



Victorian Entertainments



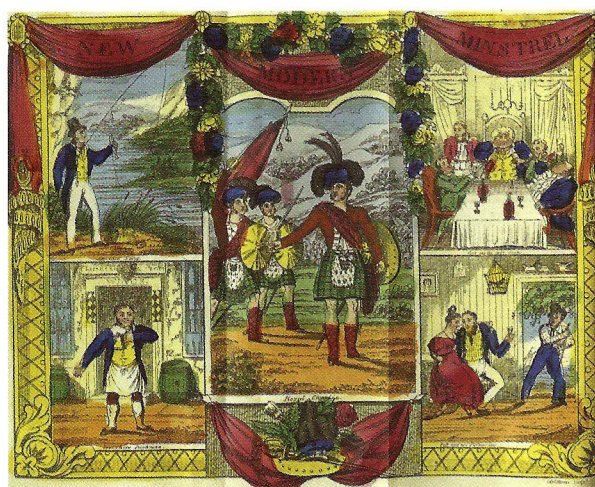
"We Are Amused"

An Exhibit Illustrating Victorian Entertainment

Walter L. Arnstein

Christina Bashford

Nicholas Temperley



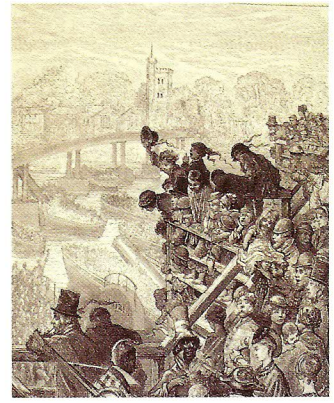
April 20th-July 20th, 2007

*The Rare Book & Manuscript Library
University of Illinois*

Visit the online version of the exhibit at: www.library.uiuc.edu/rbx/exhibits.htm

General Introduction

Most people can amuse themselves. Indeed, John Ruskin thought that amusement should arise naturally out of one's work. But there has always been a temptation to escape into the world of paid entertainment. In Victorian Britain the number who could afford to do so increased to a point where they supported hundreds of thousands of professional entertainers. Of course, many still preferred to entertain themselves with hobbies, acquired skills, and group activities; self-improvement was often a factor here.



In this exhibit we embrace both professional and personal entertainment. As a comprehensive guide to Victorian entertainment is impracticable, we have chosen to focus on three categories: music, theater, and sport. All three enjoyed a near-universal appeal in the Victorian period. Even the Queen, despite her most famous saying, was amused: she was an enthusiast for opera and horseback riding, and promoted recreational swimming. Some of her less exalted subjects preferred Christy's Minstrels or dog-fighting, while melodrama perhaps occupied a middle ground. If golf and hunting were somewhat exclusive pastimes, other sports such as skating and cycling were within the reach of the majority, and could be enjoyed by both sexes.

Some entertainments came from abroad, but many were characteristically British, including most of those organized games that now enjoy worldwide popularity. Soccer, rugby and lawn tennis were specifically Victorian creations. In music and theater, too, there were indigenous traditions, such as the choral cantata and the Christmas pantomime.

It is our hope that these samplings will suffice to evoke a relatively unexplored aspect of Victorian life.

—Nicholas Temperley

The immediate occasion for this exhibit is the 31st Conference of the Midwest Victorian Studies Association, held at Urbana-Champaign, April 20–22, 2007, on the theme “Entertainment in the Marketplace: How the Victorians Were Amused.” We are grateful to Robert Graves, Valerie Hotchkiss, Noah Pollaczek, Dawn Schmitz, Dennis Sears, Winton Solberg, Marten Stromberg, John Wagstaff, and the Music Library for their valuable assistance in preparing the exhibit, and to The Rare Book & Manuscript Library and the MVSA for their joint support of the exhibition and brochure. All items are drawn from the collections of the University of Illinois Library except for Items 4 and 11, which are courtesy of Christina Bashford and Nicholas Temperley.

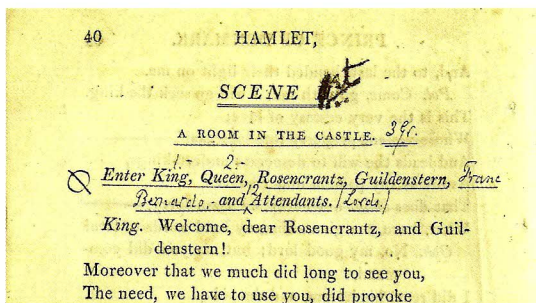




Victorian Theater

It was only in its final decades that the Victorian era yielded works that are still part of the theatrical repertory: Gilbert's operettas and Wilde's comedies. But the theater was in a flourishing state throughout Victoria's reign. Playbills bear witness to the astonishing enthusiasm of audiences for watching two or even three events on one evening, often lasting for five or six hours.

The Victorians never tired of Shakespeare. Some of their most famous actors and directors, such as William Macready, Charles Kean, and Henry Irving, made their names in Shakespearean roles. There was a movement to restore the original texts after the distortions of the Georgian period, and to seek historical realism in presenting the plays. The library is fortunate in possessing some of Macready's promptbooks, collected by Charles Shattuck (1910–92), a professor of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a leading authority in the history of Shakespeare acting.

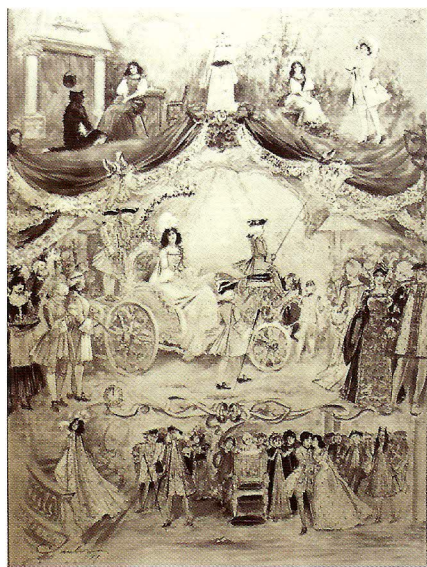


"Dozens of provincial towns boasted one or more successful theaters, as the Middlesbrough playbill illustrates."

Another salient feature of the "legitimate" stage was the dramatization of novels. Charles Dickens's thoughts seldom strayed far from the stage, and his novels lent themselves naturally to dramatic adaptation, as we know from many modern productions and TV series. By way of example we show the enduring popularity on stage of a specific character from the huge cast of *Bleak House*.

Two non-legitimate forms are represented. Melodrama, with its characteristic use of music to accompany heightened speech and action, arose in about 1800; it is no longer with us, though it passed after 1900 to the cinema screen, in silent films and beyond. Pantomime, that curious pot-pourri of traditional tales, songs, spectacle, and low humor, had older origins, but it has proved to be more durable, and still survives as a family entertainment for the English Christmas season.

Women in this period enjoyed full acceptance, if not equality, as actors, and gradually lived down the moral ambiguity long attached to



that profession. They often took male parts, and indeed this is a secondary theme of our theater exhibit. Transvestism in both directions was to be found at many levels of theatrical production, whether motivated by tradition, sexual titillation, or merely a manager's need to save money.

Theater in its many forms was evidently an entertainment for a broad range of social classes, excepting only those whose religion intervened. Dozens of provincial towns boasted one or more successful theaters, as the Middlesbrough playbill illustrates. For those who were too poor or too far away to experience live events, reports could be read in newspapers and magazines. There was also a thriving trade in theatrical prints. We have been able to draw on the University of Illinois Theatrical Print Collection, the core of which was purchased in 1953 from Theodore Leavitt, manager of the Bar Harbor (Maine) Playhouse.

—Nicholas Temperley



Music And The Victorians

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of music in the lives of the Victorians, from those in high society to the working classes, and across the nation. In a world that had only limited methods of mechanically reproducing sounds in the home (such as musical boxes), hearing live music performed was a precious thing, to be cherished forever.

But most people did not seek only to be entertained by professional musicians, they delighted in making music themselves. The series of affordable scores of choral repertoire issued by the music publisher Novello and Co. (some of which are on display) serviced much of the ever-growing demand for parts for amateur choirs. Likewise, thousands of songs and piano pieces, in styles ranging from the high serious to the popular, were composed and published for the amateur market, which was growing fast, in tandem with increasingly affordable parlor pianos.



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The Crystal Palace Polkas show one publisher capitalizing on the moment of the Great Exhibition of 1851. In the case of well-known songs whose tunes were committed to memory and sung unaccompanied, issuing the words alone was often adequate. In addition, much that was heard

on the professional concert platform was frequently packaged for domestic replication, from transcriptions of Beethoven symphonies for piano duet to the arrangement of popular numbers, such as Christy's Minstrels' songs, for voices and piano.

Public performances nevertheless loom large in several corners of the exhibit, through vestiges of concerts, operas, oratorios, and even a



ventriloquist's act. The comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, hugely popular in their day, are represented by a color caricature of Sullivan and a little-known depiction of Gilbert reading *Utopia Ltd* to his singer-actors. Meanwhile, the relationship between religion and Victorian

musical life is signaled by a vocal score of Edward Elgar's oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius* published by Novello, in a series that also included Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Creation* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

We also demonstrate how, for the Victorians, leisure could be deeply self-improving, particularly in the sphere of high art music. Program notes and music appreciation handbooks were used by many Victorian concert and opera-goers, with program notes circulating some forty years before their use became widespread in Europe or the USA. George Grove's concert notes, and a guide to the operas of Wagner, tell some of this story.

There were many changes in British musical life across Victoria's reign, of which the extraordinary growth of amateur music-making and concert life, and the widening social access to music, were obvious manifestations. Another shift involved improvements in the training of musicians, and a gradual relaxation in the taboos that had once prevented women from learning orchestral instruments and performing in public. Here, images of the time are especially revealing.

—Christina Bashford



Victorian Sports

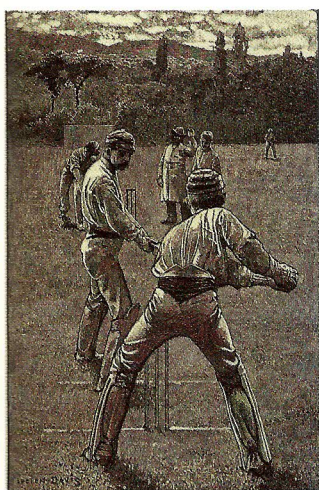
For certain traditional sports and pastimes—for example fishing, fox-hunting, and deer-hunting—the Victorian era meant relative continuity for the participants. Large crowds had assembled to watch horse races long before the onset of the century, but in the nineteenth century they became yet more numerous. Thus Parliament adjourned for Derby Day at Epsom.

Many earlier sports, such as animal-baiting, were decried, even as other sports, such as rowing, were pioneered. The immensely popular annual Oxford-Cambridge boat race on the Thames began in 1829. During the first half of the nineteenth century, public schools became converts to "muscular Christianity," inspired by organized team play in rowing, cricket, and two forms of football (rugby and soccer), as well as competitions in track and field and a variety of racquet games.

Such games became increasingly common outside schools and universities during the mid-Victorian years, an era of athletic consolidation, bureaucratization, and regulation. Thus began the British Open golf championship (1860), the Marquess of Queensberry rules for boxing (1867), the Football Association Cup (1871), the County Cricket Championship (1873), and the first World Tennis

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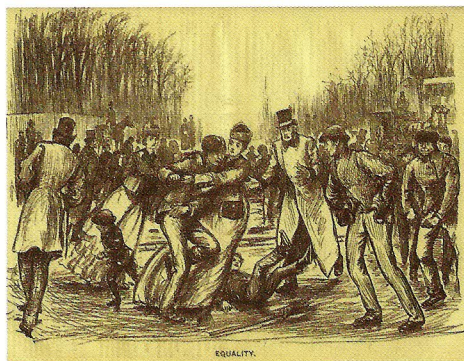
Championship at Wimbledon for men (1877) and women (1884). By 1900, on most Saturday afternoons, more than a million largely working-class boosters filled football stadiums where professional urban teams



competed. In the meantime, the redoubtable W. G. Grace (1848-1915) had become renowned as the ablest and most imposing cricket player ever. “W.G.” became as much a household name as had “W.E.G.,” William Ewart Gladstone, the four-time Liberal Prime Minister. In 1878, the first Australian cricket team visited England, and during subsequent years such exchanges among England, Australia, New Zealand, India, and the Caribbean became increasingly common. By then, it was not only telegraph and cable lines but also athletes that tied the British Empire together; the quadrennial Commonwealth Games have

continued into the twenty-first century. Although some Victorian sports transcended social class boundaries, supporters of others continued to exalt the successful amateur sportsman with independent means. Thus the public school ethos and the ideal of amateurism were transmuted, from 1896 on, into the Olympic Games.

The twenty-four volume *Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes* (1885-1895) reminds us of the sheer variety of athletic activities to be encountered during the later Victorian years: cycling, swimming, cricket, golf, mountaineering, fencing, boxing, wrestling, skating, curling, ice-hockey, boating, yachting, carriage-driving, horse-racing, steeple-chasing, archery, falconry, shooting, football, track and field, billiards, tennis, racket-ball, fishing, and hunting. Analogously, the *Ladies Field* reminds us of how many women might be found involved in them, both as spectators and as participants. Victorian leisure had become a big business.



—Walter L. Arnstein

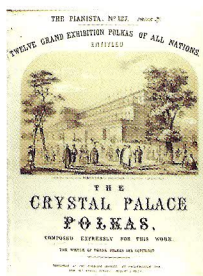
Catalog of Exhibit Items

Case 1

1. **"An Orchestra at Windsor."** *The Illustrated London News*. London: William Little, v.96: March 22nd, 1890, pp. 368-369.
2. **"Women."** *Punch*. London: Punch Publications, v.68: April 3rd, 1875, p. 150.

Case 2

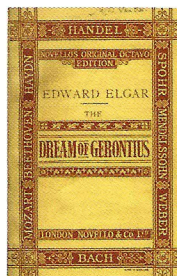
3. **"Piano Music for the Home."** *The Crystal Palace Polkas*. London: [n.d.].
4. **"Concerts in the Crystal Palace."** *Saturday Concerts Programme*. Sydenham: Crystal Palace, March 26th, 1881, pp. 610-611.
5. **"Concerts in the Crystal Palace."** *Saturday Concerts Programme*. Sydenham: Crystal Palace, April 3rd, 1880.
6. **"Home Entertainment System."** *Lane's Telescopic View of the Interior of the Great Industrial Exhibition*. London: C. Lane, 1851.



Item 3



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Case 3

7. **"Londoners at the Boat Race."** Jerrold, Blanchard & Gustave Doré. London: a pilgrimage. London: Grant & Co., 1872, p. 61.
8. **"Lewis Carroll at Wimbledon."** Dodgson, Charles. *Lawn Tennis Tournaments*. London: Macmillan, 1883.
9. **"Tobogganing."** *Ladies Field*. London: Ladies Field, v.8: February 20th, 1900, p. 363.

Case 4

10. **"Choralism."** Coleridge-Taylor, Samuel. *Scenes From The Song of Hiawatha*: op. 30. London: Novello, c1900, p. [xv].
11. **"Choralism."** Elgar, Edward. **Dream of Gerontius**. London: Novello, c1900.
12. **"Opera."** Dry, Wakeling. *Nights at the Opera*. 2nd ed. London: A. Moring, The De la More Press, 1903, pp. 60-61.
13. **"The Dancer's Reward."** Wilde, Oscar. *Salomé: a tragedy in one act*. London: E. Mathews & J. Lane, 1894, p. 41.

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14. **"Theatre-Royal, Edinburgh."** May 11th, 1857.
15. **"Theatre-Royal, Middlesbrough."** February 21st-25th, 1876.

Case 5

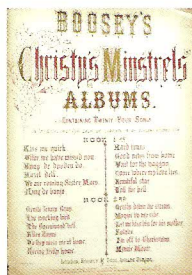
16. **"Macready's Prompt Books for Hamlet."** *Hamlet*: prompt copy...acted by W.C. Macready, Esq. at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, 1841-42. p. 40.
17. **"Tallis's Dramatic Magazine."** [1838].
18. **"Henry Irving as Hamlet."** [1875].
19. **"Irving's Edition of Hamlet."** *Hamlet*: a tragedy in five acts. London: Chiswick, 1875, p. 22-3.
20. **"Charles Dillon as Othello."** [n.d.].



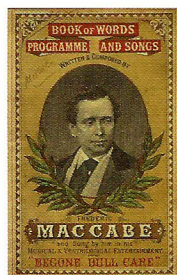
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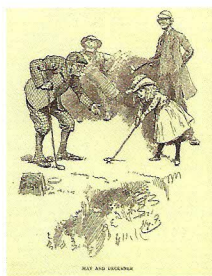
21. "Jennie Lee, 'Jo the Crossing Sweeper'." [1853].
22. "Bleak House, or, Poor 'Jo'." Lander, George. Bleak House, or, Poor "Jo." London: J. Dicks, 1876.
23. "Scene from Buckstone, *The Flowers of the Forest*." [1847].
24. "Pantomimes of the 1897 Christmas season." *The Illustrated London News*. London: William Little, v.112: January 1st, 1898, pp. 6-7.

Case 7

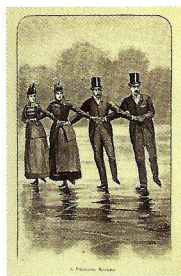
25. "Blackface Minstrelsy." Boosey's Christy's Minstrels Albums. London: Boosey & Sons, 1859.
26. "A Singing Ventriloquist." Maccabe, Frederic. Programme Book of Words and Songs. London: Grant & Co., [1874].
27. "Songs for Pleasure." Richardson's New Modern Minstrel. Derby: T. Richardson, 1834.
28. "Sullivan Without Gilbert." *Vanity Fair Album*. London: Vanity Fair Office, v.6, 1874.
29. "Gilbert With Sullivan." Fitzgerald, Percy. The Savoy Opera and the Savoyards. London: Chatto & Windus, 1894, unnumbered plate, between pp. 240-241.



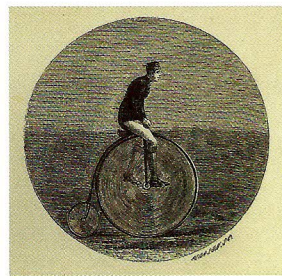
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Case 8

30. "The New Sporting Magazine." London: Baldwin & Cradock, v.7: February 1844, p. 74.
31. "Golf in 1890." Hutchinson, Horace G. Golf. (Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes). London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890, p. 445.
32. "Skating in 1892." Heathcote, John Moyer. Skating. (Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes). London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892, frontispiece.
33. "Cricket in 1888." Steel, Allan Gibson. Cricket. (Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes). London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1888, p. 77.
34. "Cycling in 1887." Albemarle, William Coutts Keppel, Earl of. Cycling. (Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes). London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1887, frontispiece.