

## End of an Era

### The Age of Philanthropy

Philanthropy was the new humanitarianism, seeking to direct intellectual and social energies, to improve quality of life for the disadvantaged masses. Much derived from the evangelical movement and other organisations and institutions whose often strident campaigns focused on improving social conditions, such as soup kitchens, Ragged Schools for street urchins and care of the destitute. Evangelists urged women to take up the cause, exemplified by Hannah More extolling the benefits of giving up a just a little precious time to help others, thereby saving the nation from social upheaval. This reflected the spirit of the Victorian era.

Such worthy causes tugged at consciences and the wallets and purses of the wealthy, none more than Angela Burdett-Coutts, grand-daughter of Thomas Coutts, the founder of a bank bearing his name. Her diverse philanthropic projects spread far and wide from new housing development in Bethnal Green, provision of a drying closet and basic essentials at Scutari, at the request of Florence Nightingale, the funding of Ragged Schools and Urania Cottage for fallen women, to support for founding The Royal Marsden, the specialist cancer hospital, and provision of water fountains. The most famous, Greyfriars Bobby in Edinburgh, has a Skye terrier perched on its pinnacle, waiting forlornly for return of his master. Less well known is her support to relieve starvation in Ireland during the famine and revival of a flagging fishing industry. This heralded a modern approach to charity by giving the tools, not just handouts.

Thomas Barnardo enrolled as a trainee doctor at The Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel, in 1866 at the age of 21, with the intention of becoming a medical missionary in China. Soon cholera swept the city, killing 3,000 people, leaving families destitute. Thousands of children slept on the streets in the East End where overcrowding, bad housing, poverty, disease and unemployment were constant companions. The next year he set up a Ragged School, and in 1870 his first home for the destitute in Stepney. Here, boys could train in carpentry, metal work and shoe-making. One boy, nicknamed Carrots, was turned away as the home was full. Two days later he was found dead from malnutrition and exposure to the elements. Barnardo immediately erected a sign: "No Destitute Child Ever Refused Admission." By the time of his death, in 1905, he had founded 96 homes, caring for more than 8,500 children.

Catherine Gladstone, wife of William, was much involved in philanthropy, in relieving distress and poverty. A notice on workhouse gates caught her eye: 'Take Note The Causal Wards Are All Full.' She acquired a disused slaughterhouse in Newport Market just behind Leicester Square and set up a refuge, opening in 1864. One hundred iron cots awaited the destitute, glad of coffee and bread and a bed for a night, rather than sleeping under railway arches or on a pavement. The overflow slept on the floor of the refuge. A Times appeal for donations, enabled a girls unit to open later. Catherine Gladstone also started an industrial school for boys who could learn music too. Those with potential progressed to a military band.

With the onset of the American Civil War, Catherine spent time in the depressed cotton towns around Manchester. She opened soup kitchens and provided much needed relief in London Hospital, Whitechapel, where Barnardo continued to work, witnessing the last major cholera outbreak in London. Catherine purchased Woodford Hall, a former stately home near Epping Forest, turning this into a convalescent home. Gradually, this type of location grew out of fashion, in favour of the salubrious surroundings of the seaside with fresh sea breezes and

invigorating air. She too looked after waifs and orphans, some of whom were housed in the Dower House of Hawarden, the impressive home of William and Catherine.

When at Harrow, Lord Ashley observed drunken men carrying a pauper's coffin. It contained the body of child. There were no mourners and the sad event had a profound effect on a 10 years old Lord Ashley. In 1842 he was instrumental in passing the Mines Act that excluded women, girls and boys under 10 from any underground working. Conditions were appalling. Young children were attached by chain and girdle to trucks, dragging these to the mine-shaft entrance, crawling on all fours beneath extremely low seam roofs.

In 1845 Lord Ashley secured passage of the Lunacy Act, treating the insane as "persons of unsound mind," rather than as social outcasts. In 1847 he helped to reduce the working day in mills to 10 hours. In 1851, on the death of his father, Lord Ashley succeeded to the title of 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury. During his 39 years as president of the Ragged School Union, he enabled 300,000 destitute children to be educated. Close to the west door of Westminster Abbey is a statue in his honour. Unveiled in 1888, three years after his death, the inscription reads: "Endeared to his countrymen by a long life spent in the cause of the helpless and suffering: Love-Serve." This was a fitting tribute to man dedicated to the cause of social improvement for those, by circumstance, less fortunate in society.

Quite apart from founding the National Trust, Octavia Hill was a social entrepreneur whose legacy survives from housing, philanthropy and the arts to feminism, conservation and social reform. Her grandfather, Thomas Southwood Smith, was a leading public health reformer in early Victorian Britain, and showed how poor housing and bad sanitation blighted life. He made a powerful impression. So did Octavia's father, heavily into radical politics, and also a lecture by Charles Kingsley on the role of women in improving the lives of the poor. Her aim was to give the poor a foothold on life and to inculcate qualities of determination and self-reliance, echoing Samuel Smiles. By 1874 Octavia Hill had 15 housing schemes with around 3,000 tenants. Her work also involved converting buildings for concerts and other events. Impatient and dictatorial, she had much in common with Florence Nightingale. It was how to get things done in a man's world such as insisting tenants paid on time and not tolerating anti-social behaviour.

### **Victorian Values – Myth or Reality**

Many charities felt their efforts should concentrate on virtues of self-help and individualism, espoused by economists and moral philosophers such as Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and James Wilson. Meanwhile, the bugle of Samuel Smiles trumpeted, "Heaven helps those who help themselves." Octavia Hill pulled no punches in a 1890 "*Letter to Fellow Workers*" of the Charity Organization Society. "We have made many mistakes with our aims; eaten out the heart of the independent, bolstered up the drunkard in his indulgence, subsidised wages, discouraged thrift and assumed that many of the ordinary wants to a working man's family must be met by your wretched and intermittent doles." The message was clear. The poor should help themselves, with firm encouragement and a stated expectation to do so.

The missive was not lost on young William Lever who received a copy of Smiles book on his sixteenth birthday. It was Lever's guiding philosophy for Port Sunlight. Worrying Smiles was his belief that well-intentioned philanthropists, and the providers of charity, might erode the motivation and drive of recipients to accept responsibility for their own lives. Diligent toil had a moral imperative too. Ford Madox Brown's painting, entitled *Work* (1865), spelt out

the work ethic with the inscription, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." The message was clear. Charity was only for the deserving poor unable to work.

By the end of the century, philanthropy was no longer seen as a panacea but social stimulus to help people forge a better life. For those seeking trading and commercial opportunities in Africa, the message was taken literally. A novel approach to the problems of unemployment and urban overcrowding was suggested by General William Bramwell Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. In 1890 he published *Darkest England*, and proposed setting up overseas colonies where the willing, persuaded and compliant, would learn craft skills. At one stroke, this would overcome the problem of the 'waste element,' transported overseas and far out of sight, much like the way we try to export toxic waste today.

This prompted a notion the solution lay in Empire by encouraging emigration to restrain the tide of poverty. Not only did John Ruskin support William Booth, though for slightly different reasons, but so did Cecil Rhodes: grand visionary, advocate of Empire, firm promoter of the English Language and all things British. Imperial expansion and settlement offered was in part a solution to dire physical problems in Britain. The contention was it represented the release valve to a better life, conveniently out of sight and out of mind. It was an ingenious way to overcome social and economic pressures. Today, some might regard this as a form of social cleansing. Others may view this as the opportunity to escape famine in Ireland and Highland clearances in Scotland to emigrate to the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand amongst other countries.

Some thought differently. They believed that greater imperial effort should be directed to needs of indigenous peoples and their prevailing poverty. Gaining support and momentum was the belief that the British had a duty to dominate the world's lesser civilizations. Only the British could lift people out of a feudal, if not barbaric existence, into a more civilized society. Victorian values were inextricably linked, not just with self-help, hard work, thrift, sobriety and religious observance, but Empire in a desire to replicate these attributes.

For government and entrepreneurs, Christian missionaries were a lynchpin in the expansion of British influence in Africa, though not India. They were unwitting conduits in the form of Trojan horse peacemakers for trade and commerce. Besides, no financial burden fell on the British taxpayer. Little wonder then that the efforts of religious societies had the support of Her Majesty's Government, members of Parliament and not least HM Treasury.

A Christmas edition of the Manchester Guardian in 1895 contended, "The world must be a better place for the underprivileged many," but the urban poor remained poor as swathes of Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants came to London, Leeds, Liverpool and anywhere that offered a new life in escaping pogroms in Russia, Lithuania and Poland. Flooding into the major cities and towns caused even greater overcrowding and urban misery.

Many children didn't have access to formal schooling prior to 1870, or if they did for a limited amount of time per week, only to leave at a very young age. It was not only philanthropists, altruistic politicians, and those beating the drum for reform such as Chartists, who valued education. The British public did too, yearning for the opportunity to educate their children for a more positive future and a better life than they experienced. Religion served a useful purpose as Sunday schools helped to inculcate moral values and enable children to improve their reading and writing. Often understated is that illiterate adults were beneficiaries too.

Further education was pioneered in major cities with Mechanics Institutes. The first was in Edinburgh "to address societal needs by incorporating fundamental scientific thinking and

research into engineering solutions.” Opening in 1821, it was rapidly followed by Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London and Manchester that later became UMIST. By mid-century there were over 700 Mechanics Institutes, with some becoming public libraries following the 1850 Act.

Not only were generous donations given in forming Institutes but time and expertise, such as at Manchester. On 7 April 1824 a meeting was convened in the Bridgwater Arms with a goal to provide adult education in science and technology. Eminent participants included scientist John Dalton, Sir Benjamin Heywood the banker, and William Fairburn, an engineer who had worked with Robert Stephenson. The great and the good gave not only money but time and, crucially, expertise. Soon the range of education classes expanded to include more advanced versions of the 3Rs as well as languages, music and a host of other subjects.

So, what do we make of much vaunted Victoria Values with connotations of hard work, thrift, discipline, piety, respect for elders, moral correctness, rectitude and self-help? Victorians, especially working classes, did work hard. They had to in order to survive, a characteristic predating this era. Thrift was not just a virtue but necessity. So was maintaining discipline at home as here were the future breadwinners. This applied to the workplace also as huge technical advances and mechanisation meant division of labour, greater productivity and targets too to remain competitive.

Perhaps the best we can say is the Victorian era experienced immense change, driven to a large extent by political, industrial, social and philanthropic action. As Jeremy Bentham said, what mattered was the greatest good of the greatest number. His legacy of Utilitarianism was adopted throughout the century. It had more to do with Victorian Pragmatism rather than Victorian Values.

### **Proud to be British**

The year 1889 was significant for a series of firsts. The first season of English league soccer ended with Preston North End winning both the Championship and FA Cup, without losing a game. The newly formed County Councils took up their powers, Jerome K Jerome published *Three Men in a Boat* and the Savoy Hotel, now complete with electric lights and constant hot water, opened its doors to the rich and famous. Society changed markedly over decades, not only in domestic life but entertainment, culture and the arts, now appreciated by the expanding middle classes, artisans, and working classes too with a few bob to spare.

Liverpool Royal Institution acquired 37 paintings, mainly early Italian and Dutch, donated by William Roscoe, lawyer, politician and philanthropist. The problem was providing a home for a growing collection. Construction of the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, was thanks to local brewer and publican, Andrew Barclay Walker who in 1873 donated £20,000.

Attendances reached a peak of over 2,000 a day, encouraging Waker to fund an extension costing £11,500 (well over £3 million today in total). The Pre-Raphaelites were immensely popular, helped by the purchase of *Dante's Dream* in 1881, *Isabella*, by Millais a few years later, and Holman Hunt's *Triumph of the Innocents* in 1891, depicting the escape to Egypt from the clutches of King Herod. His religious paintings and those of Burne-Jones were a reposte to Darwinism, and forceful views of Thomas Huxley, otherwise known as Darwin's Bulldog.

In 1889 Henry Tate, a Liverpool grocer who made his fortune as a sugar refiner, offered his substantial collection of British art to the nation. Not to be outdone by The Walker Gallery,

these included *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais and John Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott*. With no space in the National Gallery, the search began for a site and in 1892 the disused Millbank Penitentiary was chosen. Henry Tate stumped up the building cost of £80,000. The new gallery opened to the British public in 1897 to coincide with the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Liverpool contributed handsomely to a growing interest in art, including fine art. Other cities did too, such as Manchester with Sir Joseph Whitworth part funding the Whitworth Art Gallery, Christie Hospital and John Rylands library, housing an enormous rare book collection. Set in a neo-gothic building it opened to the public in January 1900.

A unique funding method for constructing the Royal Albert Hall was the brainchild of Prince Albert. Contributors were private patrons known as Members of the Corporation. In return for governing the Royal Albert Hall, for the nation's benefit they insisted, seats were acquired in return. The system continues to this day with 1,275 of the Halls 5,272 seats held. Formal opening was on 29<sup>th</sup> March 1871 by the Prince of Wales. Queen Victoria was too overcome with emotion to speak. Soon, the Royal Choral Society was formed and an array of national and international exhibitions held to promote the arts and sciences, and displays of a vast range of trades from medicine and sanitation to electric lighting, food & drink, and a parade of fashionable bicycles. Special crowd pleasers were the Sunday concerts with organ recitals and singers from Dame Nellie Melba to Adelina Patti. A special visitor on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1890 was Sir Henry Morton Stanley, enthralled an audience that included the Prince of Wales.

Healthcare improved greatly in Britain but, paradoxically, whilst longevity increased over the century, infant mortality rose too if only slightly. In 1899 it was 163 per thousand and 153 in 1840. Cleanliness next to Godliness was the mantra as a contaminated water supply, and inadequate drainage and sanitation, contributed not only to poor health but disease. Only in 1854 was the cause of cholera established by Dr John Snow. He refuted miasma theory of air-borne disease through poisonous vapours, but typhoid and tuberculosis remained. Only gradually did a better understanding evolve of germ theory and the development of bacteria.

Scarlet fever, rickets and rheumatic fever were common. Damp, squalid housing, poverty and ignorance of hygiene accounted for huge variations. In Bath, in working class homes, one child in two died before the age of 5, compared to just one in eleven in middle class homes. Even by 1900, in the most deprived parts of Liverpool, the figure was a staggering 509 per 1,000. Mrs Beeton gave much advice about infant feeding but traditional bottles harboured dangerous bacteria as they were difficult to clean. A porous cork, rubber teat and tubing enabled bugs to multiply. In spite of rapid advances in medicine, the home had hidden killers such as Shiels green paint, wallpaper containing arsenic and lead paint in toys.

Irrespective of class and living conditions, Tuesday 22 June 1897 was the most prominent calendar date of the decade, if not in the lives of people. It surpassed the Great Exhibition of 1851 and 1876 when Queen Victoria was declared Empress of India, eclipsing too her Golden Jubilee of 1887 that emphasised family. This festive occasion was unashamedly about Empire and Britain's standing in the world. The Government generously agreed to meet the entire cost, or rather the British taxpayer did. William Gladstone stayed away, disgusted by "the spirit of Jingoism dressed up as Imperialism" or "boastful pride" as The Times put it, a view not shared by the British Public. Britannia still ruled the waves.

The whole of the British Empire was on display in an atmosphere of celebration. Every major town and village held a party, topped by Manchester with its gigantic breakfast event for children. Thomas Lipton, the tea magnate, donated £25,000, beacons were lit, every

tenth prisoner in Hyderabad was to be released and the Prince of Wales hosted a banquet for London's most deserving poor. Huge VRI (Victoria Regina Imperatrix) wrought iron and glass emblems adorned streets awash with battalions of billboards advertising Coleman's Mustard, Bovril and Eno's Fruit Salts, a perfect remedy for excess.

An ecstatic Queen Victoria remarked, "No-one ever, I believe, has met with such an ovation as was given to me, passing through those six miles of streets," adding, "The cheering was quite deafening and every face seemed to be filled with real joy. I was much moved and gratified."

### **Roles & Representation in Society**

The autobiographical *Cassandra* by Florence Nightingale was published in 1854, just before the Crimean War. It was for Virginia Woolf "a scream of frustration" at the repressed lives of well educated middle and upper class women. A stereotype image was portrayed in novels such as *Middlemarch* by George Eliot and depicted in art at the Royal Holloway, Egham, and in the paintings of Edwin Long such as the *Babylonian Marriage Market*.

In 1859 The Langham Place Group of like-minded privileged women laid the foundations of the suffrage movement. In 1867 the National Society for Women's Suffrage was formed that in 1897 became the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett, active in the earlier movement. Countless debates had taken place but still no vote for women in the Reform Act of 1884 that still left 40% of men without the vote. It was time to step up action but in a peaceful way. Parliament was to be lobbied by petitions and marches to secure the vote for all women and thereby achieve a goal of representation. Once achieved, the ultimate aim of Millicent Fawcett was equality of the sexes.

In Bradford in 1893, the illegitimate and poor Keir Hardie and Ramsey MacDonald formed the Independent Labour Party. An intention was to bring the means of production under public ownership but that meant co-operation with other organisations. They aligned with trades unions, creating a Labour Representation Committee in 1900. MacDonald astutely formed a secret pact with Herbert Gladstone, son of William, for the Liberals to stand and hopefully win a seat in two member constituencies, but not oppose Labour for the second seat. Not until 1906 did the LRC make its presence felt, gaining 29 seats in the Liberal landslide, changing British politics forever.

### **A Nation in Mourning**

Queen Victoria, the longest reigning Monarch and Empire figurehead, died on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1901 at her sanctuary, Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. Edward VII pronounced, "After the sixth day of March it will not be desired, or expected, that the public should appear in deep mourning," but he did ask for a further period of six weeks half-mourning. The Times noted this "generous and enlightened concession." Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> February was decreed the official national day of public mourning.

As the funeral cortège left Osborne House, soon after 1:30 pm on Friday 1 February, massed bands played Chopin and Beethoven funeral marches. The cortège came to a halt alongside Royal Yacht Alberta. Impressively lining the route were 30 British battleships and cruisers, Hohenzollern bearing the Kaiser, the Queen's grandson, with three German military vessels representing France, Portugal and Spain. Meticulous planning was helped by Victoria clearly conveying her final wishes, including garments and memorabilia to be placed in the coffin, to

include Prince Albert's dressing gown. Invited guests at the Royal State Funeral included the Kaiser, Kings of Greece and Portugal, five crown princes, fourteen princes, two grand-dukes, one archduke, five dukes and an entourage of consorts.

A single bell tolled from a nearby church as the Alberta passed silently by HMS Victory and a military band struck up a funeral dirge. Alberta tied up at the Royal landing pier of Clarence Yard, Gosport, with its small private railway station. The 50 miles railway journey to London early on Saturday morning was solemn and silent. Those near the tracks removed their hats and bowed their heads. At least 1,000,000 people were expected to line the funeral route in London, more than the Diamond Jubilee. The funeral of Queen Victoria transcended class in this national outpouring of grief.

The Times reflected the mood, saying "the love of the Queen has become one of the great silent and abiding factors in our national life." The Standard was distraught. "There are few people who are not affected by a sense of personal bereavement and regret." Prior to the coffin arriving at Victoria Station all advertisements were obscured or removed. The Great Western Railway carriage, containing the coffin, no longer bore the distinctive chocolate and cream livery of God's Wonderful Railway. In accordance with Victoria's wishes everything was in white to portray a life of purity.

Saturday morning was chilly. Scudding low clouds eventually parted to reveal a pale blue sky as 20,000 troops assembled in Buckingham Palace Road. At the head of the cortège a gun carriage, drawn by eight pure white horses, conveyed Victoria's coffin. Another 30,000 troops lined the route for the slow march down the Mall to St James and Piccadilly. Vast, silent crowds compressed against the railings.

G. K. Chesterton, not noted for emotion and sentiment, described Victoria as "the noblest Englishwoman I have ever known." Overcome with grief he spent the day at home. The civic authorities had no plans to display flowers along the funeral route but Miss Etta Close, who lived in Belgravia, had an inspired idea to decorate every lamppost with an ornate wreath. A committee was formed, authorities badgered and target achieved by Wednesday with flowers piled high in a mews stable.

A carpet of deep purple was laid at Victoria Station as the kings, princes, grand dukes, and other nobility gathered together with diplomats, including Baron von Eckardstein, keeping an eye on 'sly old fox' Leopold II, King of Belgium, and anxious to stifle rapprochement between the Kaiser and the new King, Edward VII. Present too was Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, whose death would trigger World War 1, and Tsarevich Michael of Russia. Along with the British public they were witnessing the passing of an epoch as Europe entered a new dawn with increasing uncertainty. Britain felt rather isolated, perhaps more concerned with protecting an Empire but was realising now the world was changing and rapidly.

Just before eleven o'clock the train pulled in. The coffin was placed on a gun carriage with Royal aides alongside. When the cortège reached St James's Street a white flag signalled the order for the funeral procession to formally begin. In Buckingham Palace Road all reserved tickets had gone on sale for two and a half guineas, rising to 10 guineas for a better view. This was cheap by comparison with Piccadilly where all front row seats had been sold for 25 guineas. By 8:00 am crowds were eight deep around Marble Arch but the crush was greatest in Hyde Park and the Mall where prime viewing points were taken the night before. Crowds, 60-100 deep in places, waited patiently as massed bands played Chopin's Funeral March and The Dead March from Saul. Behind the drum major, the foot

soldiers stretched back half a mile followed by generals and other top brass. Lord Roberts rode to and fro making sure his Army acquitted itself with supreme efficiency, dignity and pride for the passing of the Queen, and some might say early signs of Empire too.

At Paddington Station eight carriages of the Royal train were waiting. The coffin was lifted into a funeral carriage, each side panel draped in white satin and purple stripes. At 1:30 pm the train departed for the final journey to Windsor for the service at St George's Chapel. This was a cue for services to begin throughout Britain and for families to draw their blinds. In the evening the Royal family gathered around the coffin in silent tribute, broken only by the vocal accompaniment of Madame Albani. At last, Queen Victoria would be reunited with Prince Albert.

The Times echoed the feelings of a nation in mourning for a Monarch "left with naught but imperishable memories." Arnold Bennett mentioned "serene and cheerful" hordes of people but The Daily Chronicle next day begged to differ. "Such a silent (Saturday) night has not been seen in London within the memory of man." On the Monday, waving crowds gave the Kaiser a cheerful send-off at Charing Cross, but soon the bonhomie of lunch with the King at Marlborough House was forgotten. Frosty relations would quickly resume.

Withdrawn, and in mourning for many years, Queen Victoria engaged in public life in the late 1870s and 1880s. A consuming interest, given strong Imperial sentiments, was the British Empire and its influence and growth. It had been an age of unsurpassed achievement. Rule Britannia! For the Morning Post it was Full Steam Ahead but the Daily Chronicle was more nostalgic. "It seems as though we had bidden farewell to an era, the greatness of which we can barely gauge."

Whispers about John Brown, the Queen's personal servant, soon resurfaced. Was it not true that, from the day of his death in 1883, the Queen wore the ring his mother had given him on the third finger of her right hand until her own death, and had a life-size statue of Brown built at Balmoral? The British public liked nothing better than a sensational news story that was almost guaranteed with the accession of the Prince of Wales and coronation in August 1902 as Edward VII. He was now King of the United Kingdom, Emperor of India and King of British Dominions and Colonies. The Queen was dead, though as Edward remarked with the Royal Yacht standard still at half-mast, "but the King lives."

True to his word, Edward went through Buckingham Palace with a fine toothcomb, flinging out debris accumulated over half a century, as if trying to erase memories. The old order had gone and Edward would do things his way. Aristocratic government was ebbing slowly away. A new era beckoned. A mood of optimism masked qualms that Britain's pre-eminent place in the world might be under threat economically, with an over-extended Empire also. Even more concerning, in the echelons of Government, was increasing instability in Europe.