

Research notes for ALL THE PROUD AND MIGHTY

Social Life

(From "Fifty Years 1882-1932" by correspondents of *The Times*; pps 24-45) The Season began in February and ended on the last day of July. There were three or four balls every night Monday through Friday, except for a few days at Easter. There were two balls at Buckingham Palace every season.

The young man of leisure would begin his day at about 11.30 with an hour or so walking or riding in Rotten Row. Then it would be time to put on a frock coat and top hat for a luncheon appointment at the club or elsewhere. In the afternoon, in the summer, he might go to Hurlingham, Wimbledon or Lords, leaving his elders and female friends to drive sedately around the Park in a barouche or Victoria with a bewigged coachman and a powdered footman. There might also be afternoon concerts or a fashionable wedding. In the evening, there was the theatre, the opera, dinner parties and balls.

When the theatres closed the clubs warmed up. At 1 am the card-room would be at its fullest. Some clubs stayed open until sunrise.

There was no "weekend" in the 1880s. On Saturdays there would usually be a "drum" at a great family home--such as Devonshire House, Grosvenor House etc. Saturday was also a great day for dinner parties. In June and July there would be afternoon parties at large houses within a drive of Hyde Park Corner.

On Sunday morning everyone went to church. Only an invalid would use a carriage on Sunday. After church people went--on foot-- to visit friends or to sit in Hyde Park. In large and hospitable houses, tea was given to all and sundry. Young people took long walks to Kensington, Fulham and Hampstead, where artists had pictures on show. The Zoo was fashionable and chic

in the 1880s (later it went down market).

Clubs

Conservative: Carlton (1832), White's, The Conservative.

Liberal: Reform, Brooks's.

Small: Pratt's (1841), Buck's, The Beefsteak.

Cultural: Garrick (1831), Savile, Savage, Arts (1863)

The Travellers (1819) cross-party. The Athenaeum, intellectual. United Service Club - "the Senior". The Turf brought together the owners of old acres and new wealth. The Marlborough was started by the Prince of Wales, and white tie was de rigueur there at dinner time in case he should drop by (even after he became king).

(Young Whigs went to Harrow & Cambridge, Young Tories to Eton & Oxford).

London landscape

See "The Village London Atlas" pps 3-4 for a detailed account of the view from Westminster Bridge in 1890.

Brothels, etc.

The Argyll Rooms in Great Windmill Street, next door to a church, were the most popular place of entertainment in London. The rooms brilliantly lit by gas and the walls covered with large gilt mirrors. An orchestra played gay sentimental dance music behind an elaborate screen of gold trellis-work. The cost of admission to the dance-floor was a shilling, and an extra charge was made for the gallery, which had alcoves with plush-covered seats and low lighting. The master of ceremonies, wearing a

badge of office and white-tie-and-tails, would effect introductions. The girls wore very low-cut dresses but kept their cloaks on while dancing. Champagne cost 12s a bottle, but the most popular drink was a sherry cobbler, potent but cheap, and traditionally drunk after a polka and through straws, two partners sharing a glass. The men were all sorts: toffs, middle-class businessmen, clerks and shop assistants, and young army officers who had to dash by cab to Nine Elms Station to get the goods train to Aldershot in time for the 7 a.m. parade. The women included not only prostitutes but dollymops, shop-assistants or maids who hoped to attract a young man to stand them dinner and take them back to his rooms afterwards. Closed by the Middlesex magistrates in 1957 but reopened later. By law all such establishments operated from 8 pm until midnight, when all drinking and dancing had to cease, and the Argyll obeyed the laws strictly.

Mott's, in an unpretentious house in Foley Street, off Great Portland Street, was more select. The hall-porter, Freer, guarded the entrance and turned away men who did not appear to be gentlemen. Dress was strictly formal: white tie & tails, opera cloaks, solk hats. The main room had a big glass dome. Mott's stayed open into the early hours, ostensibly to serve a cold buffet with non-alcoholic drinks. In fact booze was served, and during the occasional police raid (well signalled in advance) all bottles and glasses would be hidden away in prearranged secret cupboards in the walls and floors.

Kate Hamilton's in Prince's Street, off Leicester Square, was even more select. There were two uniformed commissionaires at the door. You then went down a long passage to another door which had a peep-hole. Beyond that was Kate herself, twenty stone, sitting on a raised platform, wearing a vast evening gown that revealed most of her enormous bosom, surrounded by girls. All her girls were said to be refined and some were women of quality in search of thrills. An honoured male guest might be

invited to sit next to Kate. People compared her regal pose to that of Queen Victoria and her Consort when presiding over a State function; and indeed some of the people who bowed before the Queen in the morning would bow equally low before Kate the same night. Politicians, aristocrats and visiting potentates visited Kate's. Kate served cocktails like those of the 1920s and gave them whimsical names such as gum-tickler, eye-opener and corpse-reviver.

In the summer **Cremorne Gardens** was used for similar purposes. It consisted of 12 acres of groves, grottoes, ferneries, flower-beds, trees and lawns on a site that is now bounded by King's Road, Uverdale Road, Dartrey Road and Lot's Road. There was dancing out-of-doors and in tents, a ballet theatre, an oriental circus, an American bowling green, a marionette theatre, shooting galleries, punch-and-judy shows, and a menagerie. There was a daring female tight-roper walker who made the crowds gasp lest she should fall. You could take balloon rides over London. There were chinese lanterns in the trees and seats in dim arbours. There were fireworks which made the lions and tigers in the menagerie roar. Some people had their own private "boxes" where they could dine.

Sometimes, especially on Derby night, the place was overcrowded, food was thrown, and top hats were battered. Clerks would battle undergraduates, girls would defend themselves with their hatpins, someone would sabotage the gas lights, the police would be called and everyone would fly for the exits.

You could go there by pleasure steamer for a penny, and enter by the imposing gilded gates that gave on to the river; but after dark the hansom cabs set down their West End fares at the King's Road entrance.

When the dance halls closed down at midnight the prostitutes and dollymops took possession. Yet there remained an air of decorum: the men and women were always well-dressed; a man would bow and raise his hat before addressing a girl, and the girl would drop her eyes and look demure. It was considered amusing

to pinch people then giggle.

The gardens were closed in 1875.

Clerks

From "Victorian Clerks" by Gregory Anderson. A clerk began with an apprenticeship which could be for anything from three to six years depending on starting age. During the first year he was a junior, doing the work of an office lad. After a year a new junior would be put under him. After three years he became a senior. By this point he would know all he needed to know about office routine.

The sons of rich men would be put under the care of a professional clerk.

Ledger clerks could see only part of a transaction and had poor prospects. Stock-ledger clerks in the docks were employed on a casual basis at £68 a year. Correspondence clerk (£150 - £400) was the job with the best prospects because in dealing with correspondence with customers the clerk could learn about all aspects of a transaction and also make business contacts which might enable him to start up on his own.

Chief clerks in commercial counting houses carried out the bulk of mercantile administration, and might set up as merchants in their own right if they could acquire the necessary capital-- by borrowing, inheriting or marrying money, or by entering a vacant partnership.

Other clerical posts with typical salaries: Principal clerk £400; Teller at head office £175; Secretary £1,000; Cashier, book-keeper, branch manager £150 up plus a house in the case of a branch manager. For comparison, a new partner might be taken on at a salary of £2,000.