15th century and at the Tudor court. Some think Morris is derives from moorish dance and the Moors of Morocco and and it was brought back by soldiers celebrating their victory over the Moors in Spain. (Some think the soldiers were imitating Moorish Sufi dancing which is still very similar today.)

(Another possibility is that farm workers blacked their face in the 14th century so they could beg food in the winter without being recognised.)

Notes

It captures a moment in the day-to-day life of Regency London. It is now in

Tate Britain and Haydon would probably have been appalled to see it displayed in a national gallery as he dedicated his life to raise British art 'to honour and glory' by promoting large-scale history paintings of noble subjects. He was driven to paint subjects like Punch or May Day to pay the bills. He had hoped the King would buy the painting as he asked for it to be sent to Windsor Castle but it was returned, a setback he blamed on the actions of the Keeper of the King's Pictures, William Seguer

Haydon knew all the great artists and writers of the age but lived hand-to-mouth for years. An attempt he made to interest the public in his noble paintings resulted in debts of £3,000. Rather than go into debtors prison again and because his sight and mind were deteriorating he decided to commit suicide. He bought a gun and wrote a will but even this failed. He shot himself in the head but the ball failed to penetrate his brain so with characteristic determination he slit his throat to kill himself. He left his diary open at the last entry read "'Stretch me no longer on this rough world' – Lear".

Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846) was born in Plymouth the son of a prosperous printer. He showed an aptitude for study and went to Plymouth Grammar School. When he was 18 he left for London and entered the Royal Academy School and when he was 21 exhibited for the first time. His financial difficulties began in 1810 when his father stopped his allowance as although he had had some commercial success it did not pay well enough and he entered into disputes with his patrons. He painted large history paintings that did not or were hard to sell. In October, 1821, he increased his commitments when he married Mary Hyman, a widow with two young children, whom he had known for some years. In 1823 he spent two months in debtors prison.

"Haydon had ambitions to be a history painter, but after some early successes struggled to find patrons or public support for his huge canvases of noble themes from history or scripture. In the late 1820s, after repeatedly falling into debt and even being imprisoned, he painted several subjects of contemporary life that he hoped would be more commercial. This richly detailed composition is intended to capture the energy of contemporary London. A crowd mingles with a costumed procession in the Marylebone Road. Haydon thought of calling this picture simply 'Life', suggesting that he retained a sense of ambition even in painting such a lowly subject." (Tate)

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Richard Carlile (1790-1843)
*A coloured print of the Peterloo
Massacre*
1819
Coloured engraving

Richard Carlile (1790-1843), A coloured print of the Peterloo Massacre, 1819

We turn now to an era of acute hardship, when decades of war and punishing legislation brought Britain's poorest to breaking point. Two decades of conflict with France left thousands of disabled veterans unable to find work, and the **Corn Laws of 1815** drove the price of bread beyond the reach of ordinary families. On **16 August 1819**, more than sixty thousand people gathered at **St Peter's Field in Manchester**, many dressed in their Sunday best. They came peaceably to hear speakers demand voting reform — fewer than two per cent of the population held the vote — and relief from the grinding poverty that gripped the country. The response from authorities was devastating. Cavalry charged into the unarmed crowd of men, women, and children, slashing with sabres. The first casualty was a two-year-old child. By the end of the day, between fourteen and eighteen people had died and up to seven hundred were wounded. **Richard Carlile**, printer and radical journalist, published this coloured print to memorialise what happened. He dedicated it explicitly to **Henry Hunt**, who chaired the meeting, and to the female reformers present who bore the violence directly. **The Peterloo Massacre** stands as the most brutal act of domestic political repression in nineteenth-century England.

Notes

A coloured print of the Peterloo Massacre published by Richard Carlile, 1819
Hard Times

We come now to hard times. A very difficult period particularly for the poor. The country had been at war with France for over twenty years (1793-1802 then the Napoleonic Wars, 1803-1815) resulting in many disabled men returning home unable to find work. In addition, Parliament passed the Corn Laws in 1815, which resulted in the price of bread reaching astronomical proportions.

On 16 August 1819, more than 60,000 people gathered at St Peter's Field, Manchester, many dressed in their Sunday best. The peaceful crowd wanted to hear the speakers discuss voting reform as less than two per cent of the population were eligible to vote—and an end to the extreme poverty that gripped Britain. You can see here the cavalry attacked the unarmed crowd of men, women and children slashing wildly with their sabres. The first casualty was a two-year old infant and by the end of the day about 14-18 had died and 400 to 700 were injured. It was the bloodiest political episode of 19th-century England and it started the journey to the rights we enjoy today.

Notes

"To Henry Hunt, Esq., as chairman of the meeting assembled in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, sixteenth day of August, 1819, and to the female Reformers of Manchester and the adjacent towns who were exposed to and suffered from the wanton and fiendish attack made on them by that brutal armed force, the Manchester and Cheshire Yeomanry Cavalry, this plate is dedicated by their fellow labourer, Richard Carlile:[1] a coloured engraving that depicts the Peterloo Massacre (military suppression of a demonstration in Manchester, England by cavalry charge on August 16, 1819 with loss of life) in Manchester, England."

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Harry Rutherford (1903–1985)
The Opening of the Chartists' Meeting House, Hyde
 c. 1960-70
 59.7 x 90.6 cm
 Astley Cheetham Art Gallery,
 Stalybridge, Manchester

Harry Rutherford (1903–1985), *The Opening of the Chartists' Meeting House, Hyde*, c. 1960-70, 59.7 x 90.6 cm, Astley Cheetham Art Gallery, Stalybridge, Manchester

Harry Rutherford's **The Opening of the Chartists' Meeting House, Hyde**, painted between roughly 1960 and 1970 and held at Astley Cheetham Art Gallery in Stalybridge, depicts a pivotal moment in working-class political history. The **Chartist Movement** emerged after the **1832 Reform Act** failed to extend voting rights beyond property owners. By 1838 the **People's Charter** codified six demands, including universal male suffrage, the secret ballot, and payment for Members of Parliament. Rutherford's painting shows the local preacher and agitator **Joseph Rayner Stevens** addressing the crowd from a platform as the militia enters to arrest him. Rather than documentary reconstruction, the work functions as a declaration of local pride and collective memory. Rutherford left school at fourteen, attending evening classes at the Manchester School of Art under **Adolf Valette**, alongside fellow students **L.S. Lowry** and James Fitton. **Walter Sickert** later took him into a studio class in 1925, and Sickert's influence — particularly a love of performance and theatre — runs throughout Rutherford's mature output. Early time with the **Newlyn School** in Cornwall brought luminous colour into

his palette, which he then trained on the industrial streets and mill towns he knew from Hyde throughout his life.

Notes

Harry Rutherford (1903–1985), *The Opening of the Chartists' Meeting House, Hyde*, c. 1960-70, 59.7 x W 90.6 cm, Astley Cheetham Art Gallery, Stalybridge, Manchester

The Chartists

A mass movement gradually grew among the working class following the failure of the 1832 Reform Act to extend the vote beyond those owning property. In 1838 a People's Charter was drawn up and the movement became known as the Chartist Movement.

There were few paintings celebrating it at the time. This is *The Opening of the Chartists' Meeting House, Hyde* by Harry Rutherford. It was painted much later and shows the opening of a Chartist Hall in Hyde in Greater Manchester (east). "The local hero, Joseph Rayner Stevens, is talking from the platform as the militia is marching in to arrest him. The work is not a historical representation of the events, rather a celebration of local pride and history." [1]

Notes

The People's Charter listed six main aims:

- a vote for all men (over 21),
- a secret ballot,
- no property qualification to become an MP,
- payment for MPs,
- electoral districts of equal size,
- annual elections for Parliament.

Bio:Rutherford

Leaving school at fourteen, Rutherford continued his artistic training attending evening classes at the Manchester School of Art, where he was taught by Adolf Valette. Fellow pupils included L.S. Lowry and James Fitton. In 1925 Walter Sickert opened an art class for students of which Rutherford was one of them. The influence of Sickert is evident throughout the work of Harry Rutherford, particularly in a shared love of the theatre.

Early on in his career, Rutherford spent time in Cornwall with the Newlyn School of painters and light and colour infused his work from this time. Alongside his painting, Rutherford was employed as an illustrator for the print media, as he had a quick eye for sketching caricatures and cartoons.

In 1936, during the early days of television, Rutherford was invited to participate in a programme called 'Cabaret Cartoons' during which he would stand in the wings of the studio and draw the variety acts as they performed. These quick sketches would be shown live on television. Rutherford was a pioneer of graphic illustration on television and in the 1950s appeared on a regular 15 minute programme called 'Sketchbook'.

Rutherford continued to travel widely, spending time in Borneo in 1957, France and Spain. However he is most loved for his paintings of the industrial landscape and life around his home town of Hyde. These include his painting 'Northern Saturday' 1948, now held in Ashton Town Hall and 'Mill Girls' 1948." [2]

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Daniel MacDonald (1821-1853)
The Discovery of the Potato Blight
1847

National Folklore Collection,
University College Dublin

Daniel MacDonald (1821-1853), *The Discovery of the Potato Blight*, 1847,
National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin

Having established the broader hardships facing Ireland's poor, we turn to one of the very few paintings to confront the Famine directly. **Daniel MacDonald** painted *The Discovery of the Potato Blight* in 1847, the year the catastrophe reached its peak. Born in Cork in 1821, MacDonald trained under his father, a caricaturist, and had already exhibited at the **Royal Hibernian Academy** before moving to London. His decision to return and record the Famine was an act of deliberate witness at a time when most artists looked away. Ireland's poor had become almost entirely dependent on a single variety of potato, the **Lumper**, which proved catastrophically susceptible when ***Phytophthora infestans*** swept across Europe in 1845. Between 1846 and 1850, one million people died and up to two million emigrated — roughly a quarter of the population. The British response was not merely slow; it was compounded by the fact that Ireland continued exporting thirty to fifty shiploads of food daily to Britain throughout the crisis. Historian **Christine Kinealy** and others argue this makes the Famine a preventable political failure, not simply a natural disaster. MacDonald died of fever in 1853, aged thirty-two, before his full significance was recognised.

Notes

Daniel MacDonald (1821-1853), The Discovery of the Potato Blight, 1847, National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin

The Great Famine

There is another appalling disaster that affected the poor in Ireland at this time. This is Daniel MacDonald's The Discovery of the Potato Blight is one of the few paintings to show the terrible famine.

The population of Ireland had become dependent on a single food crop, potatoes, as it grew well and provided more calories per acre than any other crop. In 1845, potato blight (*Phytophthora infestans*, fi-TOF-thor-ra in-fest-ains') spread across Europe and effected Ireland particularly badly as the population was already suffering from extreme poverty and had few alternative food supplies. They mostly grew a single variety, the Lumper, which was particularly susceptible to potato blight.

From 1846 to 1850 1 million people died of starvation and another 1.5-2 million emigrated, about fifth to a quarter of the population. The English response was inadequate and slow and to add to the inhumanity Ireland was still exporting 30-50 shiploads of food a day to Britain. This was more than enough to feed the population which made it a preventable famine which is why some historians describe it as genocide although technically to prove genocide requires showing an intent to destroy a nation or group. The disaster eventually led to Irish independence in the next century (1921, law 1922, David Lloyd George and Michael Collins).

Notes

The Acts of Union 1800 were parallel acts of the Parliament of Great Britain and the Parliament of Ireland which united the Kingdom of Great Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland (previously in personal union) to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The acts came into force on 1 January 1801.

The food being exported was grown on land owned by English landlords for sale in England.

Bio:MacDonald

"Daniel MacDonald (1821-53) [was] one of the few 19th century Irish painters to focus attention on the Great Famine in Ireland during the late 1840s, Daniel MacDonald (originally McDaniel) was born in Cork, the son of the

caricaturist and draughtsman James McDaniel (c.1789-1840). Taught drawing at an early age by his father, MacDonald soon demonstrated his sketching skills, becoming noted for his pen and ink drawings including both portraiture and caricatures of local figures. When still only a young teenager, he had two etchings published in *The Tribute*, a Cork literary publication. In his early 20s, he began exhibiting at the Royal Hibernian Academy (1842-44), before leaving for London shortly after.

Meanwhile the Famine (1846-51) had broken out in Ireland, during which MacDonald returned to paint one of the few pictures showing an actual scene from the famine. This genre painting, *The Irish Peasant Family Discovering the Blight of Their Store* was exhibited at the British Institution in 1847. Neither MacDonald's role in publicizing the tragedy - nor that of his fellow Cork artist James Mahoney (1810-79) - has ever been fully recognized. MacDonald continued showing at the British Institution (1849-51). Two of his works - *A Vision of the Sea*, and *The Gun of Distress* - were also shown at the Cork Institution in 1852. Then in 1853 he exhibited for the first time at the London Royal Academy - a portrait of Mrs Edward Fulcher. It was at this point at the age of 32, just as his art was maturing, that he died of a fever." [1]

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William Edward Kilburn (1818–1891)
Chartist rally, Kennington Common
10 April 1848
Daguerreotype
Royal Collection

William Edward Kilburn (1818–1891), Chartist rally, Kennington Common, 10 April 1848, Royal Collection

This photograph in the Royal Collection documents the Chartist rally on **Kennington Common** on **10 April 1848**, a year when revolution was sweeping across Europe. **Feargus O'Connor**, the Chartist leader and MP, claimed 300,000 gathered; historians settle on somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000. The Government deployed between 85,000 and 170,000 soldiers and special constables — among them Gladstone, Robert Peel, and the future **Napoleon III** — with cannon concealed in backstreets and the Thames bridges closed. The crowd dispersed peacefully by two o'clock, and the press declared it a fiasco, though the demonstrators considered the day a dignified success. So did Chartism fail? The movement took its name from **Magna Carta** and demanded six reforms: votes for all men over 21, a **secret ballot**, no property qualification for MPs, payment of MPs, equal constituencies, and annual elections. All but annual elections became law — but spread across **70 years**, from the **Reform Act of 1867** through to **1928**, when women finally gained equal voting rights. The Chartists did not win quickly, but they established, irreversibly, that ordinary working people had a legitimate claim to political power.

Notes

This is a famous photograph in the Royal Collection. It shows the enormous Chartist rally on Kennington Common. It is 1848, a time of revolution across Europe and on 10 April an enormous crowd gathered to hand in to Downing Street a petition with six million signatures. Armed soldiers and canon were hiding in the backstreets and the bridges were closed. A disaster and possible revolution was avoided by hair's breadth.

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), 1885 (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. On the other hand over the next 70 years all of the Chartist demands were passed into law except for annual elections.

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.

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, 9th 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'.

...

In the background of the photograph on the east side of the common was a three acre vitriol (sulphuric acid) 'manufactory', between that and Kent Road to the east was a smelting house for lead and antimony, a tannery, a manufacturer of glue, another for tobacco pipes, another for floor cloths and carriages and several nursery grounds.

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 (96 million) than the entire population of the UK (67 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.

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Robert Braithwaite Martineau (1826–1869)
The Last Day in the Old Home
 1862
 107.3 × 144.8 cm
 Tate Britain, London

Robert Braithwaite Martineau (1826–1869), *The Last Day in the Old Home*, 1862, 107.3 × 144.8 cm, Tate Britain, London

The ruin of a family could come not from vice alone, but from a single catastrophic loss of fortune — and few paintings make that fall more forensically visible than this one. **Robert Braithwaite Martineau's** **The Last Day in the Old Home**, painted in **1862**, is an early Victorian problem picture — a genre that invites the viewer to read the scene as a narrative puzzle. Martineau trained first as a lawyer, then under **William Holman Hunt**, one of the founding **Pre-Raphaelites**, and that legal eye for evidence shapes every detail here. The story, once decoded, is unambiguous: an aristocrat has gambled away the family fortune and must surrender the ancestral home. A **Christie's auction catalogue** lies on the floor; lot numbers mark the furniture; a **sporting print** in the lower left confirms the horses were his ruin. By the window, a weeping grandmother presses a five-pound note into the butler's hand. The mother's expression is tight with anxiety, yet her husband raises his glass, oblivious or indifferent. Bare trees beyond the window and a dying fire signal destitution approaching fast. The model was Colonel **John Leslie Toke**, a friend of Martineau. With grim symmetry, Toke himself was forced to sell his ancestral home in **1896**, crushed by agricultural depression after four

centuries of family tenure.

Notes

Children - From Rich to Poor

The death or bankruptcy of the only breadwinner could lead to destitution. This is another example of the road to ruin. Robert Martineau's *The Last Day in the Old Home* is an early example of a Victorian problem picture, you search for clues to work out the story behind the picture.

I will give the the answer—an aristocrat has gambled away the family fortune and has been forced to sell the ancestral home with all its contents.

What are the clues? The sporting print at the bottom left tells us he has gambled the money away on the horses. There is a Christie's catalogue on the floor and lot numbers on all the contents. On the left by the window an old woman, probably the grandmother is giving a five pound note to the butler as she weeps. The mother looks concerned but her husband should be as well as the bare trees and the dying fire in the grate indicate they will soon be homeless and poor.

(The man portrayed is Colonel John Leslie Toke (1839–1911) who was a friend of Martineau and was painted at his country home, Godinton House near Ashford, Kent. Bizarrely, life followed art, Toke inherited the house in 1866 but had to sell it in 1896 after four hundred years of the Toke family living there. Toke was increasingly burdened by debt due to the agricultural depression.[1])

Notes

Robert Braithwaite Martineau (19 January 1826 – 13 February 1869) was the son of a Master in Chancery. He first trained as a lawyer and then entered the Royal Academy School where he won a silver medal. He was a pupil of William Holman Hunt, one of the founding Pre-Raphaelites. He married when he was 39 and had two children but died in 1869 at the age of 43. *The Last Day in the Old Home* is his best known work.

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Augustus Edwin Mulready (1844-1904)

Remembering Joys That Have Passed Away

1873

Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London

Augustus Edwin Mulready (1844-1904), *Remembering Joys That Have Passed Away*, 1873, Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London

Shifting focus now, this painting illustrates the same Victorian anxieties about childhood poverty through a different artistic lens. **Augustus Mulready's** **Remembering Joys That Have Passed Away** presents two children whose fine clothing signals former prosperity now lost. The boy, identifiable by his broom, works as a street sweeper; the girl sells matches. Mulready constructs a quiet narrative: the older child recounts the joy of a **pantomime** to a sister too young to hold that memory herself. They are the **deserving poor**, a Victorian moral category that generated sympathy but offered no guarantee of support. These are children navigating an adult world of labour and survival, possibly without parents at all. **Augustus Edwin Mulready** trained at the **South Kensington School** and then the **Royal Academy**, coming from a distinguished artistic family — his grandfather **William Mulready** had made a successful career after emigrating from Ireland. Augustus built his own reputation through **London street scenes**, repeatedly returning to young children burdened by adult hardship: flower sellers, urchins, small figures dwarfed by the city. His personal life remains largely undocumented beyond his marriage in **1874** and two children. The work speaks far more loudly than

the biography.

Notes

This is a different artist but could illustrate the result. It is Augustus Mulready's *Remembering Joys That Have Passed Away*. These children were wealthy as you can see from their clothes but have fallen on hard times. The boy is a street sweeper and we can see his broom and the girl is now reduced to selling matches. Perhaps the older sibling is recounting the joy of the pantomime to his sister who would have been too young to remember it. They are now too poor, possibly, orphaned, to ever visit a pantomime.

They are the deserving poor but that didn't mean they were automatically looked after. They were young children, possibly orphans struggling in an adult world.

Notes

Augustus Edwin Mulready (1844-1904) was a genre painter who often painted London street scenes with urchins and flower sellers particularly young children struggling with adult problems. He came from a family of artists, his grandfather William Mulready was a well-known and successful artist who came from Ireland to London. Augustus went to the South Kensington School followed by the Royal Academy. Little is known of his private life except that he married in 1874 and had two children Claude and Eleanor.



Emma Brownlow (1832-1905)
The Foundling Restored To Its Mother
1858
76.2 × 101.6 cm
Foundling Museum, London

Emma Brownlow (1832-1905), *The Foundling Restored To Its Mother*, 1858, 76.2 × 101.6 cm, Foundling Museum, London

Before the Victorian era, responsibility for the poor rested with the parish under the **Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601**, a system that crumbled as populations shifted from countryside to city. Into that failure stepped **Captain Thomas Coram**, who was so appalled by the suffering he witnessed on London's streets that he founded the **Foundling Hospital in 1739**. **Emma Brownlow**, born in 1832 and self-taught, painted *The Foundling Restored* in 1858 from deep personal knowledge: her father, **John Brownlow**, was himself a former foundling who rose to become the Hospital's Secretary. He stands behind the desk in the painting, watching as a mother is reunited with her child — an event so rare it carries the weight of fiction. The mother, overcome with emotion, has dropped the receipt she was required to present as proof of identity when claiming her child. Brownlow painted this as a deliberate response to critics who accused the Hospital of severing the bond between mother and child. On the wall behind Brownlow's father hangs **William Hogarth's** satirical **March of the Guards to Finchley**, painted in 1750, showing a disorganised rabble of troops mustering before the failed **Jacobite rebellion of 1745** — a pointed reminder, even here, of the fragility of social order.

Notes

Prior to the Victorian period there was little done for the poor. When most people lived in the countryside and worked on the land the parish was ultimately responsible for looking after them based on the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601.

As more people moved into towns in the eighteenth century the Old Poor Law, as it was known, began to break down.

One person, Captain Thomas Coram was so appalled by the conditions of the poor in London that he opened the foundling Hospital in 1739 (when it was granted a Royal Charter).

This painting by Emma Brownlow a self-taught and successful professional artist shows the Committee Room a hundred years later. She shows a foundling girl being reunited with her mother. You can see that the mother is so overwrought she has dropped the receipt she received when the child was first admitted, which is the evidence for her claim. It was very unusual for parent and child to be reunited and this painting was seen by most as a portrait of her father, John Brownlow, who was himself a foundling and became the Hospital's secretary, The Times described it, for example, as a 'very capital portrait'.

It seems the child's mother has come into money, perhaps through marriage and has come to take back her child.

Notes

Some children were claimed by their birth family, but it was extremely rare. Although the scene is an idealised fiction, Emma Brownlow has depicted her father (the Hospital's Secretary, John Brownlow) behind the table, watching over proceedings. The Illustrated Times, a weekly newspaper of the time, described this as 'a very capital portrait of the secretary himself'. Visible on the wall behind him, the artist shows some of the paintings in the Hospital's collection, including William Hogarth's painting, The March of the Guards to Finchley.[1]

The Second Jacobite Uprising (known as the '45) was part of a series of uprisings that had been occurring since the late 17th century and were aimed at returning the Stuart Dynasty to the throne after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 replaced James II with William and Mary. It was the last in a series of revolts that began in 1689, with major outbreaks in 1708, 1715 and 1719.

"This heavily romanticised scene depicts a mother reclaiming her child at the Foundling Hospital. She is clearly overcome with emotion at the sight of her child and has dropped the receipt on the floor. Mothers were required to present the Secretary with the receipt that they were given when their child was admitted to the Hospital as proof of identity. Emma Brownlow was the daughter of the Hospital's Secretary, John Brownlow, who was himself a former foundling. John Brownlow can be seen in the picture standing behind the desk. The dropped receipt bears his signature. In reality instances of parents reclaiming their children were rare. Often the Hospital Governors would examine the mother's circumstances, and decide that the child was better off remaining in their care.

The children were not allowed to have contact with their parents after they were admitted, although sometimes parents and other family members would make contact in secret when the Hospital was open to the public. It is likely that this romantic view of the Hospital was painted to answer the Hospital's contemporary critics, who attacked it for removing children from their mothers. Brownlow painted a number of scenes from life at the Hospital, subjects she doubtless chose because they reflected her personal experience but also her social conscience." [2]

On the wall behind, in the centre, is Hogarth's satirical *The March of the Guards to Finchley* (1750, Foundling Museum) showing an imagined rabble of disorganised troops mustering on the Tottenham Court Road prior to marching to Finchley to put down the unsuccessful second Jacobite rebellion of 1745. Hogarth makes fun of their lack of training and disorganisation.

"Emma Brownlow (1832-1905) was born in 1832, the youngest of the three daughters of John Brownlow, the Secretary of the Foundling Hospital. John Brownlow was himself a foundling who had excelled at administration, training and working within the Secretary's office before rising to that role.

"Emma Brownlow was a self-taught, modestly successful professional artist, exhibiting regularly in London and regional art exhibitions, and several times at the Royal Academy. She exhibited and sold oil paintings, but also made working preparatory drawings and studies in pencil, watercolour and charcoal. Her first known exhibited work was *The Foundling Girl*, shown at the Royal Academy in 1852. In 1858 one reviewer described her as 'a young artist of promise'. This was the year in which she painted *The Foundling Restored*, perhaps the most successful of her scenes of life in the Hospital." [1]

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A Dr Barnardo's Home

A Dr Barnardo's Home

Thomas John Barnardo, born in Dublin in 1845, arrived in London and encountered children living in conditions of extreme poverty. A cholera epidemic compounding urban destitution moved him to act decisively. Though he trained as a doctor and never completed his qualification, he used the title throughout his life. In **1867** he founded schools aligned with the **Ragged School movement**, offering poor children food and basic education. By **1870** he had opened his first home for boys, where residents learnt carpentry, metalwork, and shoemaking. When a boy he had turned away was found dead from malnutrition the following day, Barnardo committed to refusing no child. He rejected the Victorian distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, accepting children regardless of race, disability, or circumstance. His legacy carries serious complexity. From the late nineteenth century until **1960**, Barnardo's participated in **child migration schemes**, sending over one hundred thousand children to Canada and Australia. Sean Arthur Joyce, in **Laying the Children's Ghosts to Rest**, documents how many were subjected to forced labour and sexual abuse. Barnardo also practised what he himself called **philanthropic abduction**, removing children without parental consent. He faced prosecution eighty-eight times and was acquitted

on every occasion.

Notes

Dr Barnardo's

One of the charities set up in the nineteenth century to help orphaned children was Dr Barnardo's.

Thomas John Barnardo (1845-1905) was born in Dublin and trained as a doctor and although he never finished his studies he used the title 'doctor'.

When he came to London he was shocked to find children living in terrible conditions and when a cholera epidemic left many orphans he felt he had to do something about it.

In 1867 he set up several schools as part of the Ragged School movement so that children could be fed and get a basic education. He abandoned medicine to look after the children and in 1870 set up his first home for boys. The boys were taught skills such as carpentry, metalwork and shoemaking. The schools quickly became full but when a boy was turned away and found dead of malnutrition the next day he vowed never to turn away another boy. Barnardo refused to discriminate between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. He accepted all children, regardless of race, disability or circumstance.

(There were controversies. From the late nineteenth century until 1960 Barnardo's sent children to work in Australia and Canada, but we now know that this well-intentioned practice was deeply misguided as many were treated effectively as slaves and many were harshly treated and sexually abused.)

(The other controversial practice which Barnardo admitted and called 'philanthropic abduction' was to take children without their parent's permission. He was taken to court 88 times but was a charismatic speaker and was found not guilty every time.)

Notes

"Dr. Barnardo: Saint or Villain?" Is a question raised in the book *Laying the Children's Ghosts to Rest* by Sean Arthur Joyce. Between 1869 and the early 1930s more than 100,000 children were rounded up from the streets of Britain to be used as labourers in Canadian homes; often little more than slaves. The lives of Canadian child immigrants were rife with suffering: for the boys, back-breaking labour from dawn 'til dusk on a farm. The girls were earmarked for domestic service, mostly in isolated farm households, that left them

vulnerable to sexual abuse due to their isolation. While some children would be welcomed into loving homes, others were exploited as cheap labour, little different than pack animals and many did not live to be adults.

Annie Macpherson's journals according to her niece Lilian Birt suggest a child mortality rate in London's East End as high as four out of five children younger than five years. (Children's Ghosts, p. 65)

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Ernest Borough Johnson (1867-1949)
A Salvation Army Shelter
 1891
 61.6 x 97.0 cm
 National Gallery of Victoria,
 Melbourne

Ernest Borough Johnson (1867-1949), *A Salvation Army Shelter*, 1891, 61.6 x 97.0 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Building on that picture of charitable London, we turn now to the **Salvation Army**, whose founding in **1865** by **William and Catherine Booth** in the East End represents one of the most ambitious efforts to bring religious conviction directly into the lives of the destitute. The Booths rejected the convention of the pulpit and instead took their message to the streets, guided by the doctrine they called soup, soap, and salvation — addressing hunger, hygiene, and spiritual need in equal measure. Their organisation established shelters for homeless people, soup kitchens, rescue homes for women fleeing abuse, and the world's first free labour exchange. The painting depicting one of these shelters is the work of **Ernest Borough Johnson**, born in Shifnal, Shropshire, in **1867**. He trained at the **Slade School** between 1885 and 1887, then at the **Herkomer Art School**, and later studied in Paris before settling in London. His career spanned painting, lithography, and drawing, and he eventually taught at **Bedford College**, London University. He exhibited widely from **1886** and shared his working life with the painter **Esther George**, whom he married. His genre subjects — children, portraits, domestic scenes — made him well suited to rendering the human dignity present even in scenes

of poverty.

Notes

Another charity created to help abused women and homeless people was The Salvation Army. It was founded by William and Catherine Booth in the East End of London in 1865 to take their religious message directly to the people. Their motto was soup, soap and salvation.

They provided a number of services including as you see here shelters for homeless people.

The artist was Ernest Borough Johnson (1867-1949) who studied at the Slade, later becoming Professor of Fine Arts at Bedford College. He exhibited in London and abroad from 1886, and was married to fellow artist, Esther George.

Notes

"The Salvation Army began on the streets of East London in 1865 when Methodists, William and Catherine Booth, abandoned the traditional concept of a church pulpit to take God's word directly to the people.

The Booths preached and lived out a doctrine of practical Christianity — soup, soap and salvation — to encourage both social and spiritual transformation among society's most vulnerable and marginalised people.

Their work included setting up shelters for people who were homeless, a family tracing service, running soup kitchens, helping people living in the slums and setting up rescue homes for women fleeing domestic abuse and prostitution. The couple also oversaw the world's first free labour exchange and campaigned to improve working conditions." [1]

Ernest Borough Johnson studied at the Slade, later becoming professor of Fine Arts at Bedford College. He exhibited in London and abroad from 1886, and was married to fellow artist, Esther George.

Painter, lithographer, draughtsman, art writer. Born in Shifnal, Shropshire, married to the painter Esther George Johnson. Studied at the Slade School, London, 1885-1887, and at Herkomer Art School, 1887-1889; In Paris, 1890, then Bushey and Basingstoke; In London from ca. 1917; Taught at Bedford College, London Univ., South-Western Polytechnic, Chelsea; died in London. Works include paintings and drawings of children, portraits, genre paintings, and flower studies.

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[1] <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/about-us/our-history>



Gustave Doré (1832-1883)
Dudley Street, Seven Dials
 1872
 Illustration (wood engraving)

Gustave Doré (1832-1883), Dudley Street, Seven Dials, 1872

Gustave Doré hated to be seen drawing in public, so he lurked in doorways and worked at dawn and dusk, relying on a photographic memory to reconstruct what he witnessed. That discipline produced images of deeply unsettling frankness, and nowhere is that more apparent than in his illustration of **Dudley Street, Seven Dials**, published in **London: A Pilgrimage** in **1872**, the book he made with writer **Blanchard Jerrold**. Seven Dials, a slum district near Covent Garden, appears here as a crush of humanity: children blocking the street, vendors seated below pavement level in cellar openings, only their heads visible from above. Jerrold wrote that in streets like these "the mark of misery seems to be upon every man, woman, and child." The response from some critics was not sympathy but menace — proposals for labour camps, mass sterilisation, and what one writer called the extermination of the unfit as a class. Doré's vision arrived as **slum clearance** was already under way. **St Giles Rookery**, the area **William Hogarth** had depicted in **Gin Lane**, was demolished between **1844 and 1847** to make way for New Oxford Street. Nationwide clearance, however, did not come until the **1930 Slum Clearance Act**.

Notes

Illustration of a street market in Dudley Street, Seven Dials, from 'London: a Pilgrimage' by Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré, 1872. The book was characterised as 'the wonder and horror of the age'.

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.

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 sterilisation introduced to prevent the degeneration of the race, and one writer recommended the 'extermination of the unfit as a class'.

At this time slum clearance was starting in some cities. The worst slum in London was St Giles Rookery which is shown in William Hogarth's Gin Lane. It was lawless, controlled by gangs and riddled with crime and prostitution and it became one of the first to be cleared in 1844-47 when New Oxford Street was built through it. Liverpool engaged in slum clearance between 1895 and 1918 but major slum clearance nationwide did not take place until the 1930s with the 1930 Slum Clearance Act.

Bio:Dore

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.

References

Jeremy Paxman, The Victorians



John Leech (1817-1864)
Substance and Shadow
 1843
 17.7 x 24.3 cm
 Punch or The London Charivari,
 London

John Leech (1817-1864), Substance and Shadow, 1843, 17.7 x 24.3 cm, Punch or The London Charivari, London

John Leech's "Substance and Shadow," published in **Punch** on **15 July 1843**, delivers one of the sharpest attacks on government indifference to poverty produced in the Victorian period. Leech had joined Punch in **1841**, and the magazine was already establishing itself as a vehicle for radical social critique — it was Punch, too, that published Thomas Hood's "Song of the Shirt," a subject we return to later. The image responds directly to a government-sponsored exhibition held at **Westminster Hall**. Punch's editorial was withering: ministers, unable to give "hungry nakedness the substance which it covets," offered instead "the shadow — an exhibition." The entrance fee was one **shilling**, beyond the reach of the poor, and when the fee was eventually waived, the exemption pointedly excluded Saturdays, the one day working people could attend. This work also carries linguistic significance: it is **Cartoon No. 1**, the piece that gave the modern word "cartoon" its meaning. Previously the term described a full-size preparatory sketch for a fresco. Punch redefined it as a full-page satirical graphic, distinct from caricature's exaggerated portraiture. Leech himself, a Charterhouse-educated artist who trained briefly in medicine, brought both social awareness and draughtsmanly

precision to everything he produced for the magazine.

Notes

John Leech (1817-1864), 'Substance and Shadow', Punch or The London Charivari, 15 July 1843, p. 23, 17.7 cm × 24.3 cm

Government Indifference

Punch in the 1840s was a force for change. It was Punch that published Thomas Hood's Song of the Shirt severely criticising employers for their working practices. We will hear more about that later.

Here Punch is criticising the Government. It wrote in its editorial,

"Ministers have ... determined that as they cannot afford to give hungry nakedness the substance which it covets, at least it shall have the shadow. The poor ask for bread, and the philanthropy of the State accords—an exhibition".

The exhibition referred to was Government sponsored and held in Westminster Hall. The poor of course could not afford the entrance fee of one shilling. The fee was later waived but not on Saturday the only day the poor could attend.

(This is 'Cartoon No. 1' the first ever cartoon. Previously, a cartoon was a full size line sketch which was transferred to a wall or ceiling prior to painting a fresco. Punch created the modern meaning of the word, in this case as a full-page satirical commentary in graphic form as compared with a caricature in which facial features were exaggerated.)

Notes

Bio:Leech

John Leech (1817-1864) was a child prodigy who was discovered by John Flaxman drawing on his mother's knee when he was three. He studied at Charterhouse School where he met his lifelong friend William Makepeace Thackeray. He studied to become a doctor but drifted into the artistic profession. He became an illustrator for a number of magazines. He was also a successful lithographer and wood engraver. His connection with Punch began in 1841 and it lasted until his death. He was also friends with John Everett Millais who helped him prepare for an exhibition in which he painted enlarged drawings in oils.

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

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

Samuel Luke Fildes painted **Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward** in **1874**, drawing directly from a scene he stumbled upon returning from a dinner party. He spotted a crowd of destitute people queuing outside a police station and, rather than move on, spent weeks returning to make studies, eventually inviting some of those he met to sit for him as paid models. These are portraits of real, named individuals whose names we have lost. A casual ward offered one night's shelter and a meagre meal of six ounces of bread and an ounce of cheese, a thin layer of straw for a bed, and work the following morning before discharge. The next night, each person had to find a different district and queue again — which is why these itinerant poor became known as **tramps**. The system was a direct consequence of the **Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834**, whose central logic, identified by the historian **Norman Longmate**, was deliberate deterrence: conditions were designed to be worse than the worst independent poverty. The woman in the foreground clutching her baby already holds her permit; the elderly man in a top hat behind her is asking the policeman for directions. Fildes makes their dignity plain despite everything the system was designed to strip away.

Notes

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

The Workhouse and Casual Ward

This is Luke Fildes (pronounced to rhyme with 'childs') Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward.

A casual ward was a single nights accommodation and food in return for work for those unwilling or unable to enter the workhouse. As you could only stay one night they had to find another district the next day. Here they are queuing outside a police station to get a permit to allow them to spend a night in a casual ward. The woman in the foreground with a baby and child has a permit and the old man with a top hat behind her is asking a policeman the way to the casual ward.

On entry men and women were separated and given a meal of six ounces of bread and an ounce of cheese, a tiny amount. The bed was a thin layer of straw on the floor and in the morning another similar meal and often three hours of work.

Workhouses and casual wards were the result of the 1834 Poor Law whose aim was not to help the poor but to reduce the cost of looking after the poor, take beggars off the streets and encourage poor people to work hard to support themselves. The conditions inside were specifically designed to be worse than the worst slums to discourage the poor from seeking the workhouse.

However, the slums were so appalling that the conditions in even the worst 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

Bio: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. This 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 "vagrants." 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."

Notes

Workhouses were for local people and casual wards for the poor of no fixed address. They were only allowed to stay in a casual ward for one night. They were expected to work in return for the accommodation and food.

Workhouses and casual wards were often on the same site. Because they could only stay one night that had to tramp the streets each day to find another casual ward. That is why they are known as tramps, the official term was vagrant.

References

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

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

Henry Wallis trained at the Royal Academy Schools from 1848 and later studied in France, moving in Pre-Raphaelite circles before establishing his reputation with **The Death of Chatterton** in 1856. **The Stonebreaker**, exhibited at the **Royal Academy in 1858**, extended that reputation into social commentary. Stone breaking was a workhouse punishment requiring men to break half a ton of stone daily into road-building rubble — brutal even for the healthy, deadly for the destitute. Wallis dresses his figure in agricultural labourer's clothing, placing him among the rural unemployed funnelled into the workhouse system. Many early viewers assumed the man was simply resting, but the evidence against this reading is deliberate and layered. The frame bore a line from **Tennyson's A Dirge of 1830**: "Now is done thy long day's work," a poem explicitly about death. The setting sun, the drained palette, and the hammer slipped from an open hand rather than set aside all point the same way. The clinching detail is a stoat nestled near the man's right foot — motionless animals approach only the truly still. Wallis himself later remarked that dead poets sell better than dead labourers, a wry acknowledgement that **The Stonebreaker** never quite matched **Chatterton's**

commercial appeal.

Notes

This is Henry Wallis's *The Stonebreaker* which was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858.

Stone breaking was a common task given to men in the workhouse. It involved breaking half a ton of stone a day into small rocks to use in making roads. This was an onerous task even for a fit and healthy man but for the destitute it was literally deadly.

The man is wearing agricultural labourer's clothes so this is an example of 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.

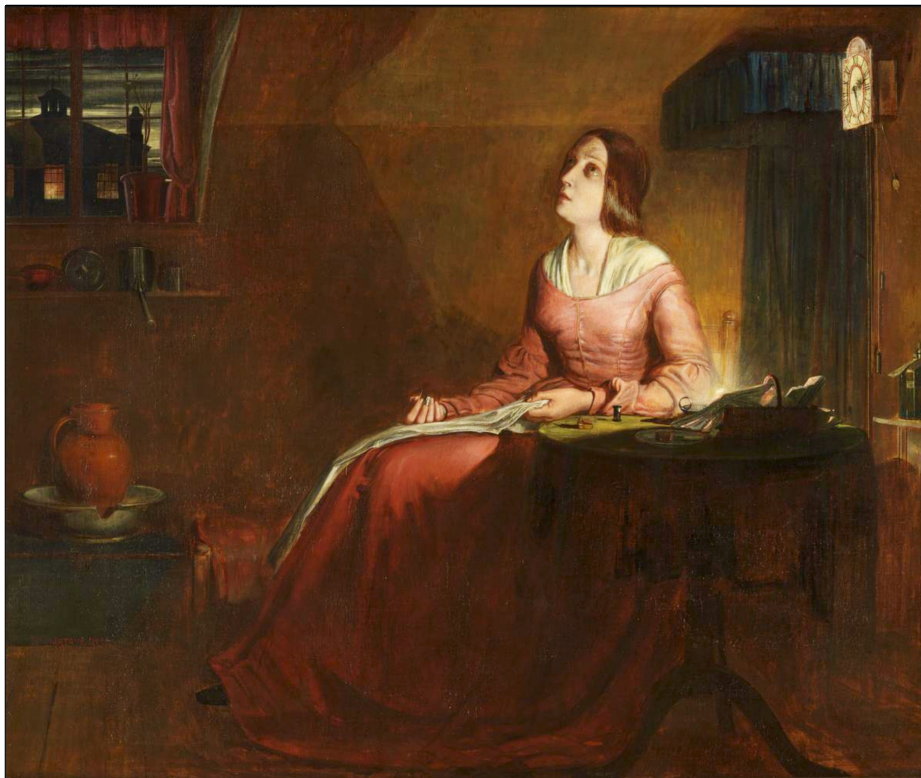
The frame was inscribed with a line paraphrased from Alfred Tennyson's *A Dirge* (1830): "Now is done thy long day's work;" about someone who has just died, the muted colours and setting sun give a feeling of finality; the man's posture indicates that his hammer has slipped from his grasp as he was working rather than being laid aside while he rests, and the final clue is that his body is so still a stoat, only visible on close examination, is next to his right foot.

(CLICK) The stoat is hard to see so I produced a lighter version. It is at the bottom left just above his foot.(CLICK)

Notes

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*. His next major work, *The Stonebreaker* (1857, exhibited in 1858), consolidated his reputation as a true Pre-Raphaelite. He once said that dead poets are more saleable than dead labourers (referring to *The Stonebreaker*).



Richard Redgrave (1804-1888)
The Sempstress
1846
Tate Britain, London

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

Richard Redgrave's **The Sempstress**, painted in **1846**, marks the moment Victorian art turned its gaze directly onto poverty and refused to look away. Redgrave came to the subject personally: his sister had been forced to work as a governess, fell ill in service, and died. That grief is embedded in every detail of the canvas. The painting responded to **Thomas Hood's** poem **The Song of the Shirt**, published in the **1843** *Punch* Christmas Album. **William Makepeace Thackeray** called it the most startling lyric in the language; it was set to music, turned into sermons, and discussed across Europe. The clock reads half past two in the morning. Lit windows across the street confirm this scene repeats throughout London. The **sempstress** works by a single candle, her eyes already swollen from close stitching. A scrap of food shows she cannot stop to eat. On the mantelpiece sit medicine bottles from **Middlesex Hospital**. Crucially, Redgrave borrowed the interior from a **seventeenth-century Dutch** composition and posed his figure in the tradition of **Baroque** swooning saints. He knew the subject had to appear respectable to be accepted by the **Royal Academy** — and it was. **The Sempstress** founded **Victorian social realist painting** as a distinct, campaigning genre.

Notes

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

The Deserving Poor Defined

This represents an important turning point in the Victorian's view of the poor.

In 1843, the *Punch Christmas Album* published a poem by Thomas Hood called *The Song of the Shirt*. It is impossible today to understand the enormous impact the poem had. William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) described it as 'the most startling lyric in our language'. It was set to music, the subject of a play and of many sermons. Articles appeared saying British citizens were being subjected to a form of slavery and a German living in England called Friedrich Engels wrote to his friend Karl Marx who was living in Paris about the horror of the situation.

This painting by Richard Redgrave is *The Sempstress*, a reaction to the poem. It was accompanied in the exhibition catalogue by these lines from the poem,

Oh! men with sisters dear

Oh! men with mothers and wives,

It is not linen you're wearing out,

But human creatures' lives.

Up to then most painting avoided showing the reality of poverty but this painting was the turning point of a whole tradition of Victorian social realist painting. It introduced the idea of the deserving poor—like this woman here.

Let us look at the painting. You can see it is 2:30 in the morning. 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 single candle. Sempstresses often went blind and if a single stitch was faulty their wages were docked. 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.

This was terrible but it was not what moved society. The point that struck home is that they woke up to the fact that the poor could be their own sisters, mothers and wives. In Victorian society the man was nearly always the sole breadwinner and there were few morally acceptable jobs for women. So if the sole breadwinner died the dependents could be thrown on the streets and go from being wealthy to poor overnight. The distinction between the deserving

poor and the underserving poor started to become established. The deserving poor were those who no fault of their own were unable to afford to house, clothe and feed themselves and their family.

Another aspect of this painting was the fallen woman. This woman is looking up to heaven for support as she tries to make a morally acceptable living and avoid becoming a fallen woman even if it means she goes blind and eventually dies.

Notes

Public discontent grew and in the countryside combined with the impact of the agricultural revolution. This led to the Swing Riot in the 1830s.

In 1832, Reform Act was passed increasing the franchise but still leaving many without the vote.

In 1834 the Tolpuddle Martyrs were six English farm labourers who were sentenced to transportation to a penal colony in Australia for seven years. All they had done was to create a Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers. The same year a 'New Poor Law' was introduced to reduce the cost of housing and feeding the poor, which introduced the workhouse.

During the 1840s the harvests were very poor and the decade became known as the Hungry Forties.

Richard 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. He 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.

This is one of the first paintings in which art is used to campaign for the poor. The artist 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.

The first painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy the year after the poem appeared but is now lost. This is a second version of the painting by Redgrave.

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. 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.



Augustus Egg (1816-1863)
Past and Present No. 1 - Misfortune
 1858
 Tate Britain, London

Augustus Egg (1816-1863), *Past and Present No. 1 - Misfortune*, 1858, Tate Britain, London

Augustus Egg's triptych **Past and Present**, exhibited at the **Royal Academy** in **1858**, depicts the catastrophic consequences facing a Victorian wife who commits adultery. Egg anchors the narrative in a recognisable middle-class drawing room, then fills it with layered symbolism. The husband grips a letter revealing his wife's infidelity, crushing a miniature of her lover underfoot, while she lies prostrate at his feet. A collapsing house of cards signals the marriage's ruin; the cards rest on a novel by **Balzac**, whose fiction repeatedly explored adultery. A cut apple — one half fallen, the other stabbed — maps the couple's fates. Two paintings on the wall reinforce the allegory: one depicting the Fall of Adam and Eve, labelled simply **The Fall**, and a shipwreck by **Clarkson Stanfield**, labelled **Abandoned**. A mirror at the rear reflects an open door, foreshadowing the wife's expulsion. The bracelets on her wrists read as shackles. Egg exhibited the series without a title, attaching only a subtitle describing a woman spotted destitute near the Strand. As **Caroline Norton** wrote, the faults of women are visited as sins, whilst the sins of men are not even visited as faults — a double standard the painting makes impossible to ignore.

Notes

This painting by Augustus Egg called Past and Present shows another cause of poverty and destitution. In the Victorian period (1837-1901) women had limited opportunities for education and work. They were expected to marry and fulfil the role of the "angel in the house", the title of a poem by Coventry Patmore (published between 1854 and 1862) that celebrated the ideal Victorian women as pure, submissive and devoted to her husband and family. This is one of three paintings that tells of the consequences of the wife straying from her designated role.

The husband is holding a note which we assume reveals his wife's adultery, an act for which there was no forgiveness. 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.

He is crushing 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.

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.

The set of pictures was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858 with no title, but with the subtitle, "August the 4th - 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!""

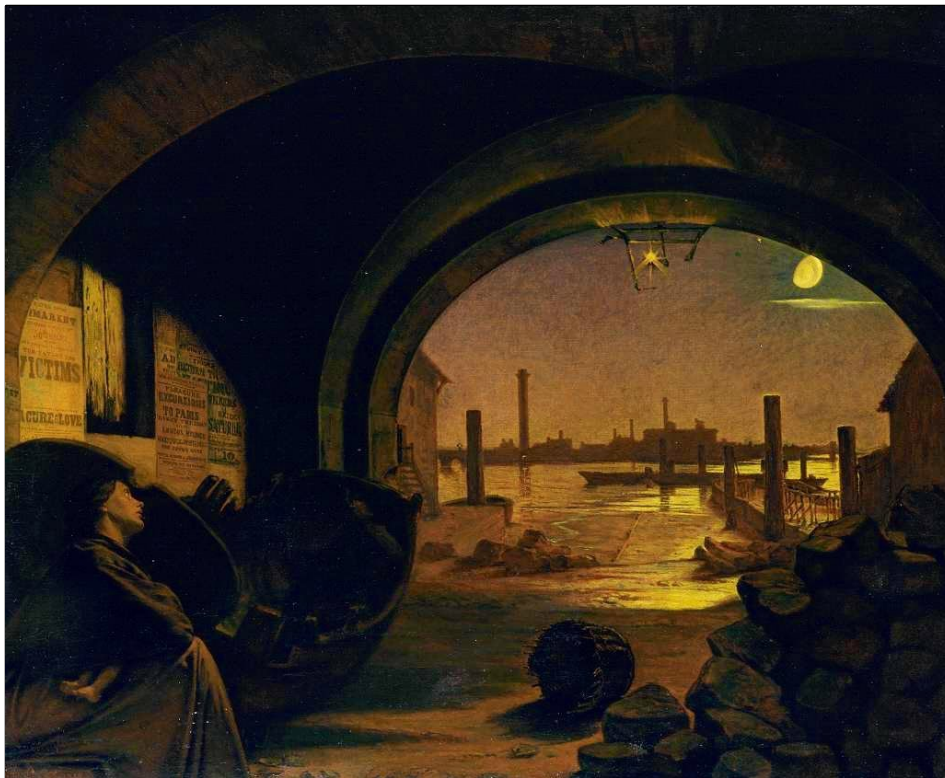
In Victorian England a man could safely take a mistress without fear of recrimination, but for a woman to be unfaithful was an unforgivable crime. As Caroline Norton, an early feminist, wrote, 'the faults of women are visited as sins, the sins of men are not even visited as faults' (quote in Lambourne, p.374).

References

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus_Egg

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Past_and_Present_\(paintings\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Past_and_Present_(paintings))

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/egg-past-and-present-no-1-n03278>



Augustus Egg (1816-1863)
Past and Present No. 3 - Despair
 1858
 Tate Britain, London

Augustus Egg (1816-1863), *Past and Present No. 3 - Despair*, 1858, Tate Britain, London

These two paintings share the same clouded moon, anchoring them at an identical moment five years after the first scene, by which point the catalogue text confirms the husband has died of a broken heart. **Augustus Egg's** left-hand canvas shows the couple's bedroom transformed by grief. The younger child kneels in a white nightgown, weeping into the lap of her elder sister, who sits in **black mourning dress** and stares out across rooftops toward that obscured moon. The small paired portraits of husband and wife still hang on the wall, now relics of a ruined household. To the right, the fallen wife lies beneath the **Adelphi Arches** beside the Thames, clutching a bundle from which protrude the emaciated legs of an infant, either asleep or dead. Posters above her head advertise **Tom Taylor's** **Victims** and **Tom Parry's** **The Cure for Love**, both dealing with failed marriages, alongside an excursion to Paris that echoes the **Balzac** novel glimpsed in the opening painting. She looks upward from the gutter to the same moon her children watch from their window. Egg was working within a wider artistic preoccupation: **Rossetti**, **G F Watts**, and **Abraham Solomon** all depicted drowned fallen women, each drawing on **Thomas Hood's** 1844 poem **The Bridge of Sighs**.

Notes

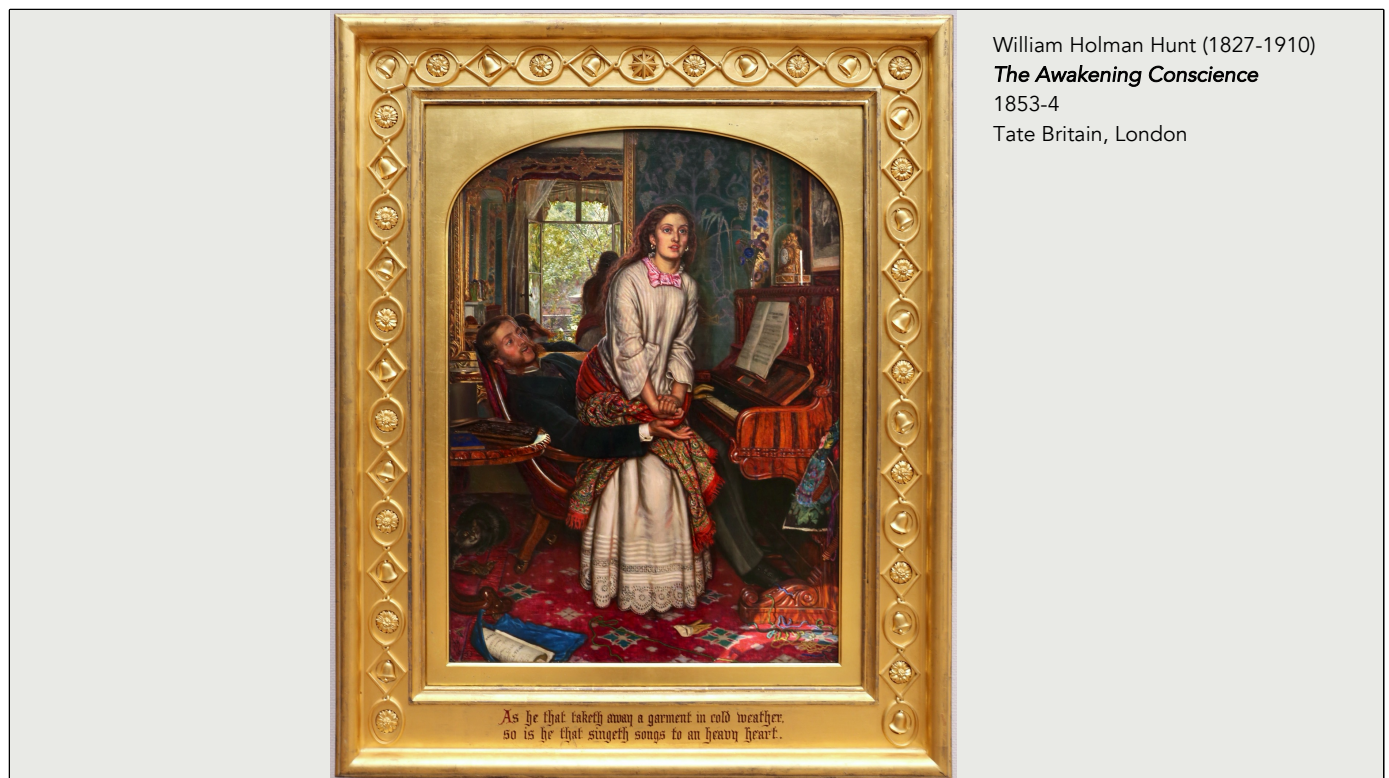
These are the second and third paintings and we can see from the moon and the cloud that they occur at the same time. We also know from the text that accompanied the catalogue entry that the husband has just died five years later of a broken heart.

The painting on the left 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.

The painting on the right shows the fallen wife is resting in the rubbish-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.

Notes

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*.



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

William Holman Hunt painted **The Awakening Conscience** in **1853**, drawing his inspiration directly from Proverbs: "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart." The inscription appears on the frame itself, anchoring the moral argument before you even look at the canvas. The scene shows a man and his mistress — she wears no wedding ring — in a rented room in **St John's Wood**, where Hunt himself lodged to ensure an authentic interior. As they sing **Thomas Moore's** *Oft in the Stilly Night* together, she experiences a sudden spiritual revelation, rising from his lap to gaze at the sunlit garden reflected in the mirror behind them. That garden represents divine creation; the ray of light falling across her signals that redemption remains possible. Hunt loads every corner with readable symbols. The cat toying with a trapped bird mirrors her own precarious position. The man's discarded glove, lying beneath her dress, signals the fate awaiting a cast-off mistress. The tangled skein of wool evokes the complexity of the trap she is caught in. **John Ruskin**, writing to *The Times* in **1854**, argued that even the hem of her white dress carried meaning — its purity, he wrote, so easily soiled the moment she steps into the street.

Notes

The Fallen Woman

The frame has written on it, "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather I so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart."

This is the music that they had been singing at the piano.

Some critics thought they were brother and sister but the clues in this painting by William Holman Hunt tell us she is a fallen woman. The clues are the furniture and furnishings are too gaudy for a respectable home, the tangled skeins of wool bottom right, the cat playing with a bird under the table and his discarded glove below her dress indicating she will soon be discarded like an old glove.

The Victorians were obsessed with fallen women. 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. We are to assume that this fallen woman has just had a sudden spiritual revelation. She has looked into the sunlit garden we see in the mirror to see God's work on earth, but will she be redeemed or continue on her path?

I mentioned that men regarded it as their duty to protect women but during the Victorian Age, prostitution was a wide-scale problem in Britain. The number of prostitutes in London was staggeringly high. Although London police reports recorded there to be approximately 8,600 prostitutes known to them, it has been suggested that the true number of women prostituting during this time was closer to 80,000 (Rogers). A surgeon (William Acton) claimed to have counted 185 prostitutes during one walk home although he made this judgement based on their appearance. Women who wore gaudy and shapely clothes and did not wear a shawl or bonnet were deemed to be prostitutes.

Professions such as factory workers, seamstresses and servants as well as unmarried mothers, drunken women and mentally disturbed women were seen as fallen women because they failed to conform to sexual and social norms. Factory workers mixed with men all day often leading to seduction and rape. Seamstresses were paid so little they often worked as prostitutes to supplement their income to avoid starvation. Servants were often forced into

sexual relationships as they could not say 'no' without losing their jobs.

The ideal promoted by the poem *The Angel in the House* by Coventry Patmore of morality, domestic virtue and dedication to family was the norm in literature at the time and it encouraged men to construct deviancy, what was called fallenness, even out of non-sexual behaviour. There were also some women who chose prostitution as it paid well and so made good business sense when employment options were limited (according to Deborah Anna Logan, author of *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing*).

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 sing 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 symbolises 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.

Notes

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 he 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 7th 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'.

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according to Logan, does,, slaves, and harem women.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)
Found
1865-1869
Delaware Art Museum

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Found*, 1865-1869, Delaware Art Museum

Picking up from the broader Victorian anxieties about gender and morality, **Dante Gabriel Rossetti's** painting **Found**, begun in **1853**, sits at the centre of those tensions. It was his only sustained attempt at a contemporary subject in oils, and he never finished it. The composition shows a young drover transporting a calf to market who recognises a former sweetheart crouched against a wall. Her clothing identifies her as a woman who has turned to prostitution, and she shrinks from his reach, turning her face away. Rossetti structures the scene as a moral equation: the calf, netted and bound in the cart, mirrors the woman's entrapment exactly. Both are being taken somewhere to be sold; neither can alter their fate by will alone. The question the painting refuses to resolve is whether the drover's outstretched hand offers genuine redemption or simply another form of possession. The work was exhibited only after Rossetti's death in **1882**. **Lewis Carroll**, seeing it then, wrote that the drover's expression combined pain, pity, condemnation, and love in a way he called one of the most marvellous things he had ever seen done in painting. That unresolved emotional charge is precisely what makes **Found** so demanding.

Notes

The theme of the fallen woman was becoming increasingly popular and Rossetti began his picture *Found*. It was his only attempt at a contemporary subject in oils and he considered it one of his most important works yet he never finished it.

We see a young drover taking a calf to market. He recognises his former sweetheart and jumps from the wagon to greet her but she is a fallen woman, we can tell from her clothes, and she is ashamed and shrinks from his grasp. He tries to raise her but she resists and turns her head towards the wall. The calf, like the woman, is trapped and they are both on their way to be sold. But will she accept redemption or is she, like the calf, unable to escape her fate.

It was only exhibited after Rossetti's death when Lewis Carroll saw in the farmer's face a combination "of pain and pity, condemnation and love, which is one of the most marvellous things I have ever seen done in painting."

Notes

In 1870 Rossetti published a sympathetic poem about a prostitute called *Jenny*.

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". What seems odd about this story is that God could not prevent it happening and doesn't know where Adam is in the garden. He is described as if he were a mortal king rather than an all-knowing all-powerful God. His curse seems to dramatically exceed the offence, that all future generations should suffer and have to work to survive.

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

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

George Frederic Watts painted **Found Drowned** after returning from Italy, though he withheld it from exhibition for twenty years. It belongs to a group of four social realist works he completed between **1848 and 1850**, alongside **The Irish Famine**, **The Seamstress**, and the brutalising **Under the Dry Arch**. The woman lies beneath **Waterloo Bridge**, notorious for suicides, her feet still trailing in the Thames. The composition is deliberately confrontational: her outstretched pose, illuminated face, and the star above her frame her as a martyr to social injustice rather than a sinner. A chain and heart-shaped locket in her hand point to abandonment as the cause. Her plain clothing signals poverty, and the industrial south bank visible near **Hungerford Bridge** in the distance sets private despair against the machinery of capitalist wealth. **Henry Mayhew**, whose **London Labour and the London Poor** first appeared in **1851**, documented this world with forensic rigour through direct interviews. He estimated **50,000 prostitutes** in a city of one million — one in ten women — a figure reflecting not moral failure but structural destitution. **Found Drowned** translates that statistic into a single, irreducible human life.

Notes

This is the fate of fallen women in the view of most Victorians. The painting is one of four social realist paintings by George Frederic Watts and is called 'Found Drowned' which was 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, typically women who had committed suicide. 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.

Notes

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 the Dry Arch, c. 1845-50, the most brutal. In London one person out of twenty had no food or shelter.

The Irish Famine, c. 1845-50

The Seamstress, c. 1845-50

Bio:Mayhew

Henry Mayhew (1812-1887), London Labour and the London Poor (1851, 4th 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 how obsolete trades such as gathering snails for food, collecting dog dung for tanneries (pure finders) and sewer-hunters who search 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 10 of all women (including children). 105 women were born to every 100 men, which is 50,000 per million excess women who cannot find a husband.



John Thomson (1837–1921) and
Adolphe Smith (1846–1924)
*The 'Crawlers', from Street Life in
London*
1877

John Thomson (1837–1921) and Adolphe Smith (1846–1924), *The 'Crawlers'*, from *Street Life in London*, 1877

John Thomson and Adolphe Smith's *Street Life in London*, published in 1877, is a landmark of documentary photography and social journalism, pairing Thomson's images with Smith's detailed interviews across thirty-six street occupations. The flooded Lambeth shop on the left endured an annual tidal overflow from the Thames, with residents clearing mud and repairing their homes as a matter of routine. The costermonger on the right represents a genuinely organised trade: joining a barrow club, buying stock at market, and on a strong day clearing around four shillings' profit from a single barrel of herrings sold at a penny each. The central figure belongs to a category Smith named the **Crawlers of St Giles's** — people too broken even to beg with energy, surviving on stale bread and borrowed tea-leaves. This woman, known as **Scotty Wass**, had been the wife of a Bank of England employee. The couple once owned a two-thousand-pound property, sold it, spent the proceeds, and then he died. Too proud for the workhouse, she sat on cold stone steps caring for an infant from ten until four each day in exchange for a cup of tea she did not always receive. Yet her stated plan was precise: save enough shillings for the hop fields, reclaim her son's pawned clothes, and

secure a room with an address — enough to re-enter respectable employment.

Notes

John Thomson (photographer) and Adolphe Smith (journalist), 'Street Floods in Lambeth', 'The "Crawlers"', 'The Cheap Fish of St Giles', Street Life in London, The 'Crawlers', 1877

Making Money on the Streets

This is from a book of photographs Victorian London, Street Life by John Thomson in which he describes the everyday life of 36 different occupations with detailed interviews with the people involved.

The shop on the left is in Lambeth it suffered from an annual tidal overflow from the Thames. Residents cleared the mud, repaired their furniture and dried their clothes every year.

On the right is an honest and respectable costermonger who in a good week, after expenses, could make £2 selling herrings for 1d each.

Surprisingly all the people interviewed had a positive outlook and plans for the future even the woman in the centre. She was the wife of a Bank of England employee who was well-paid and they owned a £2,000 property. They sold it and spent the money and then he died. She was too proud to enter a workhouse so became a 'crawler' which was someone who had to beg from beggars and literally crawled from place to place.

Crawlers sat on hard stone steps day and night in wind and rain and got little sleep. This woman looked 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 for example was the wife of a tailor who died. You may imagine she was inarticulate but she had positive plans for the future. Her aim was to save 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.

Notes

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

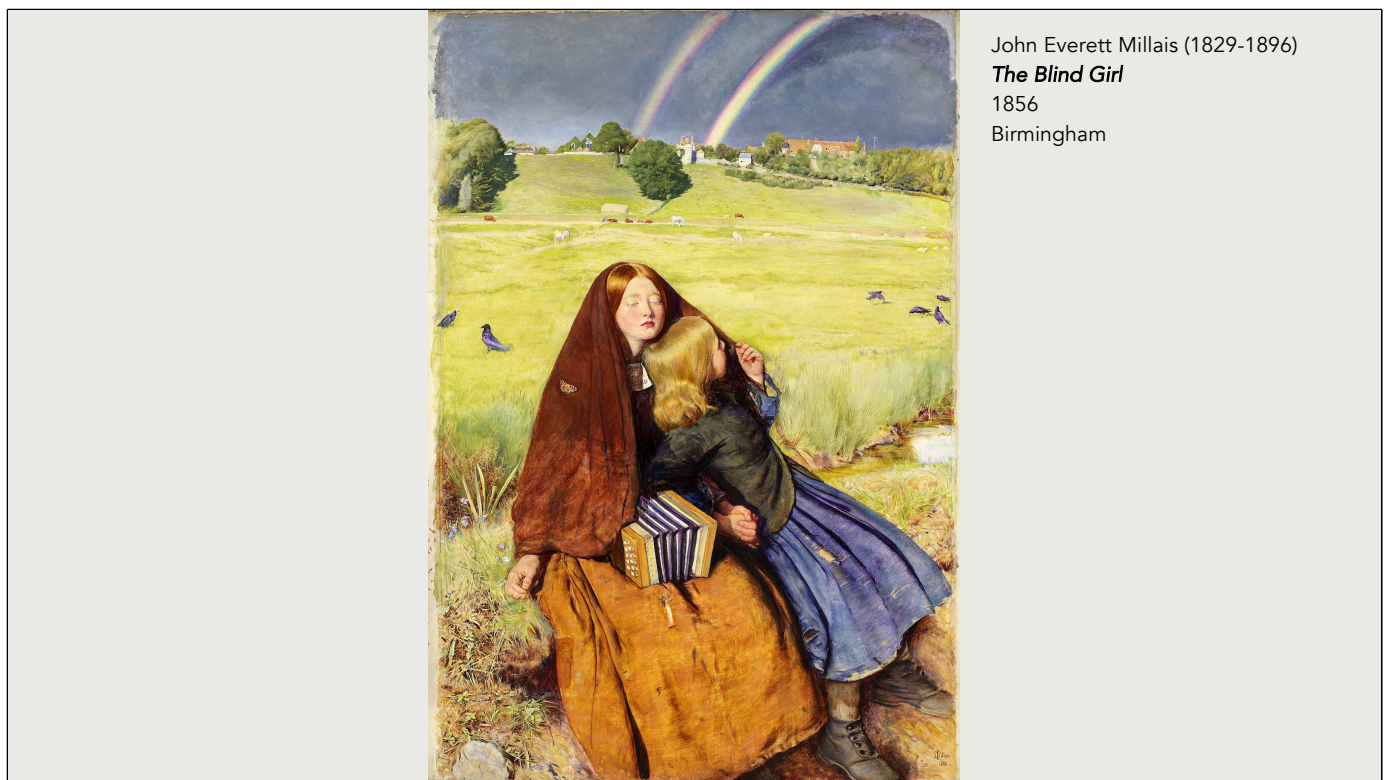
Adolphe Smith writes about The 'Crawler',

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.

Another crawler called 'Scotty' Wass once the wife of an employee of the Bank of England and they possessed a property worth £2,000. It was sold and the money spent after which he died and she became destitute. Too proud to go to the workhouse she became a crawler.

Mud-larks or beach-pickers go along the foreshore at low tide picking iron, coal, wood and waste and can get one or two shillings a hundredweight. Their trade has been partly paralysed by the building of the embankment.

The costermonger supplies fish at low prices. In the best times can can live comfortably by making 30s to £2 a week. They are honest, respectable and pay their debts. To get a barrow in the first place they join a barrow club and pay 6d a week until they have enough to buy a barrow when lots are drawn and the winner gets the barrow and then pays 1s a week until the debt is repaid. Before getting a barrow they can be rented for 18d a week. They can pay 1s a day for a place in a market or trade on the street and risk being impounded by the police and having to pay a 2/6 to 10s fine. At the start of a typical day they might buy a barrel of 500 fresh herrings for 25s. The 200 largest fish he sells for 1d each and the rest for 1/2d. At the best times he can sell the barrel in two and a half hours making £1 9s 2d, that is 4s 2d profit if trading in the street..



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

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

John Everett Millais painted *The Blind Girl* in 1856, completing the landscape near **Winchelsea** before adding the two figures in Perth, where his wife's family lived. Local girls Matilda Proudfoot and Isabella Nichol modelled as the blind beggar and her younger sister respectively. The blind girl sits with a concertina on her lap, a sign reading "Pity the Blind" around her neck. She cannot see the extraordinary double rainbow arching above her — a rare optical phenomenon produced by double reflection within each raindrop, which also creates the darker band of sky between the two arcs, known as **Alexander's Band** after the ancient Greek philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias, who first described it. That rainbow carries deliberate Biblical weight. Drawing on **Genesis**, Millais frames it as God's covenant promise to Noah, transforming a scene of poverty and disability into something closer to divine ordination. The painting engages directly with the **Victorian debate over the deserving poor**, positioning these children as victims of fate rather than circumstance. The viewer is given no ground for moral judgement, only compassion. Millais insists that blindness, vagrancy, and childhood vulnerability fall entirely outside individual responsibility — and that sympathy is therefore not optional.

Notes

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

The Blind Girl

This is The Blind Girl by John Everett Millais.

The two itinerant beggars are assumed to be sisters and one is a musician with a concertina on her lap and they are resting by the wayside after a rainstorm. The location has been identified as near 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 promise to Noah (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') that there will not be another flood that destroys the Earth.

The sign round her neck says 'Pity the Blind' and the scene deals with the contemporary social problem of vagrancy, focusing on the predicament of children and the disabled. The painting is intended to invoke sympathy as they did not bring their circumstances upon themselves thus widening the definition of the deserving poor to include what could be argued was divine fate.

Notes

The two girls were added two years later in Perth where Millais's wife's family lived. The models were Matilda Proudfoot as the blind girl and Isabella Nichol as her younger sister, they were local girls who modelled for Millais.

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.

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William Powell Frith (1819–1909)
The Crossing Sweeper
 1893
 43.5 × 36 cm
 Private collection (auctioned at
 Bonhams, 2004)

William Powell Frith (1819–1909), *The Crossing Sweeper*, 1893, 43.5 × 36 cm, Private collection (auctioned at Bonhams, 2004)

William Powell Frith, born in Yorkshire in 1819, trained at the Sass Academy before entering the Royal Academy Schools, and built his reputation on precisely the kind of scene shown here: London street life rendered with sparkling detail and unflinching social observation. The painting shows a **crossing sweeper**, a boy who clears horse dung and refuse from the road, offering safe passage to a well-dressed lady. His bare feet and torn trousers set against her immaculate skirts make the class disparity immediate and undeniable. The lady's indifference sharpens it further. Frith hired a real crossing sweeper to model for this composition, but the boy attempted to rob him, and Frith never used another as a model. The episode did not stop him returning to the subject: **four versions** exist, painted in **1858**, **1863**, and this final canvas of **1893**. Frith occupied a contradictory position in Victorian culture. Elected **Royal Academician in 1852**, he counted Charles Dickens among his friends and sold work to Queen Victoria, yet **John Ruskin**, Whistler, and Roger Fry each attacked him for artistic philistinism. He responded by publicly denouncing Impressionism and the Aesthetic Movement, remaining defiantly and productively out of step with the avant-garde until his death in

1909.

Notes

A lady waits to cross the road and a boy crossing-sweeper is offering to clear the road of refuse including horse droppings. He also acted as a protector to stop his client being knocked down by the horses. The most lucrative clients were ladies who did not want the hem of their dress soiled or get it entangled in the wheels of the carriages passing although this lady does not seem interested.

Note the boy has bare feet and torn trousers and the painting is a striking reminder of the disparity between rich and poor even in the final decade of the century.

Frith hired a crossing sweeper to model for him but an attempted robbery by the boy meant he had to call the police and he didn't use another crossing sweeper as a model.

Four versions of this painting exist, two from 1858, another in 1863 and this final one in 1893.

Notes

William Powell Frith (1819-1909) was 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). He became a 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.

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Ralph Hedley (1848–1913)
The Ballad Seller, the Black Gate
1884
94.8 x 67.4 cm
Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle

Ralph Hedley (1848–1913), *The Ballad Seller, the Black Gate*, 1884, 94.8 x 67.4 cm, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle

Slum clearance reshapes the backdrop for **Ralph Hedley's** painting of 1884, **The Ballad Seller, the Black Gate**, held at the **Laing Art Gallery** in Newcastle. Hedley was born in Yorkshire but grew up in Newcastle, training as an apprentice wood carver before studying at the Government School of Art and Design. He built a successful wood-carving business, produced lithographs for the local press, and exhibited over fifty paintings at the **Royal Academy**. His pictures are now valued as precise social documents of **Tyneside** life. The **Black Gate** was originally the entrance to Newcastle's medieval castle. By 1880 it had fallen into disrepair, with a shanty settlement built against its walls. The **Newcastle Society of Antiquaries** cleared the site and repaired the building, and Hedley sets his scene directly against that hoarding. A poor woman sells printed song-sheets, her baby in her arms, patient and resigned as she deals with a grumpy man in old-fashioned dress. The boy in a blue smock carrying a basket is a delivery lad — children could leave school at ten under the **Education Act of 1870**. Hedley posed such figures in his studio, using ordinary local people rather than professional models, among them a boy named John Irwin, brother to one of Hedley's

own apprentices.

Notes

Ralph Hedley (1848–1913), *The Ballad Seller, the Black Gate*, 1884, 94.8 x 67.4 cm, Laing Art Gallery

Slum Clearance

Ralph Hedley was known for his scenes of everyday life and here he has painted *The Ballad Seller, the Black Gate*, which is in Newcastle. He has accurately recorded a poor woman earning a living selling song-sheets for ballads. The boy in a blue smock is a delivery lad. Children could leave school at 10 and start work and there was no compulsory education.

Hedley grew up in Newcastle and was apprentice to a wood carver while studying at the Government School of Art and Design. He set up a successful wood carving business, produced lithographs for the local press and worked as an artist. He would have posed the figures in his studio, rather than sketched them on the spot and he tended to employ ordinary local people rather than professional models.

This is the Black Gate which was originally the entrance to Newcastle's castle. It had fallen into disrepair and in 1880 the slums around it were cleared and the building repaired. The ballad seller has set up her shop against the building site. With her baby in her arms, she is resigned and patient as she serves a grumpy man in old-fashioned clothes.

Notes

Bio:Hedley

Ralph Hedley (1848-1913) was born in Yorkshire but his family moved to Newcastle when he was two. He became an apprentice wood carver and studied art in his own time at the Government School and attended evening classes under William Bell Scott. He set up a successful wood carving business, produced lithographs for the local press and worked as an artist. He had more than 50 paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy. Today they are collected as a record of everyday life in Tyneside. The Laing Art Gallery (Newcastle) holds one of the largest bodies of Hedley's work, including 41 oil paintings and three watercolours, and a major exhibition devoted to Hedley in 1990.

"Hedley took great care to accurately record details of North-East trades in his paintings. In this view, the detail of the canvas backing for the song-

sheets, which could be rolled up and taken away, would have been true to life. Hedley would also have seen poor women street sellers having to take their children with them, like the baby in the ballad-seller's arms in this picture. The boy in a blue smock and carrying a basket seems to be a delivery lad. Children often started work early – compulsory education was only introduced in 1870, and children could leave school at 10. This was raised to 11 in 1893. There were so many children of poorer families working in the streets that a Newcastle Street Vendors' Association was set up in 1882, and it held a charity 'breakfast' attended by 30 girls and over 200 boys.

At this stage in Hedley's career, he would have posed the figures in his studio, rather than sketched them on the spot. Sketching in the street was difficult, and a model was more convenient to use for getting the right pose and for painting details. However, Hedley tended to employ ordinary local people rather than professional models. In fact, the young boy in a brown jacket was a lad called John Irwin, who was the brother of one of the apprentices in the Hedley family woodcarving business in Newcastle. This boy also modelled for Hedley's picture of 'Last in the Market', which is on show in the 'Northern Spirit' display on the ground floor at the Laing Art Gallery." [1]

"The Black Gate was originally the entrance to Newcastle's castle, and is one of the city's most important historic buildings. In 1880 it was in poor repair and a small shanty town had been built against its walls. Newcastle Society of Antiquaries cleared the site and repaired the building. The ballad seller has set up her shop against the hoarding round the Antiquaries' building work. With her baby in her arms, she is resigned and patient as she serves a grumpy man in old-fashioned clothes." [2]

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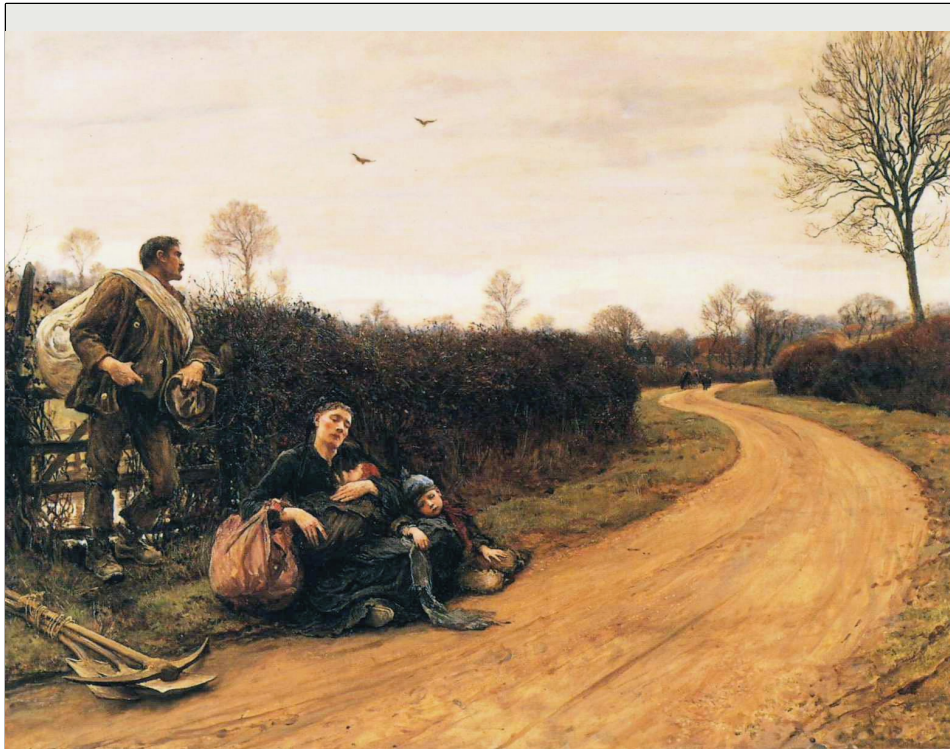
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Hubert von Herkomer (1849–1914)
Hard Times
1885
85 × 110.4 cm
Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester

Hubert von Herkomer (1849–1914), *Hard Times*, 1885, 85 × 110.4 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester

Hard Times by Hubert von Herkomer is another striking image of the deserving poor. Beneath a grey winter sky, an itinerant family rests at the roadside. The man stands against a gate, his tools — two shovels and a pick — laid on the verge beside him. He is physically strong, his gaze fixed down the road ahead, his expression determined rather than defeated. Behind him, his wife sits exhausted on the grass, breastfeeding their baby, while their young boy leans tiredly against her knee. The scene insists on the family's dignity and their willingness to work. Herkomer's own biography runs directly through this image. Born in Bavaria, he emigrated with his impoverished family first to America and then to Southampton, England, where he received almost no formal schooling. His father, a wood carver, taught him to draw. He trained at the **Southampton School of Art**, then in **Munich**, and finally at the **South Kensington School**, before exhibiting at the **Royal Academy** at just twenty years old. By his mid-twenties he commanded five hundred guineas for a single painting. He later became a pioneering film-maker, though none of his films survive. He was knighted in **1907**.

Notes

This is *Hard Times* by Hubert von Herkomer. Another example of the deserving poor. The man is travelling the country with his family to find work. He is strong with a determined expression and carries the tools of his trade with him.

Hubert von Herkomer was born in Germany but his family was very poor and emigrated to America when he was two and when he was eight they returned to Europe and settled in Southampton, England. He only went to school for a few months then fell ill and never returned. He was taught art by his father, a wood carver and went to the Southampton School of Art.

He attended art school in Munich and then the South Kensington School before exhibiting at the Royal Academy when he was just twenty and sold his first picture for two guineas. By the time he was 24 he had sold a painting for 500 guineas and a few years later was made an Associate Academician. He is mainly remembered for this painting but he was known at the time for his portraits and landscapes. He became a pioneering film-maker but none of his films survive. In 1907, he received an honorary degree from Oxford and was knighted.

Notes

"Under a grey sky, an itinerant family rests at the side of a dirt road. They are a man, a woman, a baby, and a boy of about five years. The man stands to the left, leaning against a gate with his thumb hooked into his waistcoat pocket. He has a strong physique and a determined expression, and is dressed in brown work clothes and well-worn boots. He has a bundle on his back and a hat in his hand. His gaze follows the road which leads off to the right towards buildings in the distance. Two figures and a horse in the distance are coming down the road towards the man and his family. The woman sits exhausted on the grass verge, breastfeeding the baby. She too has been carrying a bundle of belongings. Her older child leans tiredly on her knee. The man's work tools – two shovels and a pick – are also on the verge. It is winter, there are no leaves on the trees and the hedges are brown. Two birds fly in the sky. Surface water can be seen in the field behind the gate on which the man leans." [1]

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Notes

This is Newgate prison and we are looking at what was known as 'the cage' where prisoners could meet visitors after sentencing. There are two lots of bars to the prison and the visitors cannot touch each other and a guard patrols between them.

There are two families. One the left is at is a bank clerk who has just been sentenced to five years penal servitude for embezzlement. Holl shows him as a weak man from a genteel background, while the wife is working class. He has a look of wide-eyed innocence but the look of his wife suggest she may have heard it all before. The grand lady on the right in furs and jewels may be the young bank clerk's mother. It may be that the young bank clerk was cut-off by his rich family for marrying beneath him and so he may have embezzled the money in order to raise his wife to a level acceptable to his family. We do not know if his mother will now relent and make amends by looking after her grandchildren and daughter-in-law.

The second prisoner looks desperate but his wife seems resigned to his fate. He is like a caged animal who lunges against the bars that prevent him from attacking the woman who has turned him in. She and the baby are safely protected from his alcoholic abuse as long as he is in prison.

Wood's engravings of Holl's work were admired by Vincent van Gogh as he painted the poor as real people. Holl was extremely popular until the end of the 1870s when the Art for Art's Sake movement made it difficult to sell harrowing scenes of poverty and death. Many artists including Holl took up portrait painting but he died in 1888 when he was only 43 and was forgotten within a few years.

Notes

Frank Holl's father and grandfather were Academicians and the family was committed to using art to highlight the problems of the poor.

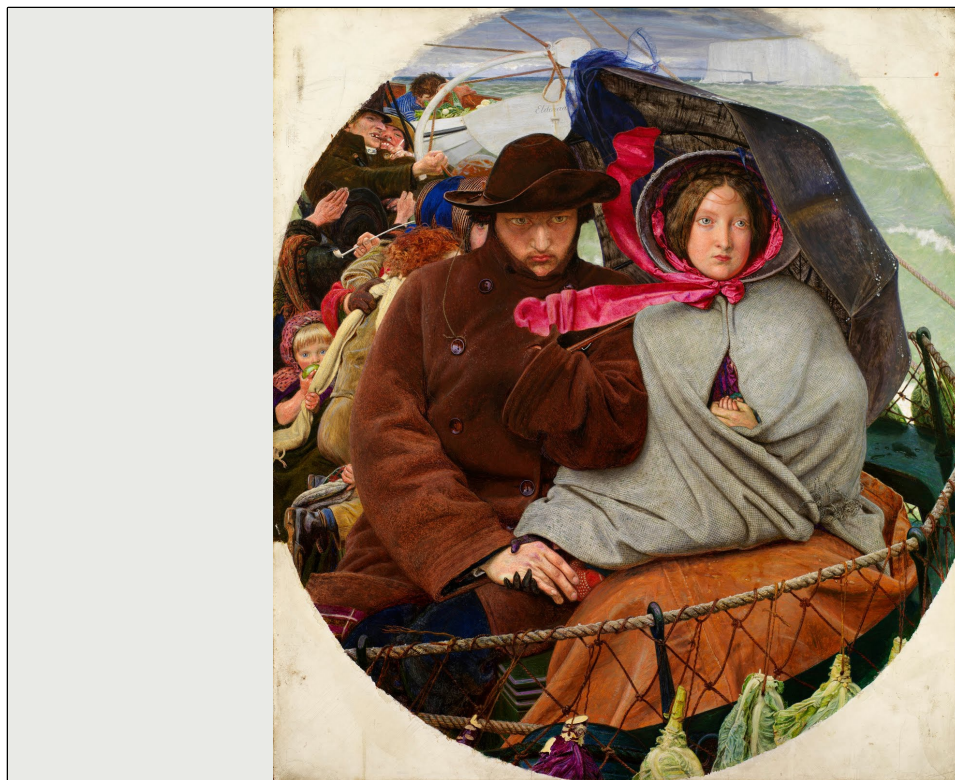
Holl worked in Newgate prison and got to know the Governor. In 1869 a new, weekly illustrated newspaper was launched called The Graphic. It used leading artists like Frank Holl, Luke Fildes (pronounced to rhyme with 'childs'), Hubert von Herkomer and John Millais and writers such as George Elliot, Thomas Hardy and Anthony Trollope. It explored social subjects, such as the plight of the poor and in 1878 commissioned Frank Holl to illustrate Newgate Prison.

The man on the left is a bank clerk who has just been sentenced to five years penal servitude for embezzlement. Holl characterises him as a weak man from a genteel background, while the wife is working class. He has a look of wide-eyed innocence but the look of his wife suggest she may have heard it all before. The grand lady on the right in furs and jewels may be the young bank clerk's mother. It may be that the young bank clerk was cut-off by his rich family for marrying beneath him and so he may have embezzled the money in order to raise his wife to a level acceptable to his family. We do not know if his mother will now relent and make amends by looking after her grandchildren and daughter-in-law.

The second prisoner looks desperate but his wife seems resigned to his fate. He is like a caged animal who lunges against the bars that prevent him from attacking the woman who has turned him in. She and the baby are safely protected from his alcoholic abuse as long as he is in prison.

The painting received mixed reviews when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1878 but one critic summed up what we see before us, writing: '...The characters are so real in this fine work that one feels there is a story to be told of ruined ambitions, of broken home ties, of devotion scorned and trampled underfoot....'

It became difficult for those Academicians who specialised in painting pictures of dead babies. Holl abandoned this type of painting in the 1880s and took up portrait painting. He died when he was only 43 and was forgotten within a few years. Holl did not engage in histrionic scenes but in restraint and he often expressed emotion by the look on a woman's face.



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

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

This painting emerges from one of the most turbulent periods of Victorian emigration, when **350,000 people** left Britain in **1852** alone, drawn by gold rushes in California and Australia. **Ford Madox Brown's** **The Last of England**, begun in **1852**, depicts a middle-class couple at the ship's rail, the man modelled on Brown himself, the woman on his wife Emma, whom he married in 1853 after three years together. Their daughter **Catherine**, born 1850, provided the model for the fair-haired child, while their infant son Oliver lent his hand to the baby half-hidden beneath the cloak. The immediate inspiration was the sculptor **Thomas Woolner**, close friend to Brown and the Pre-Raphaelite circle, who emigrated to Australia that year through lack of commissions, returning within twelve months to eventual Royal Academy election. Brown worked outdoors in bitter cold to achieve the skin's precise blue-grey pallor, and noted in his diary that the bonnet ribbons alone took four weeks. His biographer credits him as the first painter in England to render light exactly as it appeared. The **tondo format**, a circular panel, echoes the porthole framing the receding white cliffs. There are two oil versions: one in **Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery**, one in the **Fitzwilliam**,

Cambridge.

Notes

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 and Californian (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.

It was voted Britain's eight favourite painting in a BBC poll.

Notes

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)

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.



Unknown
*Post-mortem family photograph
(child mortality)*
Photography

Unknown, Post-mortem family photograph (child mortality)

Between one quarter and one half of all children died before the age of five — in the slums, as many as four in five. Yet the headline figure that the **average lifespan in 1850** was around forty is deeply misleading. Strip out infant mortality and, if a child survived to five, their life expectancy rose to roughly seventy-five — comparable to today. Between **1850 and 1870**, analysis of census data by **Paul Clayton and Judith Rowbotham** reveals a genuine golden age: life expectancy at five was as good or better than our own, and degenerative disease occurred at roughly ten per cent of modern rates. Diet and physical activity explain this. Victorian workers consumed micro- and phytonutrients at ten times the levels considered normal today. After **1875**, that changed. Cheap imports — corned beef, condensed milk, canned fruit, white bread — degraded the national diet, and by **1900**, five in ten men volunteering for the **Boer War** were rejected as undernourished. Large families were universal because contraception was absent; women who married in **1860** bore an average of six children. As prosperity grew, that fell to three by **1910**, reflecting a cultural shift toward the economically dependent, emotionally central idea of the modern **sacred child**.

Notes

Child Mortality Across All Classes

Let's look more closely at child mortality. One quarter to one half of all children died before the age of five, some say as many as four out of five in the slums. Partly because of this and also a lack of contraception the average family was large. For poor parents, a large family increased the family income as children could be sent out to work when they were 4 or 5. For more wealthy families having many children was the expected norm.

Things were changing as the average family got wealthier. Women who married in 1860 bore an average of six children but their grandchildren who married in 1910 had an average of three children. One theory for this sudden change was in an increasingly wealthy society there was a shift from a child being seen as a useful wage earner to the economically-dependent 'sacred' child. Wealthier families went hand-in-hand with the creation of the modern idea of childhood.

There is an important point to make about lifespan. You will read that the average lifespan in 1850 was about 40 but this figure was massively skewed by the death of under fives. If a child lived to the age of five then their average lifespan was similar to today, at about 75 for men. 10% of people born in 1850 lived to over 80.

In fact, Between 1850 and 1870 an analysis of census data shows there was a 'golden age' in England when, if you reached the age of five, your lifespan was longer than it is today. This was because of diet and exercise. Modern degenerative diseases such as heart attacks, diabetes and lung cancer were rare. But after 1875 the diet changed, junk food arrived—salted ('corned') beef from Argentina, sugar-laden condensed milk, canned fruit in syrup and white bread. By 1900 half the young men who volunteered for the Boer War were rejected as undernourished and their teeth were so poor they could not eat vegetables, fruit and nuts.

[CLICK] Although many children died young they loved their children as much as we do today and it was common for families to take a photograph of their dear departed child. In this picture, the youngest is dead. This may seem morbid to us but it helped them lessen the loss of much loved children.

Victorians drew consolation from meeting again in heaven. Without contraception most women were more or less permanently pregnant. This meant large families and everyone in a state of mourning for the children of

family, friends and relatives.

Victorian life was suffused with death. Epidemics such as diphtheria, typhus and cholera scarred the country, and from 1861 the bereaved Queen made mourning fashionable and there was a complex dress code and mourning etiquette.

Notes

Life span. 'The average life span in 1840, in the Whitechapel district of London, was 45 years for the upper class and 27 years for tradesman. Labourers and servants lived only 22 years on average' (H. Mitchell, *Victorian Britain: A Study*. London: Routledge; 1988). However, once infant mortality is stripped out, life expectancy at age five was 75 for men and 73 for women. The lower figure for women reflecting the risks associated with childbirth.

Child mortality. One in six children, rich and poor died before they were one and fully one third of all children died before they were five. In the slums the average age of death was 13. However, if a child reached the age of 5 life expectancy was similar to today or arguably better as degenerative diseases were extremely rare.

Smoking was widespread but intermittent until 1883 when industrial cigarette production was introduced. So, in 1869 the Physician to Charing Cross Hospital describes lung cancer as '... one of the rarer forms of a rare disease. You may probably pass the rest of your students life without seeing another example of it.' Cancers were relatively rare and had none of the stigma associated with it today. Also, cancers were rare, and seemed to develop more slowly, perhaps because of diet.

Degenerative diseases arise from cells deteriorating over time and include Alzheimers, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, coronary heart diseases, COPD (Chronic Pulmonary Obstructive Disease) and cancers.

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Paul Clayton, Judith Rowbotham. 'How the Mid-Victorians Worked, Ate and Died', 20 March, 2009, [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2672390/>]. The abstract says, "Analysis of the mid-Victorian period in the U.K. reveals that life expectancy at age 5 was as good or better than exists today, and the incidence of degenerative disease was 10% of ours. Their levels of physical activity and hence calorific intakes were approximately twice ours. They had relatively little access to alcohol and tobacco; and due to their correspondingly high

intake of fruits, whole grains, oily fish and vegetables, they consumed levels of micro- and phytonutrients at approximately ten times the levels considered normal today."

Also from the article, a Victorian navy could shift 20 tonnes of earth a day from below their feet to above their head requiring enormous physical strength and stamina. However, between 1880 and 1900 male health nationally had deteriorated to such an extent that in 1900, five out of 10 young men volunteering for the second Boer War had to be rejected because they were so undernourished. They were not starved, but had been consuming the wrong foods.

BBC News 5 June 2016, 'Taken from life: The unsettling art of death photography'.



Luke Fildes (1843-1927)
The Doctor
1891
Tate Britain, London

Luke Fildes (1843-1927), *The Doctor*, 1891, Tate Britain, London

Luke Fildes painted **The Doctor** in **1891** after a deeply personal loss: his infant son Philip died in 1877, and the quiet dedication of their physician, **Dr Gustavus Murray**, left a lasting mark on him. When **Sir Henry Tate** commissioned a painting the following decade, Fildes returned to that memory. The composition shows a rural doctor seated in vigil beside a sick child, and the pose deliberately echoes **Michelangelo's** sculpted Lorenzo de' Medici, nicknamed **Il Pensieroso**, The Thoughtful One. The visual parallel places the doctor in a thinking, ruling class, while the labouring parents depend on him for physical salvation much as they depend on their priest for spiritual salvation. Feminist readings developed at the **Tate** reinforce this: the male professional commands the scene, the mother hides her face, the father looks to the doctor for any sign of hope. Fildes worked each morning from dawn to catch the exact light entering the studio cottage he had constructed. That shaft of daylight falling across the child signals imminent recovery. The engraving sold over a million copies in America alone, and critic **Oscar Wilde's** warning that sentimentality offers the luxury of emotion without its cost hangs over the painting's enormous popularity, raising questions about what social comfort such images were quietly endorsing.

Notes

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 18th 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 19th 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.

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William Powell Frith (1819-1909), *The Derby Day*, 1856-8, 140.5 × 264 cm, Tate Britain

William Powell Frith (1819-1909), *The Derby Day*, 1856-8, 140.5 × 264 cm, Tate Britain

A cross-section of Victorian society crowds **William Frith's** **The Derby Day**, painted in **1858** and so immediately celebrated at the **Royal Academy** that a guard rail had to be erected — only the second time the Academy took such a measure, the first being for **David Wilkie's** **The Chelsea Pensioners** in **1822**. Commissioned by the chemist and amateur artist **Jacob Bell** for £1,500, the canvas organises its social panorama with meticulous precision: on the left, city gentlemen fall prey to a thimble-rigger's fraud while a young countryman strains to join in; at the centre, an acrobat's son ignores his father's act, transfixed by a lavish picnic; at the far right, a well-dressed man's mistress reclines in a carriage, her position echoed across the composition by **Annie Gilbert**, one of the celebrated **Pretty Horsebreakers** who rode daily through Rotten Row. Frith hired models, including a jockey and an acrobat, and paid a photographer to shoot crowds from a cab roof. One art historian identifies nearly a hundred distinct social types, distinguished by clothing and physiognomy alone. **John Ruskin**, **Whistler**, and **Oscar Wilde** attacked Frith for artistic philistinism, yet his command of narrative detail made his work ideally suited for engraving and turned him into one of the most commercially

successful painters of the Victorian era.

Notes

A cross-section of Victorian Society is laid out before us. This is William Frith's *The Derby Day*. It was so popular a guard rail had to be erected to prevent the public from damaging it.

On the left is the tent of the Reform Club outside of which rich, city gentlemen surround the table of a 'thimble-rigger' who is busy cheating them. Further left, a young country man in smock is being held back by his wife to prevent him from joining in, as an accomplice tempts him to play by showing him the note he was just won. In the centre, an acrobat is ready to perform with his son, but the attention of the thin young boy has been distracted by a lavish picnic banquet that is being laid out. Spectators throng behind, drinking champagne in their carriages, with the racecourse grandstand visible in the background. At the far right, a well-dressed man slouches back against his carriage in which his young mistress sits.

Echoing her position on the other side of the painting is a well-known horse woman called Annie Gilbert, in brown riding clothes. She was one of many that could be seen each day riding in Rotten Row, Hyde Park. Their skilful horsemanship led to them being dubbed 'the pretty horsebreakers'. Many, such as Catherine 'Skittles' Walters, were courtesans but it appears Miss Gilbert was not. To the right, a thief can be seen stealing a gold watch from a man with his hands in his pockets. Also visible are a group of musicians, and a group of beggars, and street vendors selling their wares. One art historian has identified almost one hundred distinct social types distinguished by Frith by their clothing and physiognomy.

The painting was commissioned by Jacob Bell, a chemist and amateur artist, to paint a large, five to six-foot canvas for £1,500. Later, Frith painted a smaller version which is in the Manchester Art Gallery. Frith began by hiring models for all the major figures, including a jockey and an acrobat, and paid a photographer to take 'as many queer groups of figures as he could' from the roof of a cab. Also, many of the female models, such as Annie Gilbert were introduced to Frith by Jacob Bell.

Notes

The painting was first exhibited at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1858, where it became so popular that a rail was needed protect it from the

thronging crowds (see *The Illustrated London News*). This was only the second time that a rail was installed at the Royal Academy exhibition: the first was in 1822 for David Wilkie's *The Chelsea Pensioners reading the Waterloo Dispatch*.

Too popular? This painting was controversial only because it was so popular. He was criticised for his artistic philistinism by John Ruskin, Oscar Wilde, and James McNeill Whistler. Frith was an astute businessman and knew "pictures of contemporary life and manners have a better chance of immortality than ninety-nine out of any hundred of the ideal and so-called poetical pictures".

One of the best-known Victorian courtesans who rode each day down Rotten Row, Hyde Park, was Catherine 'Skittles' Walters (1839-1920), a fashion trendsetter and horsewoman who was associated with intellectuals, political leaders, aristocrats and a member of the Royal Family. She was renowned for her horse control and for wearing nothing under her tight-fitting riding habit that was tailored in Savile Row. Such women were known as 'The Pretty Horsebreakers'.

Fifteen 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.

Bio:Frith

William Powell Frith (1819-1909) was 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). He was a 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. He was made an ARA in 1845 and an RA in 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. For *The Railway Station* (1862) Frith was paid an astonishing £5,250.

He married twice and had 12 children by his first wife and seven more with his mistress, who was formerly his ward, and who lived only a mile down the road. He married his mistress Mary Alford in 1880 when his wife died. When he died, he had become an anachronism but he recognised as a unique 'historian of his own age' and he had become an institution who was sadly missed.

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 including 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.

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William Powell Frith (1819–1909), *Ramsgate Sands (Life at the Seaside)*, 1852–1854, Royal Collection

William Powell Frith (1819–1909), *Ramsgate Sands (Life at the Seaside)*, 1852–1854, Royal Collection

William Powell Frith painted **Ramsgate Sands** in **1854** following a family holiday he took to the resort in 1851. It marks a turning point: before this work, Frith drew exclusively on history and literature for his subjects. Here, for the first time, the contemporary Victorian crowd became the subject itself — a revolutionary proposition that predated the Impressionists' celebrated interest in modern life by twenty years. Frith painted from real people, preferring friends and family to professional models, whom he found unreliable. He included himself, peeping over the shoulder of the figure at the far right, while the girl paddling in the centre, staring directly outward, is thought to be his daughter. Fellow artists were dismissive, one condemning it as a piece of vulgar Cockney business, but the public disagreed entirely. At the **Royal Academy**, a guard rail had to be installed to hold back the crowds. **Messrs Lloyd** purchased it directly from Frith and sold it that same year to **Queen Victoria** for one thousand pounds. Frith retained reproduction rights and earned considerably more. The beach scene rewards close reading: seven women are reading books, two figures with telescopes suggest voyeurism, and a man entertains young women with white mice. Class

distinctions are visible but never coarse.

Notes

This is Frith's Ramsgate Sands. I love this painting as all Victorian society is here and all the classes are represented. Even Queen Victoria stayed here in Albion House (built 1789), the highest house in the middle. She was 16 and nearly died of typhoid and Sir John Conroy forced a pen into her hand to try to make her sign authority to him, but she resisted.

The painting 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.

Two touches I like. On the left the man and the young boy looking through telescopes in the same direction. The man might be looking at the women leaving the bathing machines on the right from the look on his wife's face. The boy who is looking slightly further out to sea is probably looking at ships.

In the centre a man is entertaining young woman by getting white mice to play in front of them. No jumping on chairs in fright in the Victorian age.

Later the railways enabled the London poor to get to the seaside at the weekend but it was too expensive in 1852. The poorer people in this painting would have been locals or those tradespeople and entertainers who travelled there for the season.

Notes

"In 1844 extensions were obtained to Canterbury, Ramsgate, and Margate, the Folkstone branch and harbour" Bradshaws 1857 Railway Manual, (Google Books)

From The Times, Tuesday, Jul 16, 1850, "To Ramsgate and Margate direct, in three hours, every day except Sunday at half-past 12 o'clock from the London Terminus of the South-Eastern Railway. Fares - 1st. class, 10s; 2d class, 7s; children under 12 years, 4s. Compartments reserved for families." In 1852 the 3rd class fare from London to Margate was 8s 6d., too expensive for the poor.

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 an 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

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.

References

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramsgate_Sands

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/405068/ramsgate-sands-life-at-the-seaside>



William Powell Frith (1819–1909),
Ramsgate Sands (Life at the Seaside),
detail,
1852–1854,
Royal Collection

Victorian England's lower classes made up **97 per cent of the population**, yet they were almost entirely absent from the painted record. As we have seen, they were far from a single undifferentiated mass. Their social structure ran in distinct layers, from those who entered the **workhouse** out of absolute necessity, and the so-called **crawlers** who occupied the very bottom of street life, upward through the skilled labour of beggars and **street traders**, and continuing to rise through tenant farmers and shopkeepers. Each tier carried its own economies, customs, and dignity. The painters who did engage with this world — and they were few — made a conscious choice to look where polite culture looked away. That act of looking, of committing working and destitute lives to canvas, is itself a historical statement. It tells us not only what these people looked like, but that someone thought they were worth seeing. Bringing these overlooked figures back into the centre of art-historical discussion is precisely what this lecture series sets out to do, and I hope today's session has made the case that their stories belong in any serious account of **Victorian visual culture**.

Notes

My aim has been to introduce to the social classes of Victorian England, particularly the lower classes who were rarely painted but who made up 97% of the population.

They are often seen as one big group but as we have seen they had a layered structure with attendees of the workhouse and 'crawlers' at the bottom, then the skilful occupation of beggar, street traders and so on up to tenant farmers and shop keepers.

Thank you.



23-08 SOCIAL CLASS IN VICTORIAN PAINTING

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

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Victorian painting tells us far more about social class than the Academy preferred to admit. Today we traced how artists from Hogarth and Morland through to Fildes, Herkomer, and Watts chose to record the lives of the ninety-seven per cent — the destitute, the labouring, the fallen, the emigrant, and the overlooked child. Each canvas is also a political act, insisting that working and impoverished lives deserved to be seen, and that visual culture cannot be understood apart from the society that produced it.



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