

# 10: London, a City of its Time

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## A. London on the Map

### 1. Class title 1 (St James' Park)

Even more than with Paris, I have had to focus my treatment of London quite strongly, because the city contains so much. My uncle's house in Chelsea was my home from home during my high school and college years, and my first wife and I lived there during the five years of our marriage. Paris, I handled thematically, exploring two common soubriquets: *City of Light*, *City of Love*. With London, my focus will be chronological, looking at its **Victorian legacy**. But in fact it contains many different periods, as I hope this video will show.

### 2. Section title A ("A City for All Centuries")

You will probably recognize some, but not all, of those landmarks; I did not want to clutter the screen with labels. But I do include them all on the website.

### 3. The City and Westminster

### 4. The Great Fire of London

Unlike Florence, Venice, or Edinburgh, London does not have a medieval town plan that has survived despite later changes. This is for two reasons. First, that the center of the city gradually migrated westwards from the old city (still called **The City**) to **Westminster** which, in medieval times, was simply an Abbey built among fields. And second, that most of the buildings in the City itself were destroyed in the **Great Fire of 1666**, and everything after that is in classical style or later.

### 5. Victorian London collage

### 6. — the above, with bullet points

So my concentration will be on the period I called "Heyday" above: the Nineteenth Century, and more specifically the Victorian era that spanned the last two-thirds of it. Why? Because it encapsulates the feeling of British confidence as the capital of a world **empire**. Because it is the product of numerous Victorian advances in **technology** and social thinking. Because it depended so much on the presence of the **river**. Because it is period that saw the rise of the middle classes and the institution of facilities to support their **educational**, social, and **recreational** needs. And because it is the one period you are guaranteed to see peeping round the corners wherever you nominally point your viewfinder, as in this picture, where the government buildings of Whitehall peep out behind the amenities of St. James' Park. The **Prosperity** of the Empire and the needs of the **People**, the two hours of this class.

### 7. Saint James' Park, transition

Let's start, however, in the previous century. This is from a video called *The Entire History of London in 24 Minutes*. It takes a series of engravings or paintings and animates them with AI. I'm stopping before it gets to the slums and diseases of Dickensian London, which fortunately we don't see in the same way now. But here's the question: how many of the things you see in this video do still play a part in our experience of London today?

#### 8. Georgian and Victorian London

#### 9. —summary of topics in the above

The pictures at the corners of this show **Trafalgar Square** before and after building **Nelson's Column** in 1843; more on that later. The items in the middle are a summary of the topics covered by the video you just watched. Which do you think have left their mark on London today? Here are my answers:

**Georgian London.** Yes; Georgian presence still very much felt.

**Lloyds and Stock Exchange.** Yes; still important, though in different buildings.

**10 Downing Street.** Yes; remodeled but essentially unchanged.

**Buckingham House.** Yes, though considerably rebuilt under Queen Victoria.

**Westminster & Blackfriars Bridges.** Yes, plus many other buildings.

**Docks as center of world trade.** No; trade moved elsewhere; docklands redeveloped.

**Railways.** Yes; still an important part of the British economy.

**Population explosion.** 6.5m in 1901; around 9.2m now; 3rd in Europe, 33rd in world.

**Trafalgar Square.** Yes; see pictures.

**Houses of Parliament.** Yes.

**Crystal Palace.** No; original building moved South of river, burned down in 1936.

**Sewage system.** Yes.

**Underground railway.** Yes, and many further additions

**Tower Bridge.** Yes; now opened as a tourist attraction.

## B. Empire [10:15]

### 10. Section title B (Houses of Parliament)

London is, of course, the capital of Great Britain, and like other world capitals, it has an impressive set of government buildings. The present **Houses of Parliament** were begun in 1840, after the previous building was destroyed by fire in 1834. The competition for the new building was won by **Charles Barry** (1795–1860), who designed an essentially classic structure, but gave it a Gothic cladding, thus

influencing a great deal of other Victorian architecture that followed elsewhere. **Big Ben**, which is actually the name for the largest bell in the clock tower (now known as the **Elizabeth Tower**), was added in 1870. Large and imposing though the complex is, there is nothing to indicate that it was at the time the capital of an Empire, not a mere country. But the buildings that you see in the background of that St James' Park slide include many with a specifically Imperial origin.

### 11. Buildings in Whitehall (animated flip of St James' Park slide)

When I was in London as a teenager, the evidence of our former Empire was everywhere. The government buildings on **Whitehall** for example (in the background of that picture of the park), included an India Office and a Commonwealth Office. Today, they are all combined into the **Foreign and Commonwealth Office**, but there is a grandeur that radiates mid-Victorian confidence in being British and rulers of a quarter of the world. The interior courtyard at top right, for example, though entirely Renaissance in design, is known as the Durbar Court— a *darbar* being a formal assembly held by an Indian prince or British Viceroy. Britain is now a shadow of her former self, a minor player on the world stage. But it is impossible to walk around official London, even today, and not see echoes of that confidence. Nowhere more so than in and around **Trafalgar Square**.

### 12. Trafalgar Square, before and after Nelson's Column

Here again are the pictures showing the square before and after the erection of **Nelson's Column** in 1843. Nelson himself was hardly a colonial figure, but his victory at Trafalgar in 1805 set the seal on Britain's dominance of the seas, which made all the rest possible. And if you look around, you will see many references to London's role as the capital of the British Empire.

### 13. Canada House and South Africa House

### 14. Napier, Havelock, and Gordon

So for example the two buildings at the southern corners of the square, Canada House and South Africa House, once offices of Imperial administration, now I think the embassies of their respective countries. Or look at the people who get statues all around the square, such as the three generals shown here: **Napier**, who put down the Indian Mutiny; **Havelock**, who annexed the Indian territory of Sindh; or **Gordon** (now moved elsewhere) who established British rule in Egypt and the Sudan.

### 15. Yinka Shonibare: *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* (2010, National Maritime Museum)

There is a fourth plinth designed for a statue like Havelock or Napier's but never used. In the early 21st century, the Mayor of London initiated a scheme by which it would be used for a variety of temporary projects by contemporary artists. Here is one of them, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* by British Nigerian artist **Yinka Shonibare** (1962–, pronounced to rhyme with "bear"), which occupied the plinth between 2010 and 2012. Besides being an affectionate comment on Admiral Nelson towering above, it makes a perfect illustration for this class: the work of a British born son of black immigrants from the former Empire, now a member of the British establishment (the Royal Academy), referencing both the culture of his original homeland and the history of his new country.

## 16. The Crystal Palace, site of the Great Exhibition, 1851

Although nothing of it remains today, the biggest display of Imperial confidence at its peak was *the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations*, organized by Queen Victoria's husband, **Prince Albert**, in 1851. A special building like a huge greenhouse, the **Crystal Palace**, designed by the master-gardener **Joseph Paxton** (1803–65), was built in Hyde Park to house it. Although it contained exhibits from *all* nations, pride of place was given to products from Britain itself and its Empire.

## 17. Albert Memorial and Royal Albert Hall

The Exhibition attracted 6 million people and generated a profit of almost \$50 billion in modern terms, much of which was spent on the **Albert Memorial**, the **Royal Albert Hall**, and group of museums in South Kensington that will be my subject in the second hour. Colonialism is now a bad word. But Englishmen like my grandfather, **Sir William Brunyate**, who spent all his life in India, saw it in terms of sacrifice rather than profit. Here is how the spoken invocation to the 1912 oratorio *Crown of India* by Sir **Edward Elgar** (1857–1934) begins.

## 18. Quotation from *The Crown of India*

And here, to end the hour, is part of a video on the Victorians by **Jeremy Paxman** that develops this point with the aid of a close reading of the sculpture groups around the Albert Memorial.

## 19. Paxman: *The Victorians, views of Empire* [3:23]

# C. Technology [10:30]

## 20. Section title C: Paddington Station

Joseph Paxton used his experience as a designer of greenhouses to build the enormous Crystal Palace. But it would not have been possible without also devising a system of mass production to use the largest size of sheet glass then commercially available. That was in 1851. Only three years later, engineer **Isambard Kingdom Brunel** (1806–59) would use the same technology to build **Paddington Station**. It is still in use today, and is the terminus you come to if you take the train from Heathrow. Fortunately, we also have a painting of it in Victorian times by **William Powell Frith** (1819–1909). Panning from left to right, you will see people hurrying for the train, a family sending their son off to boarding school, and Scotland Yard detectives apprehending a fleeing felon.

## 21. Frith: *The Railway Station*, video pan

## 22. London 1900, showing railways

That is in the past, of course, but the legacy of Victorian innovation in railway technology, mass production, and the use of iron in building is still present today. London is very much a city articulated by its mainline stations, with the downtown ones (Victoria, Charing Cross, and Waterloo), unmissable by

tourists, and those on the northern ring (Paddington, Euston, King's Cross, St. Pancras, and Liverpool Street) marking the effective boundary of the London that casual visitors know.

### 23. Metropolitan Railway stations (*Illustrated London News*, 1863)

The famed London Underground is very much a Victorian creation, beginning with the Metropolitan Railway in 1863, a cut-and-cover line between Paddington and the City, operated by steam locomotives. Other shallow lines followed, plus the various deep bores.

### 24. Versions of the London Tube map

The original schematic map, designed by **Harry Beck** in 1933, has become an icon of information design, and has been imitated all over the world. Even the most recent design, which shows the stations in the actual geographical locations, still uses most other elements of the Beck design.

### 25a Michael Buerk: *How the Victorians Built Britain*, title

I wish I could obtain the whole of **Michael Buerk's** BBC series, *How the Victorians Built Britain*, but only snatches are available. Still, one of these is the opening sequence, which sums it all up.

### 25. Michael Buerk: *How the Victorians Built Britain*, opening sequence

### 26. Joseph Bazalgette memorial

The one extended sequence of Buerk's program that I could get concerns this man, **Joseph Bazalgette** (1819–91), of whom I had never heard. Why not? Because although his work was vital in making London what it is today, it is something that we seldom think about and never see. I'll let Buerk explain.

### 27. Michael Buerk: *How the Victorians Built Britain*, sewage system [5:20]

### 28. London views by Monet and Derain

I put together a number of short clips to make that video; apologies if it was rather choppy. One thing that I didn't know before watching it, however, is that the Embankments, which are such an iconic aspect of London—as seen in these view by **Claude Monet** (1840–1926) and **André Derain** (1880–1954)—were in fact a collateral byproduct of the sewers running underneath!

### 29. Tower Bridge

A bridge is just a bridge, right? The Victorians built a lot of bridges, to carry commuters and goods traffic over the Thames, whether by road or rail. But the one that stands out is surely **Tower Bridge**, which opened in 1892. Its fame is partly due to its unique silhouette but mainly, surely, because it *works*. It is a bascule bridge that opens and closes to let large ships go through, and until replaced by more modern machinery in 1960, run by hydraulic equipment that was yet another triumph of Victorian engineering.

### 30. Inside Tower Bridge [1:33]

## D. River [10:48]

- 31. Section title D (Tower Bridge and St. Katharine Docks)
- 32. The Seine and the Thames, comparison

London is a river city, more so than any other place in the course, except possibly Paris. In terms of each city's relationship to its river, what do you think the differences are? Paris is farther from the sea, and the Seine is smaller. It is very much a tourist artery as it flows through the city, the ubiquitous *bateaux-mouches* being the most obvious example. The number of tourist boats on the Thames has increased in recent years, but it is still a relatively minor part of the experience. The main difference, I think, is that 19th-century London was an international port, with a dockland area that was virtually its own social ecosystem. I suppose Paris must have had a port area, but it would have involved barge rather than ocean-going traffic. Compare the earlier photo with a similar view by **Derain**.

- 33. Derain painting with Tower Bridge view above
- 34. London docks, then and now

I have the usual problem. Vast areas that were of vital importance to the prosperity of the Empire have simply disappeared. The picture on top here is enhanced by AI, I think, but it is a fair evocation of what the docks would have been like in their heyday. Go there now, and you see either a few empty basins laid out as a sort of museum, or the vital new developments around **Canary Wharf**, and the **Dockland Light Railway** system (or DLR) that made them possible. I shall end the hour with clips from a video about the DLR, but there is another aspect of London that I need to mention first: the **East End**.

- 35. Views in the East End

I have never seen the London Docks. Nor, in all my visits to London as a child, have I ever been to the East End, the housing built for dockworkers (including immigrants from all over the globe). But we were fiercely proud of the pluck with which they took the brunt of the German *Blitz* night after night in the War. The people were poor, certainly, but they looked after each other. The BBC cashed in on that spirit with the long-running series *Call the Midwife*; I'm sure you all know the credit sequence.

- 36. *Call the Midwife*, credit sequence
- 37. — still from the above

In fact, though, *Call the Midwife* could not be filmed in the East End; those communities, that way of life, no longer exist. The exteriors in the series were shot at **Chatham Dockyard** in Kent, a former facility of the Royal Navy, now preserved as a living museum. But the redevelopment of the former London docks as a major office center and high-rent apartment district has been a major success story. Here are a couple of clips from a video about the Docklands Light Railway that made it all possible. As you'll see, it contains a lot of historical material along the way.

- 38. The Docklands Light Railway, excerpts [3:15]
- 39. Class title 2 (The Thames Transformed)

## E. Education [11:10]

### 40. Section title E (schematic map of Albertopolis)

I mentioned that the profits from the Great Exhibition permitted the building of the great educational institutions shown here, all honoring Prince Albert's devotion to science and the arts, and showcasing British ingenuity and culture at the same time. They were all erected in close proximity in **South Kensington**, just south of Hyde Park. Although I don't think the term is in common use today, late Victorians called the area **Albertopolis**; the term fits.

### 41. Albertopolis map, 1925

Actually, there is a lot more to Albertopolis than is shown here. This is a map from 1925, before several of the component units were moved elsewhere. But you can see that in addition to the concert hall, arts, and science museums shown in the previous map, the complex also included schools of art and music, a scientific garden complex, and (incongruously) the Imperial War Museum!

### 42. Joseph Wright of Derby: A Philosopher Lectures on the Orrery (1762, Derby)

When I moved to London in 1968, I earned money by editing a dictionary of modern art, and would go in to work each day in the Art Library of the **Victoria and Albert Museum**. But my acquaintanceship with Albertopolis went well before that. My aunt's house in Chelsea was within walking distance, and she sent me to the **Royal Albert Hall** for my first-ever concert. And even before that, visiting London with my parents as a young child, they booked me in to the lectures for children given in the basement of the **Science Museum**, which seemed a place of pure magic. I did not know it then, of course, but those lectures were the direct descendants of an educational tradition going back to the Enlightenment. I recognize myself as one of those children in the famous painting by **Joseph Wright** (1734–97). So I propose to fill out this bare list of museums and the like by a bunch of videos. They are modern, of course, but the spirit they celebrate is very much Victorian. Let's start with quick overview.

### 43. Video: *Prince Albert's Legacy in South Kensington* [3:45]

That contained a fair amount about the **Natural History Museum**, which is all I can manage to fit in. But if I turn to my own first love, the Science Museum, I can find only a very quick promo or longer videos on specific subject that are frankly TMI. So let's go for the promo.

### 44. Video: Science Museum, Museum of the Year

There are many videos devoted to the Victoria and Albert Museum. As it is the only one bearing the Prince's name and the one most specifically devoted to *British* arts and culture, I thought it would be worth putting together clips from two of them: two minutes of **Rick Steves** and three of a young American visitor, **Lucy Corban**, whose enthusiasm is infectious. There is remarkably little overlap

45. Video: Victoria and Albert Museum (Rick Steves) [2:19]

46. Video: Victoria and Albert Museum (Lucy Corban) [2:45]

46z Cast gallery at the VA

Although I said that the V&A focuses on *British* fine and applied arts, it does contain a large collection of plaster casts from Italian Renaissance and other sculpture. This is in accordance with Prince Albert's educational vision: that even people who could not afford to make the Grand Tour might still be exposed to the masterpieces of world art. The Peabody Institute has a similar collection of casts that I imagine was assembled at roughly the same time.

47. Royal Albert Hall with Proms banners

Another late Victorian legacy are the **Promenade Concerts**, known as the **Proms**. Although they started elsewhere in the late Victorian era, they have become associated with the Royal Albert Hall. For two months each summer, they electrify musical life in London with a nightly series presenting an incredibly eclectic program of classical music from *avant-garde* to popular, featuring orchestras and soloists from all over the world. The Albert Hall holds 5,000 people, so tickets are cheap; the concerts are called Proms because the seats are removed from the lowest level, so that the audience can stand and walk around. This can create an atmosphere almost like a pop concert, especially on the **Last Night of the Proms**, which always includes patriotic songs where the audience are encouraged to sing along. I'll play two verses of "Rule, Britannia" led by a costumed **Dame Sarah Connolly** in a moment. But before that, I'll give you a piece of British music that is altogether more serious, even sad: the opening of the *Cello Concerto* (1919) by **Edward Elgar**, played by British cellist **Sheku Kanneh-Mason**, with the young Lithuanian conductor **Mirga Grazinyte-Tyla** [MEER-ga Graj-in-EE-teh TEE-la] leading the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

48. Elgar: *Cello Concerto*, opening [2:58]

49. Arne: *Rule, Britannia*, first two verses [2:29]

## F. Amenities [11:30]

50. Section title F (view in Hyde Park)

This is a scene in **Hyde Park**, painted around 1900. What social class do you think the woman at bottom right belongs to? It's a very British question, isn't it, but bear with me; I have a couple of points. The first point is that the woman is clearly upper-middle class, as are most of the people in the picture. It occurs to me that what we were seeing in the previous section was the rise of the prosperous middle classes, and the availability of access to education and the arts that underpin and maintain middle-class identity. My view of London—and in particular the London that was handed down by the Victorians—is of a city that enshrines upper-middle-class values.

### 51. George Frampton: *Peter Pan* (1912, Kensington Gardens)

My second point comes when I think about *why* I see London in this way. I said right at the beginning that I was going to try to subordinate my own experience of the various cities, and concentrate on how each would be seen by others. But with London, I realize that I cannot do this. Because it was London that first made me aware of my own class status in British society. Growing up in Northern Ireland, I was simply the son of a rather strange Englishman, a foreigner. But my uncle and aunt lived in a fashionable part of town; when I was with them, we went to the Albert Hall, the Royal Academy, and Covent Garden; we shopped in the big West End stores; we walked in the Royal Parks. I was seen off at Paddington Station to go to my boarding school. It was in London that I first became aware of class and, without thinking very much about it, that I was privileged. The *Peter Pan* statue in Kensington Gardens, commissioned from **George Frampton** (1860–1928) in 1912 by playwright **JM Barrie** (1860–1937), although several decades before my time, is the perfect symbol of how boys of my kind grew up. We can see how he first met **Peter Llewellyn-Davies**, the model for the original Peter, his siblings, and their widowed mother near the eventual site of this statue in Kensington Gardens in the opening scene of the 2004 movie *Finding Neverland* with **Johnny Depp** and **Kate Winslet**.

### 52. *Finding Neverland*, opening scene [2:52]

### 53. London's Royal Parks

So this closing section—the whole second hour, really—is about those AMENITIES that cater to the middle classes. We have already mentioned **Education**. The *Neverland* scene implies **Parks**, which in London centers upon the almost continuous stretch of Royal hunting preserves ceded to the public in the Eighteenth Century and developed as parks throughout the Nineteenth. The images I showed at the beginning are at the eastern end of this stretch; Kensington Gardens, where we have just been, is at the western end, and Albertopolis was laid out at the southern edge of those.

### 54. Regent Street and Burlington Arcade

Another amenity required by the prosperous classes is **Shopping**. This slide, which comes from my opening montage, shows two pre-Victorian developments: the elegant quadrants of **Regent Street**, designed in 1825 by **John Nash** (1752–1835), and the slightly earlier **Burlington Arcade**, predecessor of the modern mall, but decidedly more upscale than most. We can get a view of it in this video.

### 55. Burlington Arcade video [2:17]

### 56. Harrods and Selfridges

### 57. Liberty's

The really big stores like **Harrods** and (a little less upscale) **Selfridges** were also 19th-century creations. But the store I want to feature—largely because I worked there one Christmas season—is **Liberty's**, which opened on Regent Street in 1875 and moved into its present mock-Tudor quarters in 1924. From the start, Liberty's was associated with the **Arts and Crafts Movement**, and that revolution in design that drew its inspiration from nature. It is especially well-known for its fabrics, which have traveled all over the world, and it still works closely with young designers. Here is a little bit of the history.

58. Liberty's history [1:43]

59. Frith: *A Private View at the Royal Academy*, detail

The Arts and Crafts Movement also had an affect on fashion. In the closing decades of the 19th Century, women began to move away from corsets and bustles and dress in more flowing garments with less structure and ornament—the sort of things they might buy at Liberty's in fact. In this detail of another painting by **Frith**, *Private View at the Royal Academy* (1881), the “new women” are seen to the left and right, framing those wearing the older style in the center.

60. D'Oyly Carte, Gilbert, and Sullivan

61. *Patience* and other D'Oyly Carte posters

One other amenity that catered to the newly-affluent classes was **Theatre**. London then, like London now, was a theater town, and the big hits in the last decades of the century were the so-called **Savoy Operas** of **WS Gilbert** (1836–1911) and **Arthur Sullivan** (1842–1900). So-called, because they were in fact operettas with spoken dialogue, produced by impresario and hotelier **Richard D'Oyly Carte** (1844–1901) at his new Savoy Theatre adjacent to his Savoy Hotel. Mostly, these satirized various British institutions such as the Royal Navy, Police, Civil Service, or House of Lords. But their longest run (578 performances, beaten only by *The Mikado*) belonged to their 1881 show *Patience*. It is less often seen these days, since its target was the **Aesthetic Movement** that Liberty's promoted—less seen today, since it is a difficult fad to make relevant. I'll end with a scene from a production in Australia. The women are all engaged to the soldiers who constitute the male chorus, but their exposure to aesthetes such as **Willam Morris** and **Oscar Wilde** have made them despise crude manliness and primary colors, so when the **Heavy Dragoons** arrive, they vanish. Before playing the clip, though, I will give you a reconstruction of an interesting announcement that Richard D'Oyly Carte made from the stage of his theatre on opening night.

62. Richard D'Oyly Carte announces electricity [3:01]

63. Gilbert and Sullivan: *Patience*, entrance of the Heavy Dragoons [3:30]

64. Class title 3 (Cricket at Lords)