

Urbanization in Victorian London



It has been said that, “When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.” London is a densely populated metropolis that serves as the capital city of England and the larger United Kingdom. Perhaps London’s most popular and well-known period, the Victorian Era is full of beautiful attributes including art, architecture, a revitalization of chivalry, and an over all new British culture that would pave the way for the current lifestyle of Londoners. The time period is referred to as “Victorian” because it falls under the reign of Queen Victoria.



Victoria was the longest reigning British monarchy and figurehead having ruled from 1837 until her death in 1901. During the Victorian Era, the city of London experienced extensive changes. She is the namesake to an entire age for she oversaw enormous changes in British society. Among these changes is the urbanization of the great city of London. Throughout the Victorian Era, London would develop into the cultural, economic, religious, educational, and political center of Great Britain.

It was during the Victorian Era that Buckingham Palace was built, completed in 1850.



Buckingham House, the garden front: detail from an oil painting attributed to Adrian van Diest (c. 1700) depicting the house as it was in the Duke of Buckingham's time *The Royal Collection © 2006, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II*



Watercolour of Buckingham Palace by Joseph Nash, 1846, showing the entrance side of the Palace before the closing of the quadrangle with a new front wing and the removal of the Marble Arch

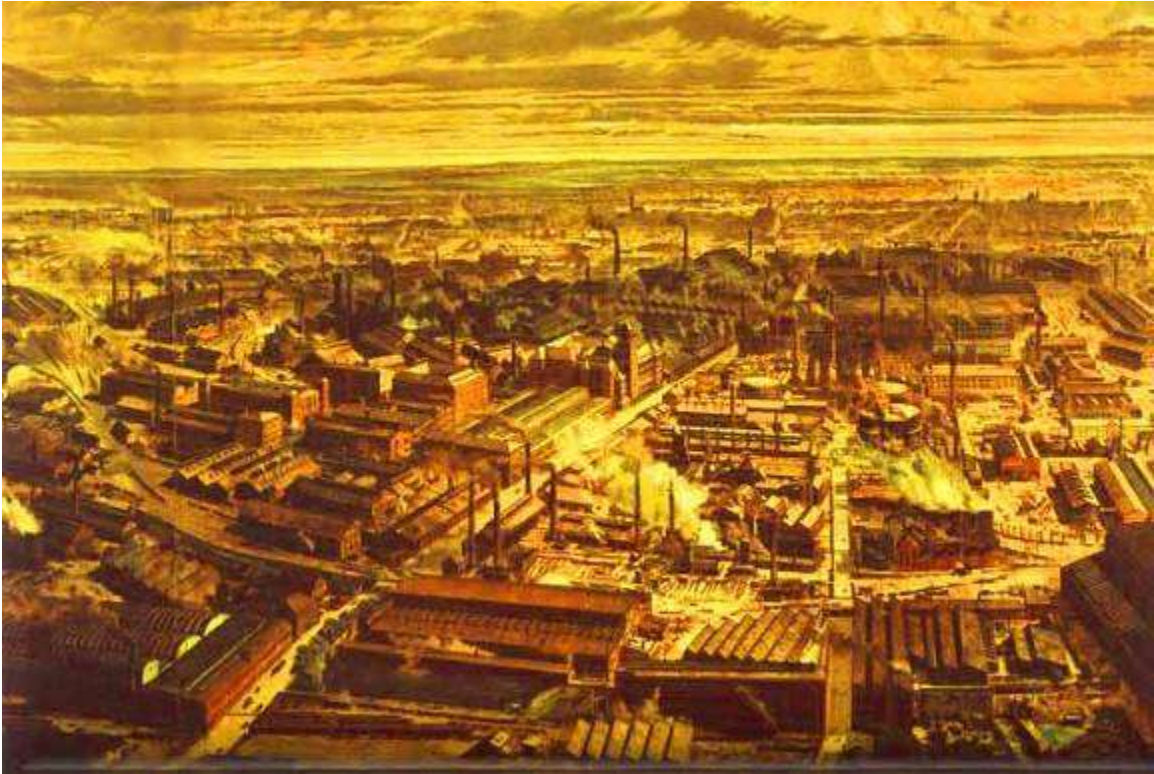
The Royal Collection © 2006, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

It was purchased by King George III in 1761 as a gift for his wife, Queen Charlotte. It has been used as the official London residence for British sovereigns since 1837. Queen Victoria was the first person to take up residence at the palace and would later become the first Queen to leave for a coronation from Buckingham Palace. The palace also serves as the administrative headquarters of the Monarchy.

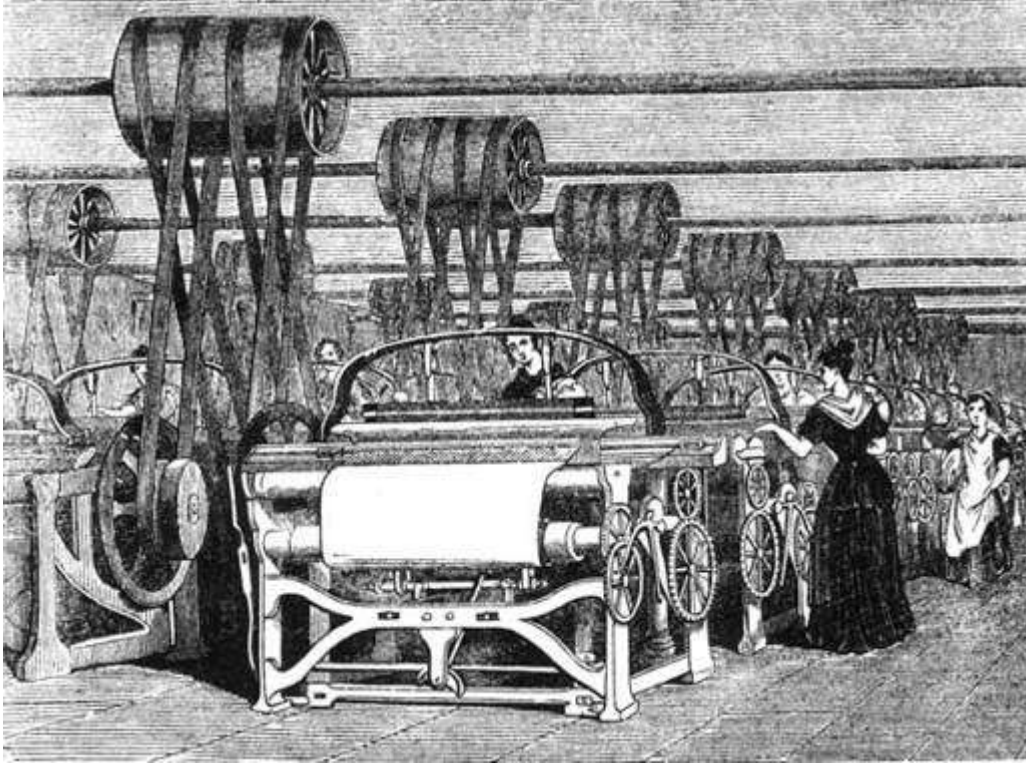
Also during this era, in 1834, the Houses of Parliament at Westminster Palace had burned down. New houses would be built complete with arguably the most famous clock tower in the world, Big Ben. It was built in 1859 and officially called the clock tower of the Houses of Parliament.



Buckingham Palace and Big Ben are not the only urban developments of the Victorian age. The Industrial Revolution finds its roots in the Victorian age. As the world knows, it owes industry and technology, in large part, to Great Britain.



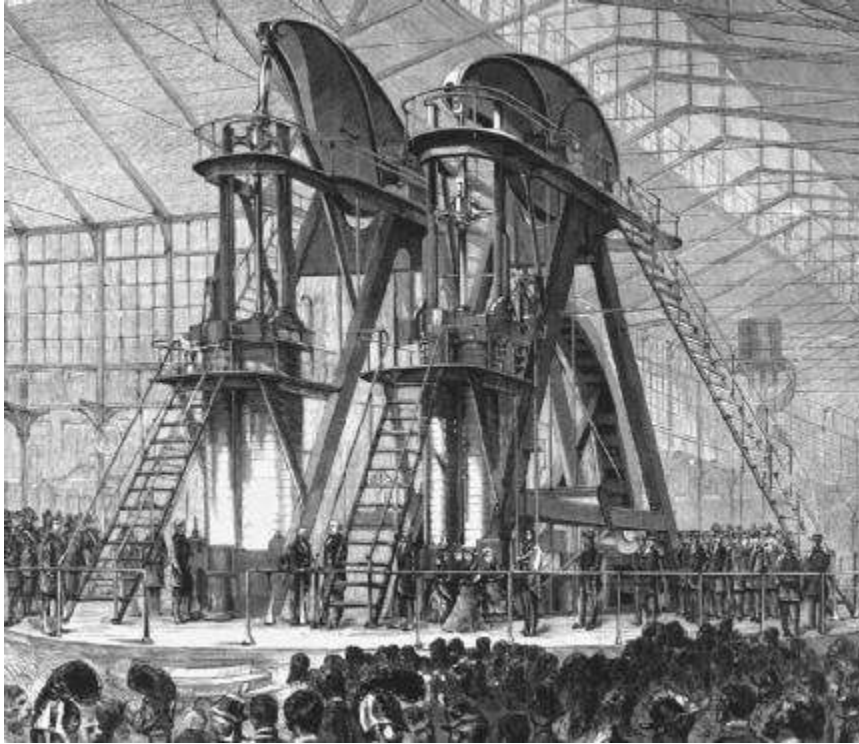
There were three major industries that would develop and become successful in London during the reign of Victoria. The textile industry was a great new breakthrough in the manufacturing of clothing. Clothing had exclusively been made in the private homes of Londoners. Clothing was made by hand with thread bought by the family from a wholesale outlet. Several machines had been invented in order to weave clothing at a much faster pace which, in turn, would make mass production a new possibility.



Iron and steel manufacturing was also very important throughout the Industrial Revolution. Great Britain had rich land from which iron ore and coal was gathered. The use of steel and iron made it possible for skyscrapers to come into existence. In crowded cities such as London, sometimes the only place to go is up.



Perhaps the most important of the breakthroughs made during the Industrial Revolution and the Victorian age, new forms of transportation had Londoners moving faster than ever before.



The steam engine had proved to produce the sufficient amount of energy to make things move and keep moving without extra efforts from man power. It was originally used as a stationary power source. It was not in Great Britain that the steam engine was used first for transportation purposes. France and the United States had invented steam boats that could work against the current making travel easier on the water ways.



It was in London, however, where the steam carriage would be invented in order to carry people through the streets of London. Such inventions would lead to the development of large scale public railways that would transform London's social and business life. It allowed for people to leave the ridiculously crowded city and move to the outskirts or suburbs of London.

As great as urbanization was for the city of London, it had its negative affects.

William Morris would found the Society for Preservation of Ancient Buildings to combat the harmful affects that the new industries were having on London. In his work, *The Earthly Paradise*, He wrote,

Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green. . .
While nigh the thronged wharf Geoffrey Chaucer's pen
Moves over bills of lading. . .

Hippolyte Taine would write, "*Nothing here is natural: everything is transformed, violently changed, from the earth and man himself, to the very light and air. But the hugeness of this accumulation of man-made things takes off the attention from this deformity and this artifice; in default of a wholesome and noble beauty, there is life, teeming and grandiose.*"

And John Ruskin would refer to it as "*That great foul city of London, — rattling, growling, smoking, stinking — ghastly heap of fermenting brickwork, pouring out poison at every pore. . . .*"

At this point in history, 1/10 of every English person was living in London. It was overcrowded with the poorest of poor living in the center of the city and those with wealth living in suburbs or further away from the core of the city. By 1871, the population of London was 3,000,000 people and would increase to 8,000,000 people in less than a century later. With the rise of urbanization came the rise in crime and poverty in London.

As important as industrialization and urbanization is to the economy of a city and nation, it can be harmful in the short term aspect of it all. In the front pages of Edward Rutherford's *London*, there is a map of London from its beginning and its progression since then. London has always been a growing city and will continue to grow, if not in size, in importance to the world and the history of the world.

Jerrel Burgo

HIST 203L

May 14, 2008

<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/hist4.html>

<http://tigger.uic.edu/~pbhales/courses/ah111s2007/Urbanization.html>

http://www.britainexpress.com/History/Late_Victorian_Age.htm

<http://www.laheritage.org/VictorianEra/index.htm>

<http://www.royal.gov.uk/output/Page569.asp>

<http://www.britainexpress.com/London/victorian-london.htm>

<http://www.britannia.com/history/londonhistory/viclon.html>