



front cover

William Powell Frith 1819–1909
Derby Day (detail) 1856–8



The Victorians



Notes for Teachers

by Susie Hodge and Miquette Roberts

Introduction

Tate Britain is a treasure trove for those interested in studying Victorian art. Teachers and students of all key stages will find, for instance, Pre-Raphaelite masterpieces relevant to their studies in the permanent collection, including the most famous and best loved of them all, JE Millais' *Ophelia* 1851–2. In this pack we provide some of the social context of the period and relate Victorian inventions and conditions of life to paintings and sculpture in the Tate collection. *The Victorians* can be used as background reading to the temporary exhibition *Exposed: The Victorian Nude*, which opens with the Centenary Development in November 2001, but is not designed specifically as a guide to this show. Rather it is intended as a long-lasting resource to help teachers, of history and english as well as art, and their students, to make best use of the Victorian art on display whenever they visit the gallery. With this in mind we provide a ready reckoner timeline at the end of the pack with the dates of historical events, famous Victorian art objects and well-known novels.

Using the pack

Ideas for student discussion or making are outlined at the bottom of each page.

Why should anyone be interested in the Victorians in the twenty-first century?

No one who has paid any attention to the particular features of the present era will doubt for a moment that we are living in a period of most wonderful transition.

Prince Albert, 1851.

Prince Albert was speaking during the year of the Great Exhibition, which he had helped to organise. Under the metal and glass roof of the Crystal Palace, examples of manufactures from all over the world had been assembled to celebrate the prolific creativity of Queen Victoria's reign. It was a long reign lasting from 1837 to 1901, which we remember for its larger than life personalities ranging from the writers Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope to the Liberal politician WE Gladstone, the chemist Michael Faraday and the painter, sculptor and President of the Royal Academy, Frederic Lord Leighton. Many of the inventions we now take for granted, such as the telephone, electricity, the typewriter and the gramophone, were created during this period.

The richness and complexity of Victorian life was reflected in its art. We look at pictures and sculpture produced then to make discoveries about the way the people lived – about the elaborately confining clothes worn by women, for instance. "Thank goodness we don't have to wear all these layers any longer," we may think, feeling ourselves remote from those unenlightened times. On the other hand, the tensions and sufferings of life explored in Victorian painting were not all so different to those we experience today. And Victorian inventions have benefited us, in art as much as any other aspect of life. It is thanks to the Victorians that we have oil paints in tubes as well as a wide range of colours. They experimented with the new chemical dyes to create new pigments. It is the combination of what we regard as outdated and are glad to have removed from our lives, with what is innovatory, that is explored in this booklet. Prince Albert was right. His era was transitional. This is why we are still interested in it today.

Postcard showing the Rotunda of the Tate Gallery 1897



If you are focussing on the Victorians at Primary school, you and your students could approach Tate Britain as detectives searching for evidence of the past.

- From the bottom of the steps leading up to original entrance to Tate Britain, look up at the imposing facade designed by Sidney Smith. How do you think he wanted you to feel as you entered this temple of art? Search for as much as possible of the original Tate Gallery within the much expanded current building. How do you think the architect of Sir Henry Tate's building intended it to affect us?
- Move through to the rotunda (see photograph left). In its centre there was originally a fountain surrounded by palm trees. Look up at the dome above you. When it was being restored some years ago, a message was discovered from the plasterers who worked on its construction asking future visitors to think of them now that they are dead. Also look at the rooms to the east and west of the rotunda. Believe it or not, in 1897 the gallery was not much bigger than this.

The original Tate Gallery was a Victorian landmark

Public art galleries are a Victorian invention. Between 1845 and 1897 they were opening all over Britain in cities like Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham and very many more. In London, the National Gallery had opened in 1824, thirteen years before Victoria came to the throne, in the Pall Mall home of collector John Julius Angerstein. The Tate Gallery, also built to receive a private collection, did not open until 1897. Sir Henry Tate, whose fortune was made from refining sugar, had offered the nation his collection and a building to house it. Designed by Sidney Smith, the Tate Gallery on Millbank was opened in 1897 by the then Prince of Wales. This is how writer and art historian Frances Spalding described the opening in *The Tate. A History*:



Albert Moore 1841–93
Blossoms 1881

- See how many of Henry Tate’s original paintings students can find. They will not all be on display but you should be able to find some out of this list. (You can ask at the Information Desk which of them are on display). Think about his taste – what qualities do you think he prized in art?

Look for: Frank Holl’s *Hush* and *Hushed* 1877;
JE Millais’ *Ophelia* 1851, *The Vale of Rest* 1858, *The Knight Errant* 1870, *The North West Passage* 1874 and *The Order of Release* 1852;
JW Waterhouse’s *The Lady of Shalott* 1888 and *Consulting the Oracle* c1884;
Luke Fildes’ *The Doctor* exh1891;
Sir W Q Orchardson’s *The First Cloud* 1887;
Albert Moore’s *Blossoms* 1881

“At four in the afternoon on 21 July 1897, the Prince of Wales arrived at the steps of the Gallery accompanied by various members of the royal family...At the entrance Henry Tate presented the Prince of Wales with a handsome gold key and requested him to unlock the Gallery, while Mrs Tate offered the Princess of Wales a bouquet of orchids in the shape of the Prince of Wales’s feathers...Over three weeks later, on 16 August 1897, the Gallery opened for the first time to the public. From ten o’clock in the morning a stream of people poured in. Newspaper reports noticed that though ‘carriage folk’ came in considerable numbers, the majority of the visitors were working men and women from the immediate neighbourhood.”

Many paintings collected by Henry Tate have remained prime favourites with the public. They include JE Millais’ *Ophelia* 1851–2 and JW Waterhouse’s *The Lady of Shalott* 1888.

John Everett Millais 1829–96
Ophelia 1851–2



- Do all of these works tell a story? What other features are important? Do you think narrative painting is outdated? Look at the most recent work in the gallery to help you decide. Can you find any contemporary stories or is meaning expressed differently today?
- After visiting Tate Britain, students can imagine they are Victorians, who have just been to the newly opened Tate Gallery. They should choose either to be ‘carriage folk’ or working men and women from the neighbourhood and write about their experiences to a relative in the country, saying what they thought of the building (were they impressed or did they think it was just too grand?) and which paintings and sculpture they liked best.

Victorian Britain: A Heyday for Artists

It was a good time in the late nineteenth century to be a painter – at least for those who were successful. Many artists certainly became prosperous on a scale unknown before, living in grand houses with spacious studios. Frederic Leighton became a Lord, the only artist ever to receive this honour, but many others were knighted and, like Leighton, were eventually buried with full honours in St Paul's Cathedral. If you walk through the Holland Park area of London today, you can see some of their magnificent houses and visit Leighton's house and studio at 12 Holland Park Road, which is preserved as a museum. You will find that he devoted very little space to everyday living requirements, concentrating on public spaces like his studio which contained a reproduction of the Parthenon frieze, and a magnificent Arab Hall, adjacent to the entrance. High up on one of its walls is a balcony from which concealed viewers could gaze down into the hall below. The Arab Hall is decorated with tiles the artist had collected on his travels as well as some designed by his contemporary, William de Morgan.

Of course not all artists became as rich and famous as Frederic, Lord Leighton. Most of them had to work hard to attract patrons by exhibiting their work in public exhibitions and galleries. Many had to teach to supplement their work. Even notable artists, such as David Cox (1783-1859), advertised lessons, albeit at the then expensive rate of seven shillings an hour.

William Powell Frith 1819–1909
Derby Day (detail) 1856–8



Why do you think Victorians liked visiting art galleries? Remember that they had no television, no computers and no cinemas. Does this help you to understand why they enjoyed standing in front of Victorian narrative paintings for a long time, gazing at all the details?

Art Exhibitions

Victorians invented the art exhibition as we know it today and going to art exhibitions became a feature of Victorian life. The Royal Academy, established in 1768 and still both popular and successful today, held annual exhibitions of contemporary art. During the Presidency of Sir Charles Eastlake from 1850–65, exhibiting at the RA became the testing ground for artists to achieve critical recognition and financial success. In 1868 the Academy moved from the National Gallery to its present site on Piccadilly. Private dealers also held shows for the most successful artists whose work had been shown at the RA and loan exhibitions began to travel the country.

Robert Braithwaite Martineau 1826–69
The Last Day in the Old Home 1862



- Find one of the following paintings:
 - WP Frith *Derby Day* 1856–8
 - RB Martineau *The Last Day in the Old Home* 1862
 - Augustus Egg *Past and Present* 1858
 - WH Hunt *The Awakening Conscience* 1853
- Working in pairs, imagine that you are wealthy Victorians with plenty of time at your disposal. Most of your life is spent with people of your own class. These paintings are one of the only ways you can find out how the other half lives. What do you notice? Take it in turns to point things out. Look really hard, trying not to miss any detail. Try to work out what each detail contributes to the overall meaning of the work.
- Which works comment on social evils? Do we still consider them evils today?
- Using a viewfinder (a square inch hole cut in a piece of card), isolate any one detail in the work. Sketch it in your notebook. As you work, you will begin to notice things you had not seen before. What do you notice in your chosen detail as you work?

Patrons

The rapidly growing affluence of the middle classes meant that they were able to buy and commission art. They acquired the habit of collecting, often hanging pictures on their walls from eye-level to ceiling. (The double rows of paintings in the *Art and Victorian Society* room at Tate Britain evokes some of that atmosphere but it is much less crowded than it would have been then – you can actually find some bare patches of wall!!)

These merchants, bankers and industrialists provided the economic foundations on which the Victorian art world was built. From the start, like Henry Tate, they preferred to buy modern works, believing it their patriotic duty to buy only British-based art. (There are of course still many collectors of contemporary British art – Charles Saatchi is perhaps the most famous example – and institutions such as Tate continue to collect it.) Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were also great patrons of contemporary British artists and encouraged public support for art, design and education.

Academic Training

Most artists underwent a rigorously academic art school training. In his autobiography, WP Frith described how, as a student, he first had to copy his teacher's outline drawings of hands and feet taken from the antique. The next stage was to conquer light and shade. Frith recalled the strain of spending six weeks shading a drawing of a white ball on a pedestal. Painting in oil from the imagination was only permitted after years of drawing, copying and mastering perspective. As a result, students like Frith were inclined to lose their enthusiasm for art and to become tired and bored.

Artists Groups

In Britain as well as the rest of Europe, artists' groups evolved, especially among students. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Newlyn School are the best known from the time. Art clubs, such as Chelsea and Dover Street were also products of the Victorian era.

Stanhope Forbes arrived in the Cornish fishing village of Newlyn in 1884. Like Frank Bramley, another Newlyn painter, he wanted to live on the spot so that he would grow to understand ordinary people in their everyday settings and be able to paint them convincingly. He used village people as actors in imagined scenes. So, for example, nearly all the figures in *The Health of the Bride* 1889 were inhabitants of Newlyn but the scene depicted was not a real wedding breakfast but a carefully staged meal. Influenced by French artists like Jules Bastien Lepage, Newlyn painters adopted a square brush technique which deliberately blurred outlines, emphasising light and atmosphere and drawing attention to the medium of oil paint.



Frederic, Lord Leighton 1830–96
An Athlete Wrestling with a Python 1877

- Look for paintings such as *A Hopeless Dawn* 1888 by Frank Bramley and *The Health of the Bride* 1889 by Stanhope Forbes. Do the scenes look real? Is there anything to give away the fact that they were in fact imagined?
- What was it, do you think, that struck these painters about the way of life in this fishing community? Why do you think the wedding guests look so solemn? At the time, many people thought that workers in the country lived a simpler and better life than town dwellers. For a God fearing people, a wedding is predominantly a serious matter.
- Can you find the passages in which the artists have used a square brush? Sketch one of these areas using a wax crayon placed on its side.

In the gallery, secondary students could spend half an hour being a Victorian art student. Find a Victorian figure sculpture and draw an outline of a hand or a foot. Now start shading it so that it appears rounded and three dimensional like the original. What does the hand or the foot tell you about the figure as a whole? (This exercise should help you understand the importance of each element in sculpture. In Lord Leighton's *An Athlete Wrestling with a Python* 1877, for instance, the strain of the athlete's battle with the snake is reflected in the tension of the bulging veins in his feet.) Sketching part of a piece of sculpture is a useful exercise in careful observation but not if, like Frith, you have to do it every day for months and months.

Industry and Communications

The Victorian period was a time of great changes in industry. The new manufacturing processes and steam power made Britain the world’s richest trading nation. In 1892, three out of every four ships in the world were built in Britain. New mining methods meant that coal production shot up from 50 million tonnes in 1850 to over 150 million tonnes in 1890. Steel was also being made quickly and cheaply. The scale of big cities expanded rapidly and by the end of the century, London with its four and a half million inhabitants, was the largest city the world had ever seen. By the 1890s the British Empire was at the height of its power, ruling colonies all over the world. Some artists like Edward Lear and William Hodges had followed in the footsteps of earlier adventurous painters such as Johan Zoffany (see *Colonel Mordaunt’s Cock Match* c1784–6) in exploring far off countries and revealing their marvels to the public in watercolours, oils and photographs.

Communications were instantly enhanced when the first adhesive stamp, the Penny Black, went into use on 6 May 1840. Thanks to novelist Anthony Trollope who worked for the Post Office, the first letter boxes appeared in the streets in 1855. Roads and railroads had become more efficient and, by 1879, trains could average 96.5 kilometres an hour. A journey that would have taken twenty hours by stagecoach took under seven hours by train. In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone.

Many inventions, such as the railway network, the development of the camera and advances in colour printing, gave artists greater scope and opportunities. But developments which brought riches to some also brought poverty, overcrowding and slums to others. Sheffield and Birmingham doubled in population in thirty years and Manchester and Salford increased from 95,000 to 238,000. When Gustave Doré began his engravings of the capital city for *London – A Pilgrimage*, published in 1872, he was horrified by the suffering that he found there, worse even than Dante’s description of Hell in the *Inferno*, which was the last book he had illustrated. Very often it seems that painters tend to depict the rich while novelists like Dickens and Mary Gaskell evoke the life of the poor.

Rich and Poor

The contrast between rich and poor was a constant source of anxiety and serious-minded people longed for greater social justice. Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81) characterised the state of relations between Britain’s rich and poor in his novel *Sybil* 1845.

“Two nations: between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants in different planets; who are formed by different breeding, fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners and are not governed by the same laws.”

The trouble for would-be social realists was that artists’ wealthy patrons often did not want their social conscience pricked each time they looked at a painting hanging on one of the walls of their homes. Poverty was considered ugly and ugliness was not considered a suitable subject for art. DG Rossetti’s reaction to *Work* 1852–65 (Manchester City Art Gallery), by his friend Ford Madox Brown, was typical:

“I am beginning to doubt more and more, I confess, whether that excess elaboration is rightly bestowed on the materials of a modern subject – things so familiar to the eye that they can really be rendered thoroughly I fancy, with much less labour; and things moreover which are often far from beautiful in themselves.”

Find examples of travel to distant countries in painting and, if possible, photography.

- In your opinion, what features of this far-off spot have impressed the artist?
- Imagine yourself as a stay-at-home Victorian. How would you react to the image before you? Would it encourage you to travel or would it make you count the blessings of your familiar English setting?

How did artists react to poverty?

- Some of them shut their eyes to it and painted the rich at play (James Tissot *The Ball on Shipboard* c1874; Alma Tadema *A Favourite Custom* 1909)
- Some looked back to a golden age in the past (F Leighton *The Bath of Psyche* exh1890; A Moore *Blossoms* 1881)
- Some of them painted the contrast between rich and poor (WP Frith *The Derby Day* 1856–8; W Logsdail *St Martin in the Fields* 1888)
- Others painted the grim reality of poverty and sickness (Luke Fildes *The Doctor* exh1891; Frederick Walker *The Vagrants* 1867; Frank Holl *Hush* and *Hushed* both 1877)

Brown was a devotee of the writings of Thomas Carlyle, the most influential early Victorian writer on social problems. In *Work*, he was attempting a kind of graphic representation of Carlyle's social philosophy. The composition is crowded with figures symbolising the different classes of society, forms of work and contrasts between labour and idleness. On one level, it is a naturalistic looking representation of a busy, noisy Victorian street. At another level it is a social and political statement about the value of work to both the individual and society.

Poverty could be shown as something pleasant and inoffensive that aroused sympathy, but never as its grim reality. So in Logsdail's painting *St Martin in the Fields* 1888, a lone child flower seller is seen in the foreground. Behind her walks a wealthy child with her mother; both dressed in fur-trimmed coats. Compassion is provoked without harrowing the viewer.



Luke Fildes 1843–1927
The Doctor exh1891

What do secondary students feel about social realism? Do you think that poverty, sickness and death are suitable subjects for art? Think about the present day equivalent, horror films in which many people die in horrific catastrophes. Do you like viewing them? If so, why? Are there similarities between this kind of voyeurism and the death scenes favoured by Victorian audiences?

Health, sickness and death

Poverty, overcrowding and poor sanitation led to illness and death. Infant mortality was high, there were few medicines (and no antibiotics) and women frequently died in childbirth. One newborn child in six died and half the children that survived died of whooping cough or diphtheria. More than 31,000 died during an outbreak of cholera in 1832. Another big killer was tuberculosis, or consumption, as it was called. This was a long slow illness that killed rich and poor alike, but it was particularly highly infectious in overcrowded slums. In *Too Late* 1858, WL Windus shows a young man who has allowed his engagement to extend too long – his fiancée is dying of consumption and he is overcome by grief. This subject seems morbid to us and indeed it outraged the critic John Ruskin whose severe criticism of the painting led Windus to stop painting. Nonetheless the Victorian fascination with illness as a subject for art continued well into the twentieth century. Edvard Munch's *The Sick Child* 1907, in the Tate collection, is based on the memory of his sister dying from the same disease.

In Manchester in 1840, 57 children out of every 100 died before the age of five. Others grew up with crooked spines or crippled legs due to rickets, caused by a lack of vitamin D. As sickness benefit did not exist, if a working man fell ill it often meant destitution for himself and his family. The horrific proportions of child mortality lead to Disraeli's sarcastic claim in his novel *Sybil* 'Infanticide is practised as extensively and as legally in England as it is on the banks of the Ganges.'

It is difficult for us to understand why sickness was not considered ugly by the Victorians in the way that the dirt and tattered clothes of the poor were. Henry Tate commissioned Luke Fildes specially to paint *The Doctor* exh1891, paying £3,000 for it and it remains a very popular painting in Tate Britain today. It was a subject close to the artist's heart since his own first-born child had died in infancy. The painting was intended to be a tribute to the doctor whose care for the child had impressed the artist. At the time he painted it, Fildes was a well-known artist and many doctors begged to be allowed to model for the painting. Fildes refused them all, however, using a professional model.

Strange though it may seem, death has always been and remains a popular subject for art. GCSE and A-level students may have seen contemporary examples in the work of Damien Hirst and the Chapman brothers. While Luke Fildes and Edvard Munch painted dying children, Hirst presents us with evidence of the everyday butchery of animals, killed for us to eat.

- How do you react to these works? Are the Victorian examples more/less acceptable to you than works based on the events and social conditions of today? If so, why do you think this is?

Science versus Religion

Strong religious beliefs helped the Victorians to bear with the ever-present illness and suffering caused by poverty. It was a comfort to them to feel that a child who died, for example, would be likely to experience the happiness of an afterlife in heaven. In 1859, however, the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* led people like John Ruskin to question their previously deeply-held faith. Ruskin was not alone in feeling that, as a result of Darwin's argument, his whole system of belief lay in ruins around him. Darwin had challenged the Bible story of the Creation. The world, he said, had not been created in a week as the Bible stated, but had been gradually evolving over millions of years with its inhabitants constantly having to adapt to new conditions in order to survive. It was from this book that the phrase 'the survival of the fittest' came into being. According to Darwin's theories, the woman dying in *Too Late* and the child in *The Doctor* are just two examples of those who are too weak to survive. Painting pictures of them for stronger (and probably richer) people to contemplate could be seen as permitting the strong to exalt in their own superiority. Not surprisingly, the *Origin of Species* caused uproar in Victorian society: copies were burned and Darwin was denounced in churches. If the Creation is myth rather than fact, could any biblical 'facts' be trusted? Such reasoning was deeply upsetting to many Victorians like John Ruskin.

Travel and Improvements in Transport

Railways, steamships and omnibuses made travel faster and easier. The railway was the biggest single revolution of the nineteenth century and within a generation it had changed the face of Britain. In the 1830s and '40s, land all over the country was levelled for railway lines. Tunnels were bored through hills and viaducts were built over valleys. In 1841 the Great Western Railway, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806–59), joined London to Bristol. By 1855, there were over 13,000 kilometres of track across the country. Well before his death in 1851, JMW Turner had recorded the thrill of railway travel in *Rain, Steam and Speed* c1844 (National Gallery). He had been observed by a fellow traveller with his head thrust out of the carriage window to watch the countryside speeding by.

Euston station was designed in 1836 and King's Cross in 1852. St Pancras, built in 1850, had the widest span of iron and glass roofing in the British Isles. Travellers from every stratum of society were depicted in painstaking detail by WP Frith in *The Railway Station* (Paddington) 1862, (Egham, Royal Holloway College). The UK was divided into sections (as has recently happened again) which were run by different railway companies and the world's first underground railway opened in London in 1863 (the Metropolitan line). Electric trains began to replace the steam trains in the 1890s.

On the positive side, travel was faster and easier and the railways provided employment for thousands of people. Their pay was higher than that of farm workers. The negative side was that people were turned out of their homes without compensation to clear land for railway lines and in 1879, the Edinburgh to Dundee express plunged into the River Tay when the bridge collapsed during a high gale. All seventy passengers were drowned.

Better transport allowed artists to explore their own country as well as the Continent and their excitement at the developments made possible by new technology is reflected in the work of JMW Turner. When he first crossed the Channel in 1802, he went in a boat like the one with a large sail which is the focal point of *The Shipwreck* first exhibited in 1805. Long before he died in 1851, steam ships had replaced sailing boats and in many works Turner shows the new power triumphing over stormy weather.



Herbert Draper 1863–1920
The Lament for Icarus 1898

Find as many pictures as possible showing Victorians travelling. You will find, for instance, paintings of ships by both Turner and John Constable – who died in the year Victoria came to the throne. You may find WM Egley's *Omnibus Life in London* 1859 and Atkinson Grimshaw's *Liverpool Quay by Moonlight* 1887. There are also paintings by the American James A McNeill Whistler which include boats.

- Compare travel now and then. Unfortunately accidents did not stop in Victorian times and the underground was probably safer when it was new than it is now. Imagine that you have been transported by magic into the ship/carriage/omnibus that you see in the painting in front of you. Write about your journey, comparing your comfort and the length of the journey then with what it would be today. If you had the choice, when would you rather be alive?
- John Constable spent many hours recording the appearance of the clouds above him. He felt that the 'empty' sky was as important a part of a landscape as the crowded earth below. Look at his *Cloud Study* 1822, or at any of the skies in his landscapes, to see how he structures

them and makes them full of interest. Can you imagine how he would have felt if he had been able to look down on the clouds from an aeroplane? Write a letter to him telling him what the clouds look like seen close to.

- Although the aeroplane is a twentieth century invention, Victorians were able to explore the skies in hot air balloons. Turner was very excited by accounts of these and may even have shifted the viewpoint of his paintings to give the impression that he was looking down on the earth from high in the sky. Look for example at *England: Richmond Hill, on the Prince Regent's Birthday* 1819.
- Sometimes these ascensions went wrong and people were hurt. Perhaps such mishaps may have been present in Herbert Draper's mind, as well as his classical source, when he painted *The Lament for Icarus* 1898. Victorian inventors were as ambitious as Icarus in their attempts to conquer the world. Do you like this painting or is it too depressing? What do you like/not like about it?

Changes in Painting Materials and Methods

Watercolours had been available since the late 1700s. Pigments were ground with a gum arabic binder and honey or glycerine was added to prevent the paint from cracking. The paste was poured on to a slab of granite, left to harden then cut up into cubes. These portable paints gave artists great scope for travelling and painting. You can see Turner's pocket book containing watercolour cubes in one of the rooms in the Clore Gallery. By the late 1800s, oil paints were available in metal tubes, making them as portable as watercolours. This enabled artists to leave their studios and paint anywhere they liked. New chemical and dyeing techniques produced a myriad of new colours. Look at the violet blue in Arthur Hughes' *April Love* 1855, for instance, and the purples created by synthetic alizarins in WH Hunt's *Our English Coasts (Strayed Sheep)* 1852. The emerald green which is so striking in this painting was only produced from the 1830s so that it only became available to John Constable in the last years of his life.



William Holman Hunt 1827–1910
Our English Coasts (Strayed Sheep) 1852

- Compare the green fields of *Our English Coasts* with the colours used by Constable to paint the English countryside in *Flatford Mill (Scene on a Navigable River)* 1816–7, before emerald was in use. Constable created the greens in this painting by mixing Prussian blue with raw and burnt sienna and yellow ochre. At school, try making greens with these colours and then compare them with bright modern greens.
- In *Flatford Mill*, Constable wanted to show the English countryside in full summer. This was extremely difficult to achieve without any bright green available. What tricks does the artist use to compensate for the lack of this colour? (Look at his contrasts both of light with dark and of green with its complementary red.)

Sculpture

The Victorian age was a great time for sculptors whose bronzes of famous people still punctuate our streets. As Michael Hatt points out, in his essay in the catalogue of *Exposed: The Victorian Nude*, we take public sculpture for granted, very seldom looking at any of it properly. The only Victorian sculpture really well-known in London today is Albert Gilbert's *Eros* in Piccadilly Circus. Start looking out for sculpture in the streets when you next visit central London. Find out what it represents and when it was made.

Most Victorian outdoor sculpture is made of bronze because this material lasts well without wearing away. Sculptors used the age-old lost wax method, first making a model in wax which they then surrounded in plaster or clay, leaving a hole at the top through which molten bronze could be poured when heat had been applied and caused the wax to melt. Artists used traditional clay or plaster casts for the marble statues which were often designed for an indoor setting. They often made initial clay or plaster models hoping that someone would pay for the expensive casting in bronze or marble. Many such pieces were never cast and others were not cast until years after they had first been conceived.

Making and Meaning

Greek art was still considered the greatest ever produced. It influenced not only the form but the subject matter of many works. Look for example at Frederic Leighton's *An Athlete Wrestling with a Python* 1877 and *The Sluggard*, as well as Harry Bates' *Pandora* ex1891 and GF Watts' *Daphne* c1879–82. An added advantage which came with the Greek source was that whereas the Victorian public would have been outraged at representations of their naked contemporaries, athletic young Greek men and sylph-like women inspired by the distant past could, with perfect propriety, be admired for their physical beauty. Bates' *Pandora* can be seen as a model of demure young girlhood despite the fact that she is bereft of the signs of her gender. Her unrealistically smooth white skin is inspired by Greek marbles. Classical masculine images corresponded moreover with Victorian interest in physical culture so that, while Leighton's figures are inspired by Greek prototypes,

- Do you like sculpture in public places? Why?/why not? Recently Londoners have been made to think about this matter by the debate over the empty plinth in Trafalgar Square.
- Have you seen any of the sculptures designed for it by Mark Wallinger, Bill Woodrow and most recently, Rachel Whiteread? How do you like their work compared with the original Victorian sculptures in the square – like the lions designed by Edward Landseer for instance?

they are also an encouragement to Victorian men to develop a fine physique. In a guide to the sculpture halls of the 1851 Great Exhibition, Anna Jameson defined sculpture as both 'a thought and a thing.' Despite its human form, figurative sculpture should never be seen as a mere imitation of a human being, since it usually also embodies an abstract concept. It may carry references to the art of other cultures as well as setting up ideals of masculinity and femininity.



Harry Bates 1850–99
Pandora exh1891

- Compare Victorian sculpture of men and women. Think about how each sex is presented. What materials are used? Is smooth white marble often associated with the female body? What materials are used in the depiction of strong males? Do you think such classifications are outdated? Are we still presented in magazines and advertising with images of strong he-men and helpless but beautiful females?
- What themes did Victorian sculptors choose to illustrate? What does the subject reveal about qualities in the figures? (Leighton's *Athlete* is strong, Bates' *Pandora* is too curious for her own safety and Watts' *Daphne* is at the mercy of the sun). If you were making sculptures of men and women now, what qualities would you attribute to them?
- How real are your chosen Victorian figures? How real/unreal are their skin, clothes, expression? How much movement is there in the work? Find out by walking round it observing the way the shapes change according to your viewpoint.

Printmaking and the Reproduction of Art

Printing underwent a dramatic technological transformation in the nineteenth century. By 1865, steam power, along with new machines, sped up the printing process. Soon many illustrated journals came into existence, such as the *Illustrated London News*, with artists employed to record important events. Artists' work became accessible to a much wider audience than before. Their sketches were worked up into elaborate woodcuts and the allied, but finer technique of wood engraving. The art of the time was often discussed or caricatured in *Punch*. Other popular journals such as the *Macmillan Magazine*, regularly and proudly chronicled new developments in art and science.

In the 1860s and 70s the growth of literacy resulted in an upsurge in the production of illustrated books and journals. In December 1869, *The Graphic* appeared, a new periodical whose contributors included Luke Fildes, Frank Holl and Hubert von Herkomer. Vincent van Gogh collected copies of the engravings reproduced in it and described in one of his letters how Luke Fildes came to produce *The Empty Chair, Dad's Hill – Ninth of June* 1870 for the Christmas number of the *Graphic* in 1870. He explained that the painter Millais had shown one of Fildes's social realist drawings to the ageing Charles Dickens, recommending Fildes to him as an illustrator for what turned out to be his last book *Edwin Drood*. On the very day that Fildes arrived at Dickens' house to discuss the project with him, the novelist had just died so that all the artist found was his empty chair.



Frank Bramley 1857–1915
A Hopeless Dawn 1888

- If you visit the National Gallery, you will find a painting by Vincent of the empty chair in his own room at Arles (*Van Gogh's Chair* 1888), inspired by the one in Fildes' print. At Tate Britain you can find a similar use of an empty chair – to symbolise absence and death – in Frank Bramley's *A Hopeless Dawn* 1888. In these works the artists believed that absence would have a stronger emotional impact than a presence. Do you agree?
- *Design a Chair* is a QCA scheme of work which draws students' attention to the significance of everyday pieces of furniture. Find as many chairs as you can in Victorian paintings and make quick sketches of them. In each case consider the possible meaning of the chair. In Bramley's painting it symbolises absence and death, but chairs can also indicate riches and poverty as well as power (a throne).

The Impact of Photography

From today, painting is dead! Paul Delaroche 1839.

More than any other Victorian invention, photography had an impact on artists. Its development was the result of parallel investigations in Britain and France. In 1839, the English scientist Henry Fox Talbot made the first true photographs, negatives, from which any number of prints could be taken.

Although the anxiety of painter Paul Delaroche (1797–1856) (see his *The Execution of Lady Anne Grey* 1833, at the National Gallery) is understandable, he was far too pessimistic. Art would certainly never be the same again but that does not mean that it would die. Predictions of the imminent death of painting have continued right up to the present day without any sign that it will come to pass.

Phrenology

Many artists saw photography as a science which revealed the ‘Truth’. With hindsight we can see that this was not always so. For instance many photographers believed in their art as a tool for classifying human types. This coincided with the Victorian interest in phrenology which led JE Millais to use the head of his father as a model for St Joseph in *Christ in the House of His Parents* 1849–50 although a real carpenter had posed for the painting of his arms. To Millais, his father’s noble egg-shaped head was more appropriate for the subject than the real carpenter’s would have been. Similarly photographers believed that they could establish the characteristics of types of people. They photographed several criminals, for example, and then produced a composite image of the criminal type by creating a new photograph from the superimposed negatives. An example where photography did provide scientific evidence of visual facts was in the recording of horse racing. In the 1880s, Edweard Muybridge took sequence action photographs. Artists could see how animals really moved and were able to represent them properly for the first time. Until then animals such as horses had been painted running like rocking horses with all four legs sticking out at once. (See, for instance, the dog near the centre of Frith’s *Derby Day* 1856–8)

Painting and Photography

Photography could also be a timesaver for artists, many of whom began on occasion to substitute photographs for sketches. This practice has continued to the present day, the most famous example being provided by David Hockney. JE Millais painted intensely realistic pictures using intricate detail and vivid colour which could be interpreted as demonstrating painting’s superiority to photography. (*Christ in the House of His Parents* 1849–50, *Ophelia* 1851–2 and *The Order of Release 1746* 1852–3 are examples). Colour photography first became possible in 1891.

The invention of photography coincided with the rise to affluence of the middle classes who, as well as buying paintings, clamoured to have their likenesses captured on camera. Between 1851 and 1857, the number of photographic portrait studios in London rose from about twelve to more than one hundred and fifty. Julia Margaret Cameron was one of the leading portrait photographers of the period. She virtually invented the close-up, taking sensitive, soft-focussed portraits of some of the dominant cultural figures of the day such as Alfred Lord Tennyson. But surface appearance was not enough for her. She once wrote: “When I have had such men before my camera my whole soul has endeavoured to do its duty to them in recording faithfully the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man.” She considered that photography, like painting, was more than mere representation.

The same was true of landscape photographers whose images now replaced the watercolours formerly produced as souvenirs for travellers. From their photographs, you may be able to guess their attitudes towards travel and the place represented.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was inspired by JM Cameron’s example in the painting of his dead wife as *Beata Beatrix* c1864–70. He uses Cameron’s soft focus symbolically to create an intermediary condition between life and death, remembering and forgetting, for his wife Elizabeth Siddal.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti 1828–82
Beata Beatrix c1864–70



- Find an old family photograph or look at one of the landscape photographs displayed at Tate Britain from November 2001 for a few months. Compare the photograph with a painted portrait or landscape. What are the qualities special to each technique? What does a camera do better/ what can only be achieved by a paintbrush?
- At school or at home, ask a friend to sit for a ‘Victorian’ photograph. The model must be posed to demonstrate a quality – thoughtfulness, anger, distress or happiness. Having directed the sitter in the pose, the photographer should ask the model to stay absolutely still while the photo is taken. (In its early days, photography was slow and uncomfortable. Sitters sometimes had their neck held in clamps so that no movement would spoil the resulting image. Cameron used subdued light, large photographic plates and long lenses which meant that her sitter had to remain still for several minutes during the exposure. You will be using a modern camera but because the sitter has been posed, the results may look quite Victorian. Do they?

Artistic, Literary and Historical Timeline

In this section you will find references to artists’ groups such as the Pre-Raphaelites whose work is represented at Tate Britain. Remember that you should always check with the Information Department (tel 0207 887 8734) in advance of your visit, to see which works are currently on display. You will also find the date of publication of some famous Victorian novels in the timeline. These have been included because storytelling was an important feature of Victorian art and there were contacts between writers and painters.

1830s	
1834	Parliament decreed that able-bodied paupers and their families be sent to workhouses.
1837	Death of John Constable (b1776) and coronation of Queen Victoria.
1839	Chartist riots after Parliament rejected petition to extend the franchise.
1840s	
1840	Queen Victoria marries Albert, Prince of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, her first cousin. Penny post established.
1842	Lord Ashley's Act forbade the employment of women and children under ten in coal mines.
1843	In <i>Modern Painters</i> , vol.1, art critic John Ruskin praised the work of JMW Turner. In his poem <i>The Song of the Shirt</i> , Thomas Hood stirred indignation against the exploitation of women in the needlework trade.
1845	Benjamin Disraeli's <i>Sybil</i> . Irish famine.
1847	Charlotte Bronte <i>Jane Eyre</i> and Emily Bronte <i>Wuthering Heights</i> . New British Museum building opened in Great Russell St (current location). The Ten Hours Act limited women and children to ten hours’ work a day. First operation using chloroform.
1848	Formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais. They aimed to paint serious subjects in what they saw as the truthful manner of early Italian painting before the Renaissance. 5,000 miles of railway track had now been built. Year of revolutionary uprisings across Europe. Publication of Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Public Health Act forcing local authorities to institute sanitation measures.
1849	DG Rossetti (1828-82) <i>The Girlhood of Mary Virgin</i> early Pre-Raphaelite , signed with the initials PRB. Charles Dickens’ <i>David Copperfield</i> published. 16,000 Londoners died in a cholera outbreak, caused by poor sanitation.
1850s	
1850	DG Rossetti <i>Ecce Ancilla Domini!</i> Pre-Raphaelite and JE Millais (1829-96) <i>Christ in the House of his Parents</i> .
1851	Death of JMW Turner (b1775). Free libraries begin to appear. The Great Exhibition of world-wide manufactures held in Hyde Park in the Crystal Palace, an innovatory structure in iron and glass, designed by Sir Joseph Paxton.
1852	William Holman Hunt's (1827-1910) Pre-Raphaelite painter. <i>Our English Coasts (Strayed Sheep)</i> admired by Eugene Delacroix who exclaimed “I am really astounded by Hunt’s sheep.”
1852–65	Ford Madox Brown <i>Work</i> (Manchester City Art Gallery).
1853	WH Hunt <i>The Awakening Conscience</i> Pre-Raphaelite shows a kept woman who sees the light. The story is told through a multiplicity of symbols.
1854	John Martin's (1789–1854) Judgement Series <i>The Great Day of his Wrath</i> , <i>The Last Judgement</i> and <i>The Plains of Heaven</i> . Dickens <i>Hard Times</i> . Outbreak of the Crimean War (continued until 1856).
1855–64	Richard Dadd's (1817–86) <i>The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke</i> painted in prison where he had been jailed for killing his father. <i>Daily Telegraph</i> , first mass circulation daily newspaper founded.

1855	Mrs Gaskell <i>North and South</i> .
1856–8	WP Frith <i>The Derby Day</i> completed after “fifteen months of incessant labour.”
1857	Matrimonial Causes Act establishes divorce courts.
1858	Augustus Egg's (1816–63) <i>Past and Present</i> 1858 is a kind of three-volume novel in paint on the theme of the fallen woman.
1859	Publication of Dickens <i>A Tale of two Cities</i> and of Charles Darwin's <i>Origin of Species</i> .

1860s	
1860	George Eliot <i>Mill on the Floss</i> .
1860–70	DG Rossetti <i>Beata Beatrix</i> .
1861	Death of Prince Albert.
1862	Robert Braithwaite Martineau (1826–69) <i>The Last Day in the Old Home</i> illustrates the consequences of being spendthrift.
1863	London Underground under construction.
1865	Lewis Carroll <i>Alice in Wonderland</i> 1866 DG Rossetti <i>Mona Vanna</i> . Like the Art for Art’s sake of his friend Whistler, this painting aims first and foremost to be beautiful. Pre-Raphaelite .
1866	Hyde Park riots for increased franchise.
1867	After decades of struggle by the Chartist movement, the right to vote is extended to cover all middle class men and town workers.
1868	Gladstone becomes Prime Minister.
1869	Girton opens, the first women’s college at Cambridge.

1870s	
1871	Trade Unions legalised.
c1872–5	J Mc Neill Whistler <i>Nocturne in Blue and Gold-Old Battersea Bridge</i> Aesthetic pioneered the notion of Art for Art’s sake whereby the composition of forms and colours sets the mood.
1871	Publication of <i>Alice through the Looking Glass</i> .
1874	Disraeli becomes Prime Minister.
1877	Frederic Lord Leighton (1830–96) <i>An Athlete struggling with a Python</i> . Queen Victoria proclaimed Empress of India.
1878	Ruskin accuses Whistler of “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face”. Whistler sues Ruskin for libel and wins.
1879	Thomas Edison perfects electric light.

1880s	
1880	Gladstone re-elected Prime Minister.
1881–91	P Wilson Steer <i>Boulogne Sands</i> , an example of English Impressionism.
1884	Edward Burne Jones, second generation Pre-Raphaelite <i>King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid</i> . The third and final reform bill extends the vote to two million agricultural labourers.
1885	JS Sargent (1856–1925) <i>Carnation Lily, Lily Rose</i> was painted to capture a specific light effect, inspired by the example of the artist’s Impressionist friend, Claude Monet.
1888	Frank Bramley (1857–1915), member of the Newlyn Group <i>A Hopeless Dawn</i> .
1888	JW Waterhouse (1849–1917) <i>The Lady of Shalott</i> based on the poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson.
1888	Vincent van Gogh <i>Van Gogh's Chair</i> (National Gallery).

1890s	
1890	F Lord Leighton <i>The Bath of Psyche</i> Neo-Classical evokes a golden age in the past. Oscar Wilde <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> published.
1891	Luke Fildes <i>The Doctor</i> exhibited, commissioned by Sir Henry Tate, and Thomas Hardy <i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i> published.
1893	The Lumière brothers invent the Cinématograph.
1896	The National Portrait Gallery opens in Trafalgar Square.
1897	The National Gallery of British Art (the Tate Gallery) opens at Millbank.
1901	Death of Queen Victoria.