The Axis of Change:
The Great Exhibition of 1851

Kailyn Gwin
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On May 1, 1851, Queen Victoria remarked, “God bless my dearest country, which has shown itself so great today! One felt so grateful to the great God, who seemed to pervade and to bless all.”\(^1\) This statement came at the end of the first day of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Many historians have regarded this event as the first world’s fair. This monumental occasion marked the start of a new quarter in the nineteenth century. It was the beginning of the visible change from the old world of British life to the new powerhouse it was to become. From May first to October fifteenth, the Great Exhibition saw six million visitors come through its doors with over 100,000 exhibits on display.\(^2\) This renowned event was no small task by the imagination. The Exhibition changed life in London, the British Empire, and the known world. It served as the catalyst for a change in all parts of British society: politically, economically, and socially.

The height of the exhibitionist movement came during the industrialization of the world. The term, exhibition, came from the Middle Ages. The definition of exhibition during the time period stood for the idea of trade fairs and regional markets. The fairs would mobilize the citizens and the economy to help show the goods produced in the region. These fairs would primarily handle business but also would allow pleasure and enjoyment for the people.\(^3\)

The Great Exhibition in London was not the first exhibition held in Britain. It was not even close. Since 1838 many of the industrial cities in Britain had held some type of exhibition. According to Toshio Kusamitsu, a well respected scholar, he stated, “Their [the exhibitions] popularity was really overwhelming.”\(^4\) The people loved attending the fairs because it broke the

\(^1\) Christopher Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2000), 214.


\(^3\) Jeffery A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 12.

monotony of daily life for them. It gave people something to look forward to and allowed something other than the weather to dominate daily conversations. This popularity for the fairs gained the interest of the Society of the Arts, a group of people in London who searched for a way to amass money in order to promote the arts in British Society.\footnote{Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 9.}

The founding of the Royal Society of the Arts was in 1753. The main purpose of the society was to encourage “the arts, manufactures, and commerce.”\footnote{Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 14.} In 1844, Prince Consort Albert accepted the presidency of the society and constantly looked for ways to elevate their ideas to the British people. He wanted his adopted country to have better manufactured products than the rest of the world. He also longed for Britain to excel in the arts as well. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was not London’s first attempt at an exhibition. The society had tried and failed in some aspects for several years. They could not seem to find a way for it to work. Transportation on the railroads was still poor and the manufacturers did not seem willing to show off their products. It was not until 1847 in which an exhibition in London finally achieved some level of success. The 1849 Exhibition, however, finally brought the manufacturers to the realization an exhibition was not only necessary but could be of use to them.\footnote{Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 15-22.} Once the manufacturers agreed to the idea of an exhibition the last step was to gain royal approval for such an event. Albert willingly agreed to have the event in London and he wanted to have a bigger exhibition than the previous ones. He had waited for the right moment to act. Upon his approval of the festival, he made a comment which altered the purpose of the fair. Prince Consort Albert stated this exhibition “must embrace foreign productions” in addition to British products.\footnote{Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 23.} With
this simple statement, Britain was ready to discuss creating an event in which the world could participate.

The city of London was in a state of transition in the years up to 1851. In many ways it resembled more of the old world than the new one to come. The idea of an exhibition would help to usher in this new change which was going to take place. The credit for the idea and the foundation for the Exhibition of 1851 belong to two men: Henry Cole and Prince Consort Albert. Both of these men knew what use an exhibition could be in both the manufacturing world and also in bringing prestige to Britain and London in particular. These two men worked tirelessly in the early stages of the process either to ensure its success or bear the brunt of its failure.

Upon reaching a decision to have an exhibition, there were many questions which needed addressing in order to figure out how to make this giant affair come to life. The first question was what it should showcase. The answer came in one of the first design meetings before Henry Cole went to the manufactures to see if they liked the idea. The group decided the Exhibition would show “raw materials, machinery, and mechanical inventions, manufactures, sculptures, and plastic art generally.” No one seemed to mind these parameters and most liked them because it showcased not only the importance of manufacturing but also the art involved in the process.

Upon the settlement of what they should showcase, the next question arose of where to get the money to fund a Great Exhibition. Everyone knew this endeavor would cost a great deal of money. Early estimates put the cost around 150,000 pounds and this would cover only the

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11 “The Great Exhibition of 1851,” *The Times*, Thursday December 6, 1849; 5 e.
basic necessities associated with the project. The decision ultimately reached was the people of London should not incur another tax but instead they would retrieve loans from wealthy patrons. The repayment on these loans would come at the end of the Exhibition.\textsuperscript{12} The general public, however, did not want to feel like the Exhibition belonged exclusively to the wealthy. If the rich provided all the money then there was an idea that the event would only belong to them. This thought went contrary to the purpose of an exhibition which was to educate the working class.\textsuperscript{13} Due to pressure from all sides the men broke from their decision and allowed public fundraising from the lower classes in order to help fund the project along with loans from the wealthy. They allowed this so all people would feel like the Great Exhibition belonged to them.

After answering these two important questions, many numerous other hurdles stood in the way to making this experience a revolutionary one. The next step was getting Parliament’s approval, which was easy. Then a Royal Commission was founded in January 1850 in order to answer the tougher questions. The commission consisted of twenty-four men. This group became responsible for deciding the general conduct of the Crystal Palace and deciding the thorniest issue facing the Exhibition: its location.\textsuperscript{14} One important name lay off the list for the commission, Henry Cole. Cole had played his part in laying the foundation and making sure the manufacturers would come. He simply had fulfilled his role and was no longer needed. Instead two men took up his position and became the heads of organization: Charles Wentworth Dilke and Lyon Playfair.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 24-26.

\textsuperscript{13} Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 10-13.

\textsuperscript{14} Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 27-29.

\textsuperscript{15} Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 40.
The location for the Great Exhibition was the hardest decision facing the new commission. Rather quickly with the introduction of foreign products, it was clear that a large expansive area would be needed to house the event. As early as 1849 Prince Albert mentioned several possible locations including the south side of Hyde Park. This location faced a great amount of opposition and they quickly dismissed the idea. Hyde Park received its name from “the manor of Hyde.” Under Charles I, the park opened to the public. However, the Commonwealth sold the park to private investors who closed it off. Now only the wealthy had access to the park. In 1851, normally the rich would go to the park because it was close to their homes and away from any unsavory characters. Certainly a giant event could not occur so close to homes of the rich. There were several other options where the Great Exhibition could have taken place. Some suggested Battersea Fields, or Victoria Park. The Prince even suggested the royal family’s Somerset-house as a location. In the end, none of the locations panned out and Hyde Park was the only logical choice left. It certainly was not the popular one.

From the start of the project, there was major opposition to the idea of an exhibition being of any use to the citizens of London. The newspapers were the most vicious in their attacks against this idea. Almost every newspaper came out against building any structures in Hyde Park because most saw it as ruining a perfect park where people could go to relax. No one was happy with the decision to place it in the park but in the end it was the best decision the commission ever made.

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16 “The Great Exhibition of 1851,” The Times, Thursday, December 6, 1849; 5 e.


The last piece to the puzzle which needed a decision was what the building would look like that would house this occasion. The Commission asked architects to send in their ideas as part of a competition. However, Prince Albert had already decided on the design of the building before the competition even had a shot. A man named Joseph Paxton had submitted an idea which the Prince loved; a glass building. This building would house everything associated with the fair and Albert thought this idea was fantastic. Sir Paxton was the Duke of Devonshire’s head gardener and saw the potential this type of structure could have on the Exhibition.\(^{19}\) There were many arguments with such a giant building. One of the most popular was they would have to cut down the beautiful trees in Hyde Park to make room for such a monstrosity. Paxton solved this problem by incorporating the trees into the design itself. Therefore, within the building would rest these giant trees.\(^{20}\) The commission passed his idea of a palace made out of glass. The glass house became the famous “Crystal Palace.” This term came from *Punch*, a popular newspaper in Britain, in hopes of getting the building defeated by the commission.\(^{21}\) The name stuck because as the palace started to take shape the term crystal became an understatement.

Finally, with most of the plans laid out by the commission there was only one more important step which had to be reached before construction could begin, getting the people of Britain, especially London, to agree to the plan. Jeffrey Auerbach, a well respected historian on the Great Exhibition, stated, “There was nothing preordained about the popularity of the exhibition.”\(^{22}\) It was a constant battle to make sure this event and not the competition won. The competition, in this case, was the newspapers and those prominent English citizens which stated

\(^{19}\) Picard, *Victorian London*, 215.


\(^{22}\) Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, 54.
the exhibition would bring destruction upon the people of London. *The Times* was one of the strongest opponents to the whole movement while it was in the planning stages.\(^23\) Two events changed the mood of the general population into a more positive light. The first was a spread by Sir Paxton to show the people exactly what his envisioned building looked like. The architectural wonder amazed the people and they could not wait to see if it could actually occur.\(^24\) The other factor changing the people’s mind was the Prince Consort. Albert wanted to see this exhibition succeed like no other fair ever had before and used his political sense to make sure they at least had the shot to try. In a speech, Albert made a statement which he believed no one “will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great era to which, indeed, all history points.”\(^25\) The Prince used his great political rhetoric in order to convince the people to believe in the idea that this whole plan could work. Albert’s seemingly endless drive, Sir Paxton’s building, and the nation’s curiosity all led to the building of the exhibition between 1850 and the spring 1851.\(^26\)

After all the arguments, it was time to put the Great Exhibition to the test. It was opening day. On May first, there was a grand parade to Hyde Park with every major character in Victorian England in attendance, including the Royal family. Albert gave a great speech and introduced the “Great Exhibition of the Works and Industry of All Nations.”\(^27\) Everyone who was anyone was in attendance including the Duke of Wellington and Lord Anglesey who could

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\(^23\) Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, 50.

\(^24\) Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, 52.


barely walk. The first day marked what the Crystal Palace would become: a giant success. No one could find fault with it on opening day, including *Punch*, who notoriously slammed the idea of the Exhibition, every chance it had. Even their reporter by the end of the day had become enraptured by the events and the idea which had been produced. The *Times*, after this point, began to believe in the Exhibition as well. The May second edition of the *Times* spent most of the paper regarding the Great Exhibition. A one page layout provided for the people exactly what was in the palace so they could figure out before they arrived what they would want to see. The western half of the building was to house only the achievements of Britain and her colonies while the eastern half of the building housed the foreign countries exhibits, everywhere from the United States to Russia. Over 14,000 exhibitors and 100,000 exhibits came from all around the world to show off their nation’s achievements during the height of the Industrial Revolution, half of which came from either Britain or her colonies.

Walking into the Great Exhibition was like entering another world unlike anything previous. People could see things from countries such as India, Greece, Spain, Turkey, the United States, and Russia. These were places which most people would never go to but they could get a feel for what those people deemed important. The Exhibition served as “a true test of the point of development at which the whole of mankind has arrived in this great

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30 “The Great Exhibition,” *The Times*, Friday, May 2, 1851; 6 a-f.


33 *The Crystal Palace Exhibition*, xxv.
task [industrialization], and a new starting point from which all nations would be able to direct
t heir further exertions.”

Over the next five months millions of people walked through the halls of the Great Exhibition. Almost daily, the Times would devote an article as to what happened and how many visitors had arrived. There were people who loved it and people who hated it but overall the experience was this exhibition was a success for the people of Britain. By the time the closing date rolled around on October fifteenth, over six million people from all over the world had come to see the great world’s fair, a reported seventeen percent of the British population had come to pay its respects as well. With the end of the Great Exhibition, the effects this fair produced on British society were little more than revolutionary. It changed and affected almost every aspect of British life and changed the course of the Victorian Age.

The immediate effect of the Great Exhibition was the fulfillment of its purpose. Its primary purpose was to raise funds in order to promote the arts in London. At the end, the festival had made a profit of 186,000 pounds after paying all the loans and bills. Albert used this money to purchase around thirty acres in South Kensington in order to build “museums, colleges and other institutions.” It would take many years in order for the area to look as Albert intended for it due to different difficulties but finally ten establishments including four museums and four colleges grew in the region. The Crystal Palace itself was never to be a permanent fixture in Hyde Park. Less than a year after the Exhibition closed, they sold and moved the building to

34 The Crystal Palace Exhibition, xiii.
35 “The Great Exhibition,” The Times, Friday, July 18, 1851; 8 b.
36 Hibbert, Queen Victoria, 215; Wood, Nineteenth Century Britain, 175.
37 Hibbert, Queen Victoria, 215.
38 Wood, Nineteenth Century Britain, 175-176.
Sydenham Hill, which was located in Norwood about six miles south of London.\footnote{Picard, 	extit{Victorian London}, 225.} This site stood until a fire in 1936 destroyed Sir Paxton’s building forever.\footnote{Picard, 	extit{Victorian London}, 233.} Surprisingly, the greatest effect of the Exhibition which occurred almost immediately was the political ramifications felt by the success of the spectacular event.

Politically, Prince Consort Albert stuck his neck out to produce this fair. Albert had always found it difficult if not impossible to be well received by the British people. The reason for this was simple, he was a foreigner. Albert was from the region of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in Germany. The British people viewed him as an outsider to British politics and figured what could he know about how to run their country. Albert never really tried to fit in with the British crowd and this made it even harder for him to find acceptance among the people. Everyone took their punches at him since his marriage to Queen Victoria in 1840. When Albert made the decision to do the Great Exhibition he was taking a very risky move. Due to the way in which the Exhibition had been structured the success or failure was to fall squarely on the Princes’ shoulders and no one else’s. The Prince Consort knew of this risk but he was willing to take it. Queen Victoria remarked before the event how “terribly fagged” he looked.\footnote{Picard, 	extit{Victorian London}, 217; H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, “Albert,” 	extit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: in Association with The British Academy: From the Earliest Times to the year 2000} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1:571-572.} If it had been a failure, Albert never would have found acceptance in Britain and would always be the outsider looking in. Fortunately due to his planning and sheer will, the Exhibition was a success. The Exhibition showed Britain another side to their Prince. It allowed for an image which both softened and illuminated his artistic nature.\footnote{Roger Fulford, 	extit{The Prince Consort} (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1949), 204.} No one could deny the success and Albert as a
consequence received praise for his abilities. Now people viewed the Prince for the genius in some ways that he was. He had been primed for this type of position and understood what it took to be royalty and what it required of him. Even *Punch* which repeatedly found ways, since his marriage to Queen Victoria, to make fun of the Prince could not in this situation. They gave him the credit. Even Queen Victoria remarked how Albert had finally received the glory she knew he had deserved all along. This newfound love for the Prince Consort was the most immediate political effect of the Exhibition. There was one other political ramification effected by the Great Exhibition and it was the position of Britain both internally and internationally.

Following this gigantic event, the people of Britain took pride in themselves. They regarded their achievement as a way to claim how great their country was. This nationalism was common after festivals and fairs. According to Auerbach,

“The Great Exhibition served as an opportunity for British writers and politicians to assert and reaffirm those elements that they considered integral to British national identity, to extol the qualities, beliefs, and values they saw as central to the British state.”

Nationalism was one of the major effects of the exhibition and a strong political factor as well. The government wrapped itself around the fair in order to define the country. The great writers provided the words which helped to define the people of Britain. They praised their government, especially the monarchy, their freedom, liberty, and progress in this new age. Nationalism was mainly stated through comparisons with other countries at the Crystal Palace. Britain always ended up the winner and showed itself to be better able to handle every aspect of life than any of

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45 Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, 165.

46 Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, 166.
the other countries. In comparison with the United States, even though they liked the theory of free trade they deplored the act of slavery still in use. This effect created a sense of pride in the country of Britain over what they had accomplished. It took a snapshot of what the British people thought about themselves in 1851. This image proved to be rather important in terms of most of the other effects which the Exhibition was to produce. Without the idea which the snapshot produced the other effects would not make any sense.

One effect which lies heavily on the national view of the British was its view of internationalism. The Great Exhibition was considered by most to be pacifist internationalism. It was to show the “peace, love, and ready assistance, not only between individuals but between the nations of the earth.” The event did allow for this idea to happen, however there was an unanticipated reaction at the end. After the Great Exhibition, Britain never felt higher. It was the start of something bigger in terms of imperialistic ideas. One source claimed, “The awe-inspiring majesty of the Crystal Palace in 1851 was the first step along the road of imperialist expansion-from Rotten Row to Majuba Hill, Omdurman and Mafeking.” No one at the Great Exhibition, other than France, came close to comparing industrialization-wise with what Britain accomplished. The fact that this fair held items throughout the world was no mistake. Prince Albert designed it this way in order for the government and the people to see what Britain had gotten right and what needed improvement upon if they were going to remain the world’s strongest power. The Great Exhibition allowed them to view the competition what little there was.

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47 Auerbach, The Great Exhibition of 1851, 167-179.

48 Auerbach, The Great Exhibition of 1851, 161.

49 Fulford, The Prince Consort, 224.
Internationally, the British people had come to fear foreigners and what they would do.\textsuperscript{50} The Exhibition had proven to the British they were better than others. This idea bolstered British confidence in their country. This bolster actually helped see them through troubled spots without allowing them to lose the imperialistic touch. One way this occurred was in terms of ocean shipping. At the Great Exhibition, Britain had more than half of all “ocean-going tonnage of shipping.” This gave Britain a sense it controlled the seas, which in reality was the truth. This idea started to slip due to America’s rising overseas trade. Fortunately, the United States Civil War broke this trend allowing Britain to gain even further control and domination of trade overseas. In fact during the second half of the Victorian Age, Britain enjoyed a greater share of the trade than it ever had in its whole history.\textsuperscript{51} If Britain could not have proved it commanded the seas in 1851, it certainly would have been trying to play catch up and would never have experienced the boom which it felt. Internationally, though the Exhibition offered a way to international peace, in some ways it also led to the theory in which Britain was much greater than any of the other countries. This rise in expectations helped to explain some of the actions Britain took in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Great Exhibition did not only have lasting effects politically speaking but it also had effects economically for the country and the world. The greatest effect probably the Exhibition had was it argued for the idea of free trade. According to the \textit{American Heritage Dictionary}, free trade concerned the idea of “trade between nations without protective customs tariffs.”\textsuperscript{52} This idea stated basically meant the government would not interfere with trade between different

\textsuperscript{50} Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 179.


\textsuperscript{52} The American Heritage Dictionary, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed., s.v. “free trade”.
countries. The seed for free trade had existed for quite some time in Britain but had never really gained traction in the government. By 1851, more and more people were starting to agitate for free trade. Some of its biggest proponents included Benjamin Disraeli, Lord John Russell, and Sir James Graham, all Members of Parliament. Upon this agitation, the Great Exhibition started. The event was international and this fact gave a boost to the free trade idea. The first world’s fair allowed the entire world to regard “positive characteristics and societal effects to the free trade doctrine.” The original idea for the Crystal Palace was to show all exhibits without the public’s knowledge of which country it came from. However, this idea did not work due to time constraints. Throughout the Exhibition, both foreign delegations and British delegations realized the potential which free trade could offer them in the world.

Once the fair had ended, it was free trade which felt it received the greatest boost. The Crystal Palace exhibited what free trade could do: it could produce peace throughout each of the nations. The boost free trade received from the Exhibition led to European trade treaties of the 1860s. Even with all this good, some still did not support free trade in the government. The fair actually did very little in changing the minds of the unconverted for free trade because it proved how far ahead Great Britain was to every other nation. As Bismarck, a German politician,

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53 “Principal Events of 1851,” *The New York Times*, January 1, 1852; 1 a-d.


stated, “Free trade is the weapon of the strongest nation.” Every other nation realized over the second half of the nineteenth century they would have to improve in order to even compete with Britain. Unfortunately for Britain, this was exactly what all the other nations did.

Another aspect of the economic effect of the Great Exhibition was the improvement which London received. During the course of the Exhibition the city of London made quite a bit of money just from the influx of visitors into the city. Although there were concerns that several millions of visitors would not be able to find their way through the city, most visitors enjoyed the city. A basic rule of economics stated with any big event which occurs in a city, the city itself will benefit from the event. The Great Exhibition was no exception. Everyone who traveled to London to see the world’s fair had to have a place to sleep, eat, and relax. Most people who traveled would spend a day or two in the city of London. This meant they needed all the comforts of life. The visitors put money into the local economy. Not only would money go into London but also wherever the visitors traveled throughout Great Britain. With over 60,000 foreign visitors coming to the Exhibition, it was unlikely the capital city was their only stop. If it was more than a day of travel, then they would stop in the other British towns along the railroad and this would boost the town’s economy. All of this money into the economy would help keep prices stable. The business keepers in London and elsewhere would make a hefty profit without feeling the need to raise prices. Even though the profits of the Exhibition went to adding new cultural fixtures to the capital, the bonus profit spent by the millions who visited London helped to catapult the city into a new era in its history. Now it could afford to change the

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59 Wood, Nineteenth Century Britain, 176.

60 “The Great Exhibition of 1851: To The Editor of the Times,” The Times, Monday, October, 28, 1850; 8f.


62 Auerbach, The Great Exhibition of 1851, 137-144.
city from the old world to the start of a modern version of London. The construction of new buildings could occur. New inventions could start to be seen in the city of London itself.

Another effect the economy received from the Great Exhibition was it created the idea of a new style for the Victorians. During the nineteenth century several styles cropped up. The first was the Georgian, then the Regency, and lastly what would become the Victorian style. With the introduction of the Crystal Palace, the start of a new style yet again appeared in Britain. The building itself was an early example of pre-fabrication, an idea which would become popular in the twentieth century. The effect of this new style due to the Exhibition meant all the classes would try to buy things which would bring this new style into their home. People would go out and buy whatever made them look the most modern. This produced an economic effect on the country. People purchased in mass and this money enhanced the business enterprise in all of Britain.

The last economic effect of the Exhibition was the raise given to businesses which participated in the fair. One such business was the Coalbrookdale Company. This business located in Shropshire had been popular for many years. The company dealt with ironworks and the commission requested them to build the ornamental gates which stood at the North Transept of the Crystal Palace. These sixty-foot wide colossal structures made people remember the Coalbrookdale Company when it came to their need for iron products. It was the company’s main reason for participating in the Exhibition because they wanted to return to prominence as the chief ironworks company. During the fair, it was forbidden to list prices or sell items. However, businesses could take advantage of this fact. They could see their competition and

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figure out how to make their product better than the competitors.\textsuperscript{64} Businesses benefited a great deal from this practice and over the second half of the century, products improved due to this scouting of their competition during the course of the 1851 Exhibition.

The idea that all the classes would try to emulate the newest style helps also to explain the social effect the Great Exhibition caused for life in Britain. A staple of the Victorian Era was its rigid class system. People did not jump across the class system; it took a great deal to change their rank in life. In Britain, like most of the rest of the world, up until the nineteenth century the upper class was the most important for dictating how the perfect life should be. They were who everyone wanted to emulate; everyone looked up to this class.

The Victorian Age saw a change in which class mattered most. The most important class became the middle class.\textsuperscript{65} Now while the Great Exhibition was not the immediate cause of this change, it did help cement it. The world’s fair did not cater to upper class or even the downright poor; it targeted the middle and working classes.\textsuperscript{66} The fact of the matter was the Great Exhibition was a teaching tool for the workers.\textsuperscript{67} During the 1850s the height of respect shown to the middle class increased. Even the Queen and Prince quit emulating the rich and instead embraced the middle class values of family.\textsuperscript{68} The middle class, throughout the Victorian Era, became the most important class in order to dictate how life should be.

One effect the Great Exhibition did have socially was it allowed for the first time for the class lines to blur. The Exhibition allowed the classes to intermingle to a certain degree which


\textsuperscript{65} Haight, \textit{The Portable Victorian Reader}, xii.

\textsuperscript{66} Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 10.

\textsuperscript{67} Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 10.

\textsuperscript{68} Matthew, “Albert,” 573.
was unprecedented for them.\textsuperscript{69} Before the fair, people mostly segregated themselves apart. Even the city of London separated into what region certain people would live in. The rich lived in West London, the poor in East London, and the middle class in the suburbs.\textsuperscript{70} The Great Exhibition allowed all these classes to combine into one location. Due to the fact everyone helped to pay for the Exhibition, they all felt they had a right to attend it. Now of course, the Crystal Palace did not stop the distinction of class lines. In admission prices, it was still clear the people segregated themselves according to earnings. Part of the weekend, Friday and Saturday, was more expensive in hopes of limiting the working class and the poor from entering. The encouragement of “Shilling” days was in order to allow the opportunity for the working class to see the exhibits with little hurt to their pocketbooks.\textsuperscript{71}

The Exhibition itself in some ways served as a way to divide the classes. Each class came for different purposes.\textsuperscript{72} The average working class man came to look at the machines in order to take the idea back to their work place to make life better. The middle and upper classes came to look at the machinery but they also took a greater stock in the artistic exhibits around them. The classes came to look at different exhibits and this segregated them. The exhibits even divided the genders. The men cared to look at the machines to see how they worked and ran. The women on the other hand cared to see the artistic value in the object. Women also wanted to see the Koh-i-noor, the largest pearl in the world from India.\textsuperscript{73} However, some women loved to look at the machines and men appreciated the artistic value. Class and gender lines could blur a little at the

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  \item[69] Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 158.
  \item[70] Picard, \textit{Victorian London}, 81-119.
  \item[71] Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 145.
  \item[72] Auerbach, \textit{The Great Exhibition of 1851}, 156.
  \item[73] Hibbert, \textit{Queen Victoria}, 214.
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Exhibition. This effect took place inside the Exhibition but it allowed the opportunity for it to take place outside the fair as well. People could now see they had more in common with the other classes than they originally believed to have with one another. They also saw the other classes were not as bad as originally thought because the lower classes did not cause as many problems as expected.  

Another effect the Great Exhibition produced socially was it allowed for a change to take place in the city of London. In the years prior to the Great Exhibition the rail way lines were very few and scattered. The railroad was still a rather new form of transportation which had not reached its zenith yet. With the founding of the Exhibition, Albert along with others reached the decision which added the railroad lines needed to make the event accessible to all of Britain. There needed to be ways people could come into London other than in carriages. In fact with the help of one new railroad line over 150,000 people were able to attend the Exhibition. During the fair, was the easiest time to afford a ticket to London because different companies would have price slashing wars in order to gain customers. The railroad system helped the people of London socially in several ways. First the advancement of the railroad lines allowed the Great Exhibition to be as popular as it was. Another effect was it allowed more people to move throughout the capital city. The effect of the railroad lines helps to explain the changes which took place all over Britain. The Exhibition was the reason for the expansion of the railroad lines so quickly. It would have happened eventually the fair just served as a catalyst to get it done quicker.

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76 Picard, *Victorian London*, 222.
The city of London changed after the Exhibition. Hyde Park was one example of this change. Before the Crystal Palace, the park had served as a place for the rich to retreat and enjoy an afternoon. After the fair, Hyde Park became a gathering spot for the commoners. It was a place which held radical meetings and housed Sunday congregations in the years to come.\footnote{77 Hare, \textit{Walks in London}, 88.} This was one aspect in which London changed due to the Exhibition. It was logical to assume since the people had changed then the city changed with them. It was now meant to serve the needs of a changed population. The Crystal Palace started a trend to change the look of London. The old world started to fade away while the modern world started to creep in.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, historians have remarked about the Great Exhibition. They have remarked about the causes, the events, and the effects which the Exhibition caused on every aspect of life in the world. Hardly any European country escaped from mentioning the Great Exhibition of 1851 in its history. There are several different viewpoints which have been approached to studying the history of the Exhibition. There was the general point of view of the event itself, along with the interpretations from the public historian, the economic historian, the social historian, and the British historian. Each point of observation helps to explain the importance which this singular event has had on understanding the life of the Victorian Age.

Generally, historians viewed the Great Exhibition to be one of the most important events in the Victorian Age. Even those who were living through the event knew this was important. William Makepeace Thackeray, a \textit{Punch} columnist, remarked about the opening day, “I witnessed the grandest and most cheerful, the brightest and most splendid show that eyes had
ever looked on since the creation of the world.”

The people at the time understood the event was about changing society into a new era. Every historian after this has agreed with this general consensus. David Thomson, author of *England in the Nineteenth Century: 1815-1914*, claims the start of the Great Exhibition served as a way to start “the golden age of Victorianism, in the proper and essential meaning of that word.”

The main author on the history of the Great Exhibition is a man by the name of Jeffery Auerbach. For many years he has devoted his life to looking at the Great Exhibition in order to understand the event. He has studied every aspect of the event. He looked at the causes, the event itself, and the effects. His most famous work is *The Great Exhibition of 1851: a Nation on Display* written in 1999. This book was the pinnacle of information about the Exhibition and understanding the general view the occasion captured. The general view of Great Exhibition claimed it as one of the greatest events of the Victorian Era and certainly one of the most important for ushering in the modern era of history. The fact the event was important does not mean bickering and arguing between historians have not ensued over the events.

Historians interpret things differently from one another about what was important and the meaning of certain actions taken during the time. Many different meanings have explained this one event and no one can assume they are the right interpretation on the matter.

Historians not only look at the general view of the Great Exhibition but also specialized subsets. They look at the Exhibition to explain how the events affected their field. One field that explores the effects of the Great Exhibition on history are public historians. Public historians are people who present history to an audience which does not specialize in the history presented.

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Public historians regarded the Great Exhibition as the first world’s exhibition. By this act of claiming it to be the first, the Exhibition became the blueprint for the other exhibitions to take place in history. With most other countries coming to see this milestone, they received the blueprint of how to pull off an exhibition of this scale. In 1862 there was another International Exhibition in France which was similar to the Great Exhibition. It contained most of the same ideas with better products available for viewing. People were able to look at this first world’s fair to determine what worked and what needed to be fixed for future events. Public historians are not the only way to see the effect of the exhibition on their specialized set of history.

Another group of historians to see the effects of the Great Exhibition was economic historians. Economic historians study how economic phenomena evolved in the past. With this world’s fair, economic historians can look at the Exhibition upon many levels. Several include the economic impact produced on the city. The economic history of this giant event has been one of the least studied of the subsets until recently. According to Wolfram Kaiser in his article, “Cultural Transfer of Free Trade at the World Exhibitions, 1851-1862” he claims historians view the Exhibition more through “national lens than economic ones.” He made this claim to show more what can be learned through trying to look at the economic perspective of these events. All the energy for so many years has been to look at what the national impact on Britain was that people forgot this Exhibition had a great deal to do with economic concerns.

Another aspect which economic historians regarded was the business side of the Great Exhibition. With over 14,000 exhibitors several of them can be studied pre and post Great

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Exhibition to see the effect the fair had on their businesses. One such company was the Schweppes Corporation. Douglas A. Simmons in his work entitled *Schweppes: the First 200 Years* states the Commission of the Exhibition decided there would be no selling of alcohol inside the Crystal Palace. Because of this decision, Schweppes directly benefited. Schweppes was a soda drink with carbonated water which people enjoyed drinking. In 1837 Schweppes received the Royal Warrant which stated the royal family approved of the drink. Partially because of this warrant and because soda drinks were still relatively new, Schweppes obtained a secure contract to be the sole provider of soda drinks at the Exhibition. Before the fair, the Schweppes label was known but it was not extremely popular. During the Great Exhibition, Schweppes sold well over a million bottles to the visitors. The promotion which the fair provided for the drink allowed the company to expand. It was the start of the proof that soda drinks could be truly successful. Even after the effect of the world’s fair wore off, Schweppes never dropped back to pre-Exhibition numbers again.84 Economic historians study stories like this one to understand the impact the Exhibition had on the economy of the region and on businesses which primarily benefit from its being held.

Another aspect historians specialized in is the social history. Social historians are people who study social trends within society. These historians find the effects of the Great Exhibition very interesting. The one thing the world’s fair caused was it strengthened and weakened the social class system. It allowed the blurring of class lines to start though it in no way finished it.85 E.L. Woodward in an address for British Broadcasting Association led another social trend of the

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85 Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, 151-159.
Exhibition. He stated the fair stood for the idea of the “visibility of progress.” He claimed through the Exhibition society defined what it looked for in order to advance itself ahead in time. Everything changed around the people and the social trends were also in motion to change. Some people were gaining respect like the Prince Consort. People from different classes now would consider talking to each other. A new sense of awareness appeared during the time period of others and the relationship to them.

This idea of a new sense of awareness directly leads into how the British historian views the effects of the Exhibition on the people. For British historians, the Great Exhibition of 1851 marks the end of early Victorian era and starts the height of Victorian culture. The fair allows for a feeling of nationalism to occur within the country. During 1851, a British national sense formed. The Prince Consort wrote to Prime Minister Lord John Russell how the “Exhibition alone was ‘elevating to the national mind.’” A direct effect of this nationalism feeling is the consequence of imperialism. British historians also see this as a watermark in British history. This is the turning point because after this everything changes. One example of this watershed mark it became the high peak for the Queen and her family. After the fair, things start to disintegrate especially after the death of Albert. The Exhibition marked the change over from the old way of British life to a new life. There is a definite feeling of a dynamic change between the world pre-Exhibition and post.

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89 Fulford, The Prince Consort, 224.

The Great Exhibition marked a change in society. Every historian stated this great occasion serves as the changing point in history of the Victorian Era. Even the country itself changed because by 1851 Great Britain was an industrial, urban nation. It was like everyone looked one way and then turned their head in a new direction. The Exhibition itself did not cause this change but it was the effects caused by the event. The first world’s fair changed all parts of society. Politically, it strengthened the crown while giving Britain a strong sense of nationalism that would lead them on internationally. Economically, the event changed the entire economy of Britain and London. It also helped businesses to become economically sound. It affected the social classes as well. It allowed the first real chance for the classes to intermingle. Although it did not change the class system, it started the process of changing it. It also redesigned the city of London by adding railways and changing the purpose of some of the London landmarks. The Great Exhibition was by no means the last exhibition to effect life around them; in fact it really was the first. No exhibition before it caused the reaction on such a profound level which this one experienced. Other exhibitions would come after and those actually were more effective at changing life. Overall the Great Exhibition of 1851 serves as the blueprint for the future and a drastic change from the past.

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