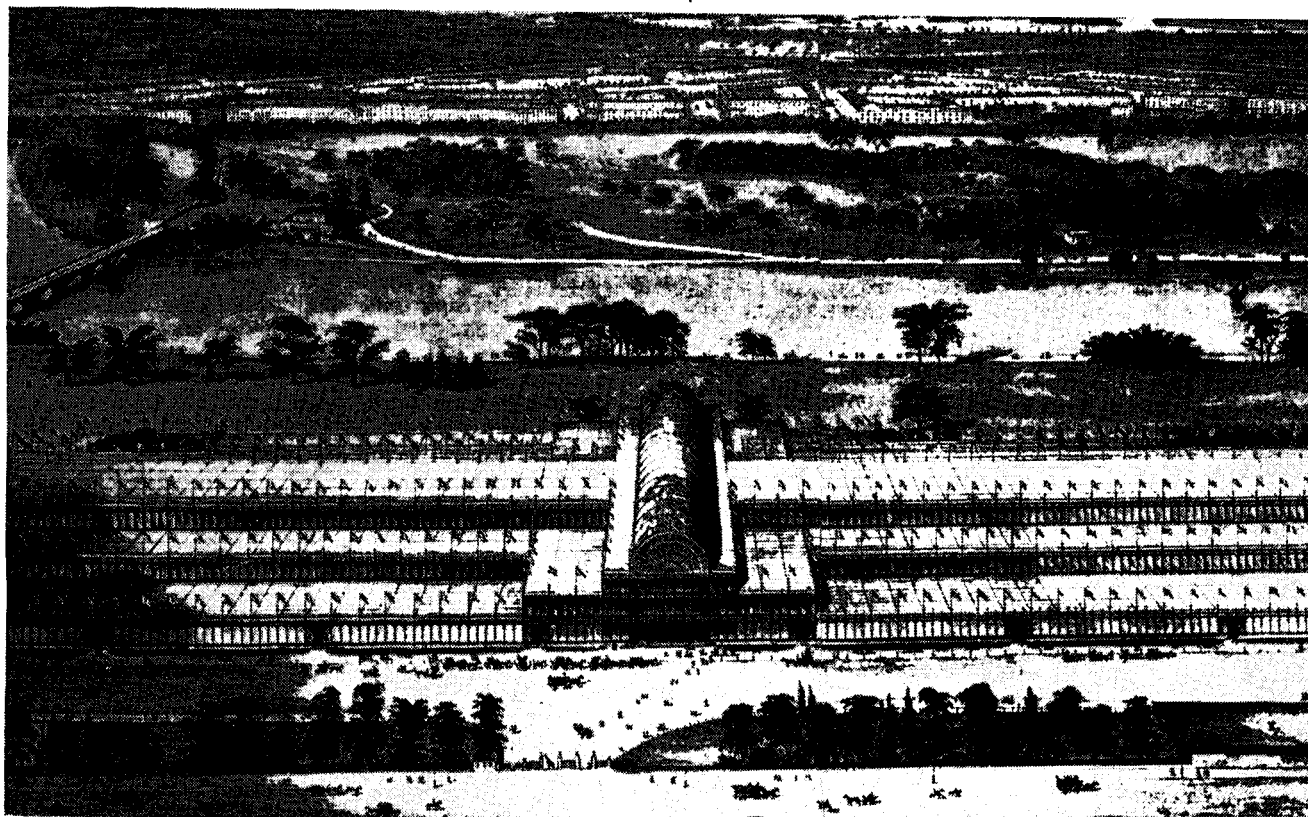


## The Great Exhibition of 1851.



A charming view of the Great Exhibition with the Serpentine and Bayswater Road in the background.

A LECTURE ON THE GREAT EXHIBITION of 1851 given by Mr. H. L. Bryant Peers to the British College of Nurses at 19, Queen's Gate, Kensington, S.W.7, on Friday afternoon February 22nd, 1952.

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As we look back on the last year and the Festival of Britain and we ask ourselves whether it was worth it, we might do well to look even further behind us—to the Great Exhibition of 1851.

The two Exhibitions with 100 years between them were totally different undertakings. The Exhibition of 1851 for example was an International Exhibition and indeed the very first International Exhibition. The Exhibition of 1951 was a British Exhibition and dealt with the great achievement of the British People over the years. Another difference was that the Great Exhibition of 1851 was one Exhibition housed in one building in one place. The Exhibition of 1951 took the form of a Festival and extended to all parts of Great Britain and even included a ship—the *Campania* which went from port to port. Even in London the Exhibition was in many places, the main part of course was the South Bank site of some 27 acres and as many buildings, then came the Housing Section "Lansbury" which commemorated the great Statesman, George Lansbury. We had the Science Section at South Kensington, the Book Exhibition, Music Festivals and of course the great venture in Battersea Park—the Pleasure Gardens. Perhaps one difference will be that in hard cash, the Great Exhibition of 1851 made a profit of £186,000. This money was very cleverly used and in fact the Royal Commission still exists and from the Exhibition Offices in Exhibition Road excellent work is still being carried on with the accrued profits of that fine venture of 101 years ago.

There has of course been a great deal of romantic nonsense talked about the Great Exhibition of 1851. Much of it is

half fact. It has, for example, been generally accepted that the idea of this project came originally from the husband of Queen Victoria—Prince Albert. Whilst it is quite true to say that Albert gave it his overwhelming support and worked extremely hard to make it the success it was, it was not his idea.

The idea came from a certain Henry Cole, and we first hear of Cole as one of the six Assistant Keepers at the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane. In fact, he was largely responsible for the building of the present Record Office. He also re-organised the Post Office, and edited several periodicals.

Cole visited Paris in 1849, and visited their Exhibition, and we are told that on June 27th in the same year Cole saw Prince Albert at Buckingham Palace and persuaded him to back an International Exhibition. They met again two days later and during these interviews the idea became a reality.

Various sites were suggested, notably the great Courtyard of Somerset House, but it was finally agreed, not without considerable misgivings and not without the intervention of the Queen, that it should be held in Hyde Park.

A Royal Commission was appointed and sat for the first time on January 11th, 1850. The site was finally chosen, about 20 acres alongside the Kensington Road, easy of access and fairly bare of trees. Plans for the building were invited and 245 plans were submitted from architects of the world. The Commission took a month to digest them and finally turned them all down.

During all this time a considerable body of opinion began to form in opposition to the Exhibition and Lord Brougham in the House of Lords said, "British people are *indeed* about to make an exhibition of themselves"; and he went on to say that he marvelled that English traders would subscribe money to such a foolish scheme.

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