

## 2. Spirit of the Age

### Let the Good Times Roll

At the start of the Edwardian period, the merchants of doom in the shape of economists, soothsayers and political commentators foresaw a steep moral decline in society, if not decadence, and a continuing erosion of Britain's fortunes. They felt uneasy with a public assumption that riding on the crest of an economic wave, fuelled by the fruits of a still expanding Empire, would continue unabated. They may have felt uneasy too about the peccadilloes of the King and his behaviour, regarded in more refined circles as *louche*. An obsession with show, the importance of pose, decline of the spiritual and rise of material, typified the Edwardian era, at least for those with money. Simon Heffer points not only to decay in morals but a gradual intellectual and industrial decline. Times had changed and so had Britain at the dawn of an exciting new century, albeit tinged with uncertainty.

On public holidays the various pleasures of beach and funfair awaited the grafting working and lower middle classes, whilst upper middle classes indulged in fine dining and dressed formally for dinner. The lifestyle of a privileged minority changed little. The calendar was segmented into shooting, tennis, parties, the London Season, grand house weekends and the social whirl. The idle rich, paradoxically, were busy too, planning their traditional annual events but how long could all this last?

In France, *La Belle Epoque* enabled the *nouveau riche* to indulge their interests in highly decorative and fashionable art nouveau and post-impressionism. For those with somewhat coarse tastes, the twirling and swirling fur and feather of burlesque beckoned at the *Moulin Rouge* and similar haunts around a raffish *Place de Clichy*. *Haute couture* was exemplified at exclusive *Maxim's* Paris restaurant and the *Ritz Hotel* under head chef and co-owner *Auguste Escoffier*. An aesthete was admired, reflecting the spirit of an exhilarating age, epitomised by *joie de vivre* and diverse cultural pursuits.

The sage philosophers of Fleet Street were rather pessimistic. They sensed that Britain's elite position was waning but this did not stem a mood of optimism and hope. Live life to the full was the credo, taking a cue from King Edward VII, enjoying the good life, or rather his own version. Those recounting the Edwardian period in later years referred to it as a Golden Age in opening up a vast array of cultural and social activities, mass entertainment and sense of freedom, removing the shackles of a staid Victorian age. It extended literacy, with availability of cheap books and newspapers, helped by compulsory schooling to at least twelve and adult education with the founding of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in 1903. This provided a new age of enlightenment for parents. They could visualise with pride the prospect of a better life for their offspring than they had experienced.

A Golden Age for Edwardian Britain was a myth for many but not to those in high society who enjoyed glitter, privilege, rank, wealth, fashion and fortune. They were not alone as similar scenes of extravagance and opulence could be seen in *Faubourg Saint-Germain* and *Vienna*, a city of endless waltzes and cavalry officers sporting the finest tunics. The image of endless summers provoked much nostalgia in later years but at the time, apart from the glitterati of London, most people were far removed from contact with this elevated strata of society. J. B. Priestley, the author and dramatist who was born and raised in Bradford, had never set eyes on the elite until he joined up for military service. "I had to take orders, often

ridiculous, and reprimands from various specimens of the English ruling class, and listened to accounts so extraordinary that they might as well have been foreigners.”

The legend prevailed, exemplified by Edward VII, and was borne out by hordes of domestic servants eager for regular non-industrial work, beguiled by the prospect of working for the noble, rich smart-set and landed gentry. Lavish entertainment at house parties required a cadre of workers below stairs from valets, butlers and housekeepers to cooks, maids, stable lads and grooms. Breakfast, spanned a leisurely two hours, followed by a lunch consisting of eight to twelve courses with, ptarmigan a popular addition. The ritual interlude of afternoon tea meant scones, jam and sticky cakes. This excessive gastronomy was enacted once more at dinner with up to a dozen courses and various fine wines.

Replete, and somewhat the worse for wear, guests indulged in a few rubbers of bridge and social chit-chat. The booming, deep tones of midnight resonating from the grandfather clock was a cue for the peckish to pick their way through copious sandwiches and tit-bits; and so to bed. The question was whose? An unimpressed J. B. Priestley viewed this as elaborate indulgence and excess. He had an inkling, if not a foreboding, the sun would set. The good times could not last forever. “Not since Imperial Rome have there been so many signposts to gluttony.”

The popular press not only promoted but inspired entertainment, exuberance and excess on a grand scale and a thirst for news and stories from the sad to sensational. Prime exponent, Alfred Harmsworth, elevated to a peerage in 1905 as Lord Northcliffe, led the campaigning Daily Mail. If Rudyard Kipling represented the voice of Empire in literature, its press media equivalent was the Daily Mail, embodiment of British greatness, superiority and imperial ideals all rolled into one.

The sensational was amply covered on news-stands along with its sister paper the Evening News. It recounted the final hours of James C. Read before entering his place of execution, a room with gaudy dark paint and whitewashed walls, where he was to sink “into eternity in less than 60 seconds.” The Daily Mirror, appearing in 1903, was intended for women only but soon turned into a bright, breezy and illustrated daily for the masses of both sexes.

Edward Elgar’s Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1 in D received its premier on 19 October 1901 at a specially convened concert in Liverpool. The concert was repeated two days later at the Queen’s Hall, London, albeit with inclusion of the second march. This conductor this time was Henry Wood. The two military marches were a sensation, receiving rapturous and prolonged applause as an enthralled audience rose and yelled. Henry Wood recalled it was the only time an orchestral item had been accorded a double encore.

Pomp represented the splendour and spectacle of impressive military pageantry, depicting order, discipline, immaculate military dress and dignity. Circumstance was experiencing the ceremony itself, its importance and imperial occasion, reflected in the formality of the event. The aura of pageantry was symbolic, evoking a sense of atmosphere, pride, precision and military might befitting Rule Britannia. In music, Elgar epitomised the Edwardian age. The son of a church organist, he left school at 15 to work in a lawyer’s office before moving to London. He was taught the violin by Alfred Pollitzer who recognised that Elgar was imbued with prodigious talent. The Malvern Hills were never far from his mind, happiest riding up to 50 miles a day on a Royal Sunbeam bicycle. He sported a bowler, tweed suit, display hankie and shiny boots, seemingly out to shoot pheasants but for no gun slung across his back.

Meanwhile, eminent actor Sir Henry Irving played to packed houses, having appeared in *The Bells* by Leopold Lewis. Still on stage up to his death in 1905, Irving's forte was theatrical characters, making him a natural for others to follow in almost reverence. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1904 he announced his retirement, spread over two years. He had a punishing schedule with two London seasons, three twelve week provincial tours, as well as return visits to Canada and America in between. On 13 October 1905 the curtain fell for the last time at Bradford. Later that night Sir Henry Irving died in the comforts of the Midland Hotel. The curtain had also fallen on a political way of life, barely changed in decades, with its emphasis on Empire and protection of interests, at the expense of social development at home.

Gradually, plays portraying contemporary Edwardian life became fashionable. Many deferred to the drawing room, amply illustrated in *The Return of the Prodigal*, *Lady Epping's Lawsuit* and *Captain Drew on Leave*. The cast of *Mid-Channel* by dramatist and stage director, Arthur Wing Pinero, were clustered in a drawing room, decked out in the French style. This added a distinctive panache and air of refinement. The setting was the key, facilitating movement, interaction and intrigue with a cast cocooned in an interior oozing with wealth, upbringing and posh accents, dripping with social intercourse.

Pinero believed it essential to base a script on people earning a substantial annual income, as otherwise a play may not have sufficient depth and interest to suit refined cultural tastes. His justification was that "wealth and leisure are more productive of dramatic complication than poverty and hard work." He had a point as full houses testified. Pinero was alluding to the inarticulate lower orders, lacking expression, thought and breeding, without the means or access to the finer accoutrements of life, making interpretation difficult, if not irrelevant. They were incapable of giving "vivid utterance to their thoughts and emotions" that his and similar productions required of a socially adept, intelligent and articulate audience.

### **A Breath of Fresh Air**

For many, Edward VII was a breath of fresh air, keen to engage with the public at home and abroad, the epitome of a constitutional Monarch with a distinctive flamboyance and personal style, in marked contrast to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert with whom he had a difficult relationship, especially with his mother. Both deplored his lack of intellect and loose morals. Quipped Edward, "Most people pray to the Eternal Father but I am the only one inflicted with an Eternal Mother." Upon succession, Edward erased memories in Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle, smashing statues, flinging out papers, consigning relics to Windsor's archives and turning Osborne House into a naval college and convalescent home for retired officers.

Edward showed little interest in deep, serious reading. His talent lay in reading people with insightful judgement of character. Queen Victoria had squirrelled away most of her Civil List entitlement. Edward, now part of the *nouveau-riche*, benefited. He was eager to indulge in the company of pretty women, successful people and financiers, whilst enjoying the leisurely pursuits of music, gambling, eating, horse-racing, golf, cigars, pomp and ceremony. Edward maintained a close interest in foreign affairs, keen to know what bloodline relatives were up to in Spain, Germany, Russia, Portugal, Denmark, Bulgaria, Netherlands, Sweden, Greece, Romania and Norway. *Bon viveur*, keen traveller, speaker of German and French, Edward, was at home both in Paris and spa resort of Marienbad, in what is now the Czech Republic.

For a restrained and insular civil service he was the emeritus ambassador with his imposing appearance, bonhomie, skill in oiling diplomacy, eye for the enjoyable things in life, charm and convivial conversation. He liked to be involved in what was going on, happy to open

hospitals and universities but rather less inclined to the grimier and monotonous industrial circuit. Eager to engage in high society, Henry James called him "Edward the Caresser," an "arch-vulgarian" who was frivolous and totally unsuited to be the British Monarch. Winston Churchill was of a similar view. When Queen Victoria died The Times questioned his fitness to serve, saying in his youth "he had been importuned by temptation in its most seductive forms."

Concerning The Times was his private life. An enraptured British public would not agree and neither would the French who affectionately regarded Edward as the Uncle of Europe, and a pleasant contrast to the stuffiness of Royal society. Apart from a dalliance with Nellie Clifden and relationships with Mrs Alice Keppel and Lillie Langtry, amongst others, the invitation of the King involved certain rituals. Some houses he stayed in were of dubious respectability, not just because of the inclination of guests to gamble heavily.

The society in which he frequented took serial philandering and promiscuity for granted. As Vita Sackville-West comments, house-party hostesses were expected to arrange bedrooms in a way to accommodate irregular liaisons. The name of each guest would be written on a card, slipped into a tiny brass frame on the bedroom door. Tact and discretion was called for so as not to upset husbands, whilst ensuring a lothario had sufficient access to those he fancied. By the time of his accession to the throne, Edward VII had largely abandoned the liaisons of earlier years though he was still seen frequently with Alice Keppel.

Edward's excesses applied to food and tobacco too and entourage accompanying him. When staying with Lady Saville at Rofford Abbey he was accompanied by: a footman, a sergeant's footman, valet, two equerries with their own valets, a brusher, two telephonists and an Arab boy to prepare coffee. Another six servants were on hand if the Queen was present. The annual month-long visit to Marienbad meant a suite of rooms in the Hotel Weimar. These demands were modest compared with his mother who rented the entire hotel, furnishing it with favourite furniture and other pieces from Balmoral and Osborne House.

Sir Philip Morgan, biographer, talked of a typical year. Christmas and New Year were spent at Sandringham, followed by a week at one of England's finest houses before the State Opening of Parliament. March meant Paris and Biarritz, and a cruise on the royal yacht. The King presided over the London season in May, moving onto Windsor for Ascot in June and Goodwood and Cowes Week before Marienbad beckoned. Back home, he headed north to Doncaster for horse-racing, and stalking and shooting at Balmoral. November and December were spent flitting between Sandringham, Buckingham Palace and Windsor.

Edward VII's eagerness to be in the public eye captured attention. Pleasure and happiness counted as people could identify with this and his gregarious persona. Even the solemnity of the coronation was not compromised by the presence of five ladies, sat in what was referred to as the 'King's loose box,' a euphemism for a horse stall. This satirical reference was not missed by the general reader, hoping for a little gossip and tittle-tattle.

They were prepared to gloss over his amorous exploits but not the dubious male company he kept, especially those associated with gambling, well beyond the means of most. Many of these men were in trade but were not as successful as Sir Blundell Maple, furniture maker, Sir Ernest Cassell, banker and Thomas Lipton, tea magnate. Class snobbery prevailed and such associations were frowned on in royal circles. For the old order privilege, rank, status, intelligence and repartee counted more than personal wealth.

## Finding a Home

By 1901, with increasing numbers arriving in Britain, especially Russian, Austrian and Polish Jews, immigration was a serious political issue, denounced by the media and some politicians as not just a threat but an 'alien invasion.' It was no coincidence that in the same year the British Brothers' League, a forerunner of the National Front and British National Party, was founded in the East End of London.

The MP for south-west Bethnal Green, S Ford-Ridley, claimed that 90,000 'aliens' had settled in the country in the first nine months of 1901. He had no real evidence for his statistics but who could argue as no official records were kept, other than the national census. It had been claimed that many entering British ports were en-route for the USA, South Africa and other destinations. Historian V. Lipman estimates the number of Russian-Jewish immigrants who settled permanently in this country between 1881 and 1905 was about 100,000.

The 1901 Census Report noted the highest proportion of foreigners to total population was in London where it reached 30 per thousand. This masked pockets where immigration was extremely high such as Stepney at almost 40%. Parts of Spitalfields, now Whitechapel, had a 95% Jewish population. Only 13 towns or cities had a foreign population exceeding 1%, including Manchester, Liverpool, South Shields, Leeds, Grimsby, Hull and Swansea.

The anti-immigration climate led to the setting up of a Royal Commission in 1902 on Alien Immigration, resulting in the 1905 Aliens Act. The second reading of the Bill in the House of Commons on 2 May 1905 is illuminating. Sir Charles Dilke, a Liberal and radical imperialist, referred to misrepresentation of figures that he felt to be a gross distortion of the actuality as many arrivals were destined for the USA in particular. In 1904, four emigrant companies slashed their fares from London to New York to £2, much lower than the fare from Germany direct to the USA. Others followed, offering an alternative embarkation port of Liverpool.

Of great concern to Dilke was the exclusion of victims of political and religious persecution, notably Russia, as the Bill excluded these people. Hounding, mob violence, disappearance, immediate arrest on mere suspicion, stripping of possessions, a pension of 40 rubles for the family of Russian soldier and none for a Jewish family, escaping tyranny, - how can we just ignore such distressing circumstances, he contended.

Major Evans-Gordon, MP for Tower Hamlets and Stepney, prime instigator of the 1902 Royal Commission, and major contributor of evidence, protested about supposed 'window-dressing' and government insincerity. He reminded the House that "some 1.5 million human beings of every age, sex and religion, the healthy and hopeful, the diseased and hopeless, good, bad and indifferent, are on the move from the South and East of Europe, pressing towards the West." He stated the causes were mainly misgovernment and oppression, adding that other forces were at work, from enticement by shipping companies and the mis-selling of tickets to expansion of competition, only fuelling demand. "Every single person who can be induced to travel is another ticket sold."

Evans-Gordon, a former officer, had been seconded from the British Indian Army from 1876 to 1897 to serve as a political officer with the Foreign Department of the Indian Government. His typical constituent was a working Conservative. He travelled widely in Europe to assess migration issues and generated pressure to set up a Royal Commission. His approach was forensic, and his views strident. Opposition came from the Liberals, notably Herbert Samuel, saying that agitation outside London was purely for political purposes. He insisted that many of these places had never seen an alien.

Evans-Gordon emphasised that immigration was by no means entirely Jewish though they formed a substantial part. He spoke of 5.5 million Jews in the Russian Empire, of whom a large number might be considered potential immigrants, adding ominously, "It is the poorest and least fit of these people who move, and it is the residuum of these again who come to, or are left, in this country." Regulation was essential. "Are we to sit still and do nothing and without reference to our own social problems and industrial conditions?" He insisted, "We have remarkable proof that aliens arriving in the United States are falling off, in contrast to Britain where numbers are increasing," (Opposition cries of No, No and Oh!).

The American contract labour law was more stringent as 50,000 passages were refused in a year, and in Naples 10,000 passages were similarly refused. "The better class of emigrants only arrive in transit to other countries, chiefly America," Evans-Gordon said, questioning why all arrivals, irrespective of destination, were subjected to close medical examination on arrival in Britain with some considered physically unfit to proceed to other countries. Why indeed but there was more. Evans-Gordon quoted figures on those rejected by America who landed back on these shores. He referred to diseases brought in such as smallpox, scarlet fever, trachoma (a contagious eye disease) and favus, describing this as "a disgusting and contagious disease of the skin," as well as miner's worm and other afflictions.

Uppermost in his mind was the social and industrial impact on poor working classes who had to live with this influx and problems, whilst "members opposite luxuriate in fine and heroic sentiment," detached from the world in which these people live. "To me it is a monstrous thing that, while we are at our wit's end to find work and house-room for our own people, we should at the same time be admitting shipload after shipload of unskilled labour."

Evans-Gordon cited concerns by the Bishop of Stepney. "In some districts, where there was formerly evidence of comparative wealth and comfort, these had been absolutely wiped out, and the East End of London was being swamped by aliens." In a crescendo of hyperbole the Bishop insisted they "were coming in like an army of locusts, eating up the native population or turning them out. Their churches were being continually left like islands in the midst of an alien sea."

Prominent MP, Colonel Seely, put his finger on the pulse and mood of the nation, in curing evils associated with immigration. Yes, keep out the criminal but not the genuinely poor. The issue of immigration had much to do with sweated labour, long hours of work and overcrowding in the East End. "These cannot be dealt with by the present measure." He urged MPs to support the Amendment, saying "It is not wise for a Christian people to begin this sinister form of legislation. We can now say that where a man is naked we clothe him; when he is a stranger we take him in. We have not done badly, and I for one will heartily oppose any attempt at legislation such as this."

Immigration, tugging at the heart-strings, was portrayed in Edwardian literature, including Joseph Conrad's *Amy Foster* (1901), Violet Guttenberg's *A Modern Exodus* (1904), Edgar Wallace's *The Four Just Men* (1905) and works of Anglo-Jewish novelist Israel Zangwill. The government knew it was on thin ice with the Liberals waiting in the wings so populism and calmness were required in equal measure.

Evidence was provided to the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration on under-reporting in census returns. Landlords did not want to reveal overcrowded properties. Some immigrants were fearful of conscription and of state authority that may rescind a right to live in Britain. A young Winston Churchill, spoke out against the tough curbs proposed by the 1902 Royal

Commission, lambasting it as the work of prejudice and racism. The Act watered down the original provisions in the Bill but gave government inspectors the power to exclude paupers, unless they could prove they were entering the country to avoid persecution or punishment on religious or political grounds, or for an offence of a political nature.

The 1905 Aliens Act restricted peacetime immigration for the first time. However, on coming to power in 1906 the new Liberal government did not rigorously enforce it and the number of exclusions remained relatively small. Britain prided itself on liberty with no borders, but no more, given an influx with a prospect of many more arrivals. Jobs, pay and housing were festering issues with claims of areas and streets being taken over.

A prime requirement of the Act was to be self-supporting without being a burden on rates. Each person had to show they had £5 with £2 for each dependent. A way of overcoming this was to pass the £5 note up and down the queue, or simply to lend it. The Act made provision for an immigration officer to be accompanied by a medical doctor. A concession was made for what we term asylum seekers, fleeing pogroms, persecution and oppression, and who invariably arrived in steerage class. A cold welcome often awaited.

If you had means you were in as inspection was cursory to reduce the flow in concentrating on the poor and persecuted. A report in 1909 said that the barriers set up by the Act may be avoided with considerable ease. Whilst weak in operation it was the beginnings of an immigration policy. As historian David Glover comments, "The Act set the precedent for the ever-tightening web of immigration control that is in place today."

The years leading to the Boxer uprising in 1899-1901 had seen a period of concerted British expansion in China. Whilst soldiers, missionaries and merchants sailed from Limehouse to defend and extend British interests, a small Chinatown developed in dockside streets and in Liverpool around Pitt Street, and in Tiger Bay, Cardiff. Chinese sailors jumped ship to settle, opening lodging houses, stores, cafes, halls and laundries for transient seamen and also for indentured labourers, signed up in China by merchant shipping companies. The Gentlemen Magazine reported that Chinese writing indicated the style and type of business, complete with a map of China and even had a Chinese Almanac.

Local ill-feeling grew. In 1908, in opposition to recruiting Chinese labour, hordes of British seamen prevented Chinese seamen from signing on as crew. They returned to their lodging houses under police escort. In 1911, in Cardiff, all 30 Chinese laundries were attacked by mobs. In Liverpool, concern was expressed over Chinese men marrying English women, the extent of their gambling and smoking of opium. Local women thought highly of Chinese men who were usually industrious, often did not drink alcohol and took care of their families.

Stories emerged and myths with politicians manipulating local fears, and writers seizing their chance to exploit the dramas of drug-trafficking, gambling and of sexual ensnarement with Limehouse the magnet. The first Sax Rohmer tales about the evil Dr Fu-Manchu, published in 1913, created near hysteria. The perceived 'Yellow Peril' intensified after the Opium Wars with many believing the Chinese were plotting revenge. Their communities depended upon buoyant maritime trading between Britain and China but by the 1930s this had declined and only about 100 families lived in Limehouse.

In America in the first two decades of the twentieth century a staggering 14.5 million people arrived, mostly the poor and persecuted. In 1880 there were a quarter of a million Jews in the USA. By 1924 this had risen to four and a half million. In Britain, by contrast, in 1911 there were 120,000. In the early 1900s as many as 15,000 immigrants a day poured into

Ellis Island, the gateway to New York City and a new life, First they had to face a battery of inspectors, interpreters, doctors, nurses, clerks, agents of aid societies and not least conmen and swindlers, making boastful promises for a modest down-payment. Pure bedlam ensued.

What was the procedure like? An immigrant recalled being asked this question many times. His response was just four words: "din, confusion, bewilderment, madness!" A doctor held a piece of chalk. Diagnosis was instant. Beware a mark: H for suspected heart disease, F for facial rash that may mask an unpleasant disease, L for limp that might be a symptom of rickets, or other form of undernourishment and E for a type of eye disease, or worse still degeneration that impaired working ability. Next was confronting the immigration inspector. "Who paid your passage, ever been to prison, can you read and write and, do you have a job waiting? It was a catch as the Contract Labour Law forbade signing up abroad.

About 80% made it to a promised land paved with gold. Their destination was invariably the Lower East side to an already overcrowded tenement block - but they were free with a new life ahead in this land of self-made opportunity. The ethos, values, culture, mind-set, system and approach to immigration in the USA was in striking contrast to Britain. In America it was about forging a destiny and a new life, offering hope and opportunity, with a national spirit of enterprise and get-up and go, laying the foundations of the most powerful nation on earth in economic and, later, military terms.

Engraved on a tablet on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbour is a poem by wealthy and erudite Emma Lazarus. Entitled the *New Colossus*, it represents the America immigrants dreamt of. Part of it reads:

"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

The Founding father, and inspiration of modern Zionism, Theodor Herzl died in 1904. He felt strongly that anti-Semitism was endemic in European society. "We are one people and subject to one fate.....we shall take what is given us." The two tectonic plates were British imperialism and small-nation nationalism. Chaim Weizmann, born in a ghetto in poverty in southern Russia in 1874, came to Britain and worked at Victoria University, Manchester.

On the eve of the 1906 general election he met the Tory Prime Minister. In such moments a few carefully selected words had to convey real meaning. "Mr Balfour, if you were offered Paris instead of London, would you take it?" Balfour was startled, "But London is our own!" Weizmann responded, "Jerusalem was our own when London was a marsh." Balfour stared at him intently. "Are there many Jews who think like you?" Weizmann responded, there are millions of Jews like me, whom you will never see, unable to speak for themselves. A brief conversation left an indelible impression. "It is curious; the Jews I meet are quite different," said a reflective Prime Minister. "Mr Balfour, you meet the wrong kind of Jews."

### **Keeping up Appearances**

Many upper and middle classes, Victorian in outlook, values and judgements, clung to wealth and privilege with a new found status for new lower middle classes. Yet, the Edwardian era is characterised by a desire to break-away from old traditions and conformity into a far freer atmosphere. The propertied and wealthy began to feel uneasy with a sense their time might

soon be up with a need to move with times. The new century had brought with it a wind of change, whilst lower middle classes felt threatened by those aspiring from below.

Religion, decency and social and political stability were under threat and perhaps the country too as Queen Victoria's death heralded a demise of the old order, especially in government. The swathe of middle classes, and especially upper classes, might denounce anything too new in ideas and the arts, whether theatre, fine art or creative design. This applied to family too observed J. B. Priestley; a rebellious remark or look maybe, or worse still open revolt and a clash between generations. Swift and intolerant reprisals to anything deemed risqué might mean censorship, not always through outrage but insecurity.

Intellectuals shared a common platform, hoping to attract a cause or different view, wishing to open up debate and perhaps transform society. New literary prophets such as H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw epitomised this view. So did Sidney and Beatrice Webb and also philosophers such as G.E. Moore and William James who inspired, if not urged an antidote to conventional thinking. Those with extravagant if not frivolous wealth appeared complacent, at least outwardly, aware that a long Indian Summer had to come to an end sometime and that an unpredictable winter may follow. For working classes, long hours, low pay and job insecurity focused minds, rather than unease about the future.

Gradations existed above lowest middle classes, characterised by private or earned income, and by occupation, whether surgeons, physicians or solicitors within the professional elite, or merchants or manufacturers. The disparity was apparent in size, location, and style of house and by the number of servants. Sons might go to minor public schools and daughters to a boarding school, even Cheltenham, or they were taught privately.

For J.B. Priestley, the highest echelon of upper middle classes oozed with snobbery, anxious to mix with those in even higher society, at ease with nobility and the land gentry, otherwise known as the County set. Their cricketing world was of gentlemen rather than players and a distinct preference for rugby rather than soccer, associated more with the working classes. Below this group lay the overwhelming majority of middle classes, for Priestley comprising about 80%. They were, for the most part, solid, complacent and satisfied with their lifestyle, deeply suspicious of others and anxious to defend that what they had.

About a quarter of the population in most towns might be classed lower middle class. Most shopkeepers, office workers, superior factory foremen, and those in basic professional roles such as teachers, commercial travellers, owners of small businesses and craftsmen came into this bracket. They earned £150 to £500 a year, rather than well over £1,000 for those in the higher reaches. Priestley's father, a school headmaster, earned £350 a year in what was a solidly middle class home life, especially being articulate and having important connections. Nearer £500 a year, one servant might be employed or at least a char.

A family ritual was Thursday Baking Day, Friday house-cleaning and Monday washing with no coffee morning. Many lived in terraced houses or, more ambitiously, in a semi detached small villa. Most emerged from working classes, only after a hard struggle. The great fear was of sliding back if circumstances changed. Frugal, timid and respectable characterised their lives rather than the perceived reckless and improvident lives of working classes and those well above their material and social status.

In 1904, the parents of J.B. Priestley bought a new terrace house in a suburb of Bradford. Meals, were taken in the kitchen rather than front room, reserved for invited guests when "a colossal Yorkshire" high tea would be taken, rather than the main meal mid-day. The back

room, a sanctuary, housed a piano. Self-discipline and sacrifice was expected. As a child, in more boisterous or belligerent moments, expect the retort, 'what might neighbours think!' Manners and morals were emphasised - and enforced.

Between Christmas and New Year "uproarious parties" were held. Far more was spent on these than presents. Several holidays were taken each year, staying in boarding houses, not hotels. Money was found for books, theatre and concerts, at the expense often of domestic appliances. There were accepted limits. Parents knew what they could and couldn't afford, determined to give their offspring a head start in life.