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Bakalářská práce

Celebrating the Nation: The Great
Exhibition of 1851 and the Festival of
Britain (1951)

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Abstract

The bachelor thesis deals with two major historical events designed to celebrate British economy, engineering, and scientific and cultural achievements – the Great Exhibition of 1851 and Festival of Britain (1951) – from the perspective of national identity and the notion of Britishness. The first part of the thesis introduces both events, including the reasons leading to their realisation, their courses, impacts and the contemporary public responses. The main comparative-analytical part focuses on the ways of generating and representing a specific image of the British nation and forging British national identity. The comparative analysis is aimed at the identification of the relationship between the two events and the related political-cultural shifts in understanding British national identity.

Key words: Great Exhibition 1851, Festival of Britain, national identity, Britishness

Anotace

Bakalářská práce se zabývá dvěma významnými historickými událostmi oslavujícími britské úspěchy v oblasti hospodářství, techniky, vědy a kultury – Světové výstavy v roce 1851 a národní výstavy Festival of Britain (1951) – z hlediska vnímání britské národní identity a idey „britství“ (Britishness). První část práce seznámí čtenáře s oběma událostmi, včetně důvodů, jež vedly k jejich konání, jejich průběhu, výsledků a soudobého vnímání veřejností. Hlavní komparačně-analytická část práce tkví v porovnání způsobů vytváření a prezentace specifického obrazu britského národa a prosazování britské národní identity v souvislosti se zkoumanými událostmi. Výstupem srovnávací analýzy je podchycení vztahu mezi oběma výstavami a souvisejícího politicko-kulturního posunu ve vnímání britské národní identity.

Klíčová slova: Velká světová výstava 1851, Festival of Britain, národní identita, obraz národa, Britishness

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INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis deals with two significant events, the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Festival of Britain in 1951, that had a great impact on the British nation. Its main focus is on their influence on forging the national identity called “Britishness” and, moreover, explores their relationship on this account.

The symbolic one hundred years that separates these events, is no coincidence. The centenary of the Great Exhibition provided the incentive for holding the Festival. But was it a real purpose of the Festival to celebrate the previous occasion?

For better understanding, the first two parts of the thesis are dedicated to the introduction of both events, beginning with the Great Exhibition and following with the Festival of Britain. It summarizes the historical background of both periods and then explains the reasons for their realisation, their preparations, courses, and the legacies they left. After providing the information, the next question follows: How did these social occasions help shape the nation?

The last part pays attention to British identity and provides a comparison between the impacts of both events. It explains the terms national identity and Britishness to comprehend the issue that is investigated. Furthermore, the comparison is structured using aspects connected with the concept of British national identity – international vs. national, exhibition vs. festival, the image of Empire and involvement of colonies and regions, the influence on sectors such as industry, architecture and others, education, the future and modernity and, as a last, the people, meaning the class, gender and race.

Ultimately, the conclusion about the relationship and views of British identity is presented.

THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1851

1 Historical Context

During the 19th century, England was going through a great transition, mainly caused by the Industrial Revolution. It completely transformed the focus of the national economy from agriculture to manufacturing resulting in England becoming the greatest economic power in the world (Mitchell, 1996 pp. 1,2).

This period is also known as the Victorian age after Queen Victoria who succeeded on the throne on 20th June 1837 after her uncle William IV. died without his own legitimate heir (Mitchell, 1996). She was married to her cousin Albert, the second son of the Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, in 1840. Despite it being an arranged marriage since their early childhood, he quickly won her heart, and she fell in love with him. Nonetheless, that did not apply to the British people, who refused to accept him as an equal to their Queen at first (Liepman, 2011).

The Queen was devoted to her country and people, nevertheless, she had to deal with a number of social and political issues that arose from industrialization. In the first half of the 19th century, many people were forced to move from the countryside to the cities in order to acquire a job, which was mainly provided by factories. Due to overpopulation, urban life was connected with poor conditions such as hunger, pollution and unaffordable accommodation. (Mitchell, 1996)

The lack of food was partly caused by Corn Laws which were established to protect domestic agriculture and put heavy taxes on imported cheaper grain. It meant great income for the upper classes who mostly owned the land and therefore supported it. On the contrary, the working and lower classes were badly affected by the laws as they made the food more expensive. Finally, in 1846, the repeal of the Corn Laws was achieved thanks to the support of the prime minister, Sir Robert Peel (The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2019).

As a result of the workers' dissatisfaction, a large movement of activists called Chartists arose during the 1830s. Their aim was political rather than economic, as they wanted to achieve primarily suffrage for all men, among other things, which would help them to increase the voice of the working class. Although the movement gained big popularity

shown by the demonstrations and a great number of petition signatures, it was rejected by the parliament and eventually faded away (Liepman, 2011 p. 20).

2 Reasons for Realisation

Exhibitions became fully popular in the 19th century, but few had been held before that. The first ones, which are known of, took place in the second half of the 18th century in London (in 1756, 1757 or 1761) and France (in 1763 and 1798). Only very traditional products, such as carpets, silk, or china, were displayed. It was not until a few years later that the subsequent French exhibitions (in 1801, 1802 and 1806) took on more sophisticated design and many innovations connected with the better support and contribution to the industry. France created a new national concept, and other European countries followed during the 1930s and 1940s, for instance, in cities such as Munich, Stockholm, Dublin, Madrid, Petrograd, Brussels or Berlin (Halada, et al., 2000 pp. 7, 8).

2.1 The Royal Society of Arts

The first attempts at English exhibitions were made by a group called The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, known today as the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) established in 1754 by William Shipley. Its main purpose was to award and support new beneficial products with great national potential and design. Apart from holding small exhibitions, the Society also had another very important outcome. It brought together the key men characters for the realisation of the future Great Exhibition (Liepman, 2011 pp. 11-12).

The most influential figure was undoubtedly Prince Albert. As said before, he struggled to find a position in the society other than the Consort to the Queen, therefore he decided to follow his interests in art. He joined the Society as a member and later even became its President after the death of the Duke of Sussex¹ in 1843 (Shears, 2017 p. 31).

Francis Whishaw, appointed Secretary of the Society of Arts, was the first one who decided to follow the steps of other countries, mainly the successful France, and organized a larger event called „a Grand Annual Exhibition of Manufactures“ in 1844 with the support of Prince Albert (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 3). It was right there, where

¹ Duke of Sussex (1773 – 1843) was the sixth son of George III. He was a royal patron and the first president of the Society from 1816 (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 2).

another very important person, Henry Cole, came to light. He was a very ambitious and talented man with a great interest in art and design, and therefore he became a proper and influential member of the Society. After Whishaw's event, other bigger exhibitions followed in the years 1847 and 1849, and with each, popularity and attendance grew bigger (Shears, 2017 p. 33).

Cole was also an opportunist, that is why he came up with an idea to expand and organize the first international exhibition inspired by the French success, however one that the world had never seen before (Liepman, 2011 p. 13).

In 1849, an exhibition of French Industry took place in Paris that was attended by Cole together with Matthew Digby Wyatt² and also independently by Francis Fuller³, other influential members of the Society (Shears, 2017 p. 36). After that, all became even more determined to make Cole's idea happen and arranged a meeting with Prince Albert in June 1849 at Buckingham Palace. Albert was enthused, but initially reluctant after presenting the idea because he feared government disapproval. However, he eventually gave his blessing to the realization of the project and going international (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 8).

3 Plans and Preparations

First, it was necessary to hear the opinions of local workers and manufacturers, since they were crucial to the success. Francis Fuller and Cole travelled around towns and collected feedback. There was an objection against awarding only the great design as a dominant criterion, for it would favour French and other foreign products which aimed for it. The cheapness, the British speciality, needed to be included as well to create a balance. The response differed according to the place of living. People in the rural areas were unsure about how they would profit from it, and were consequently promised agriculture being part of the showcase (Liepman, 2011 pp. 14, 16).

The important decision was made that the exhibition would not have any intervention and would be sponsored by the government, thus it would depend only on public

² Matthew Digby Wyatt (1820-1877) was a writer, editor, lecturer and watercolourist. He had a special interest in mosaics and therefore became associated with the Society of Arts. (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 7)

³ Francis Fuller (1807-1887) was a surveyor, originally a farmer. He was part of the Society's agricultural field of interest and also a member of the Society's committee for planning exhibitions. (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 6)

subscriptions. As a result, the commission needed to be established to manage all the matters (Liepman, 2011 p. 15).

3.1 The Royal Commission

On 3rd January 1850, the Royal Commission for the Great Exhibition of 1851 was officially appointed by Queen Victoria. It consisted of 24 men with Prince Albert at the head as its president (Liepman, 2011 p. 15). „Exhibition should belong to people“ (Shears, 2017 p. 54) and for this reason, apart from aristocrats and politicians, common people were members as well. (Shears, 2017 p. 54).

It was divided into committees on the basis of the tasks they carried out. There was a finance committee, building committee and more than 300 local committees, that represented regional interests. It also had 2 secretaries and 2 special commissioners who were mediators between the executive and local committees (Shears, 2017 pp. 54,55).

The main purpose of the Commission lied in tasks such as plan supervision, choice of place, gaining money subscriptions⁴ and awarding prizes. The plan proceeded in the following first steps: raising a sufficient amount of donations, obtaining a design for the main building, beginning with its construction, and ensuring display objects both from home and abroad (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 17).

3.2 Site

The initial location suggestions were already heard at the first meeting of the Commission, namely Somerset House, Hyde Park, Leicester Square, Regent's Park, Primrose Hill, Victoria Park, or Battersea. Ultimately, the commissioners came to an agreement that Hyde Park appeared as the most ideal since it was located near the city centre (Liepman, 2011 p. 17) and accessible to all classes (Shears, 2017 p. 39).

3.3 Building

The location had already been decided, and the question of the building followed as the most pressing one. The Building Committee, which was in charge of it, announced a tender on 13th March 1850 along with the requirements, especially for the preservation of trees and a top-lit, fire-resistant single-storey building. The building needed to be not only constructed in a short time but also temporary and, at the same time, reusable.

⁴ Although the subscriptions were collected and gained mainly by the Royal Society. (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 14)

Over 200 proposals came in, however, none of them met the expectations (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 18). Consequently, the committee decided to create a design of their own, which only brought even more criticism. It was supposed to be made of a great number of bricks, thus this did not correspond with the temporariness and last but not least, it would cost more money than was reserved (Liepman, 2011 p. 24).

3.3.1 John Paxton

John Paxton⁵ was neither an architect nor an engineer, but a chief gardener to the Duke of Devonshire (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 23). His speciality resided in constructing glasshouses for exotic plants that were innovative at that time. At the last moment, he decided to create a design for the Great Exhibition building, although the deadline had already passed. He had a construction made of glass and iron in mind similar to his greenhouses. Since the tendering had ended, he gave his design to the press. His idea represented something so innovative, modern, and clear that it immediately won the public's attention. In fact, he convinced not only the people who were against the brick building design but also those who were against the Exhibition itself (Liepman, 2011 pp. 24-27). Additionally, its popularity increased as he made an upgrade that included a way to preserve and roof large elms in Hyde Park (Shears, 2017 p. 86). Due to such an enormous public response, the Commission eventually sanctioned the proposal instead of their design on 15th July 1850. Later on, one editor (*The Punch*) named the building The Crystal Palace in his article, which sounded so accurate and noble that it immediately caught on and the building was no longer called otherwise (Liepman, 2011 p. 27).

3.3.2 The Crystal Palace

“The completed building was an unprecedented architectural achievement, being at the time the largest enclosed space in the world. It covered a massive 990,000 square feet and was 1,848 feet in length and 408 feet wide (Shears, 2017 p. 86).”

The construction of the Crystal Palace was assigned to the company Fox, Henderson & Co. for £85 000 (Halada, et al., 2000 p. 21). It mainly provided iron and timber

⁵ John Paxton (1801–1865) was keen on city parks which even brought him the opportunity to design a few (Liepman, 2011 p. 26). Railway Companies also took his interest (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 24) and therefore the Duke ensured him a post on the Midland Railway (operating between London and the north of England) (Liepman, 2011 p. 26). Before the Crystal Palace, his most successful glasshouse, and the model for the Crystal Palace, was the Lily House at Chatsworth for waterlily *Victoria Regia*. The building was remarkable for its roof that imitated giant leaves (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 24).

(Hobhouse, 2002 p. 36) , while a contract for glass was signed by the Chance Brothers of Birmingham. Paxton customized the design so that it could be well and, most importantly, quickly assembled (Shears, 2017 p. 87) furthermore, serial production was used for the first time (Halada, et al., 2000 p. 24). Construction began on 26th September 1850 with the erection of the first cast-iron columns (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 34) and proceeded rapidly since the majority of components were produced elsewhere before being delivered to the site (Shears, 2017 p. 90). Contemporaneously with the ongoing construction, innovative machines were invented and used that considerably speeded up the process, for instance, the machine for cutting wooden parts or glazing device, and many more (Liepman, 2011 pp. 37, 44). The building was traversed by the Transept in the centre, with a semicylindrical roof designed for the protection of the famous elms. The main space, the Nave, measured 72 feet. Entrances were situated in the south, east, and west, whereas exits were on all sides (Hobhouse, 2002 pp. 37, 38). The roof was compounded of 18 932 glass panes and assembled using the glazing device mentioned before (Halada, et al., 2000 p. 22).

Naturally, the public raised many concerns, mainly related to safety and water resistance. The main safety test included 300 workers walking, running, and jumping over the surfaces, concluded with no damage detected (Liepman, 2011 pp. 46, 47). Regarding water tightness, the vertical columns were hollow and gutters were installed below the roof, both to conduct rainwater away (Halada, et al., 2000 p. 22). Another problem with light and heat was solved by covering some panels with cotton canvas, which overshadowed almost half of the building. Finally, many modifications were added to the original design, for instance, space increase, refreshment rooms, staircases, better equipment such as gas-lighting, ventilation or boiler-house for the Machinery in Motion section (Hobhouse, 2002 pp. 35, 38) On 1st February, the press reported that the building was almost completed and soon prepared to accommodate exhibits (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 38). The public and the press considered the Crystal Palace to be the eighth world wonder (Halada, et al., 2000 p. 22).

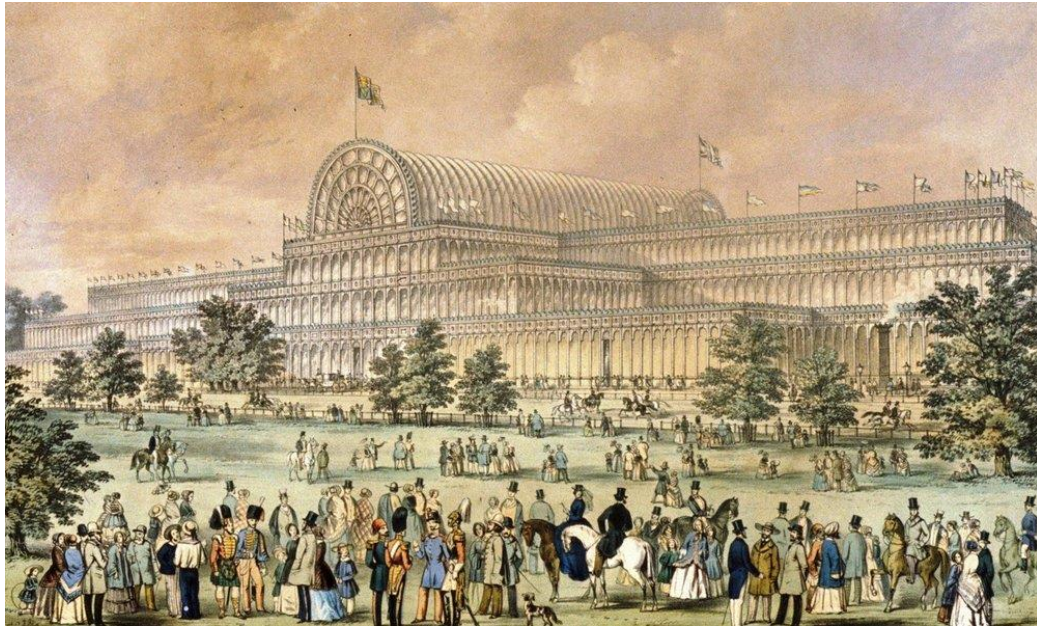


Figure 1: The Crystal Palace, drawing and lithograph by Augustus Butler (Butler, 2018)

As the building was being constructed, the Commission could occupy itself with obtaining exhibits, primarily the foreign ones. To make that easier, they invited diplomats from other countries to partially pass that responsibility on to them. It was decided that Britain would occupy half of the building and the other one would be granted to the rest of the nations. The size of the space was divided according to the number of exhibits; therefore, the French had up to three times as much space as the others (Liepman, 2011 p. 39).

3.4 Patent Laws

Naturally, concerns about piracy and theft of ideas arose in connection with the exhibition. The patent law had already existed, nevertheless, it was obsolete, slow, and above all expensive. It functioned on the basis of laws from the 17th century, and the process itself even took place under the 1536 Act, which included ten separately paid phases. On 11th April 1851, the Protection of Inventions Act was issued that guaranteed protection against piracy, however, the theft of the physical invention from the exhibition came under the police competence. The registration process under the Act had three stages. First, the submission of invention description by its original creator to the Attorney-General, second, acquiring of certificate, and third, registration of certificate at the Registrar of Design at the Design Office in Somerset House. Henry Cole played an important role in the reform. He insisted that inventions fell into a person's property, as did material possessions such as land, houses, or money. Also, he

claimed that the work of invention was not only a type of labour but also a specific type of knowledge that ought to be linked with special rights. The Protection of Inventions Act was supposed to be only temporary for the duration of the exhibition, however, it was so successful that it eventually became the inspiration for the new Patent Law Amendment Act issued on 1st July 1852 (Purbrick, 1997 pp. 56-58).

3.5 Prizes and Awards

Originally, the Commission wanted to lure exhibitors with valuable prizes, nevertheless, they decided that the awards would only be in the form of medals and they would not be ranked. The Medals Committee was to choose the medal designs, while a special Medal Inscription Committee was to decide about medal inscriptions. Choosing the jury in charge of the awards was an even more difficult task than the medals themselves, since they had to be chosen in such a way as to avoid any unfairness accusations. The jury consisted of a balanced combination of foreign and British jurors with origins from different classes. The medals were made of bronze, and the set contained five types, the Council, Prize, Exhibitor, Juror, and Service (Hobhouse, 2002 pp. 46-49).

4 Visit of the Exhibition

4.1 Opening Day

Originally, the royal opening ceremony was to be held private only for officials and diplomats; nevertheless, it would not correspond with the main message that the festival was supposed to show a union of all nations and classes (Shears, 2017 p. 93). Eventually, the Commission granted permission to attend to all who had a season ticket (Liepman, 2011 p. 53), which amounted to almost 30 000 people (Shears, 2017 p. 94).

The Opening Day took place on 1st May 1851 with the initial ceremony at noon, and the Queen declared a public holiday for that special day (Liepman, 2011 pp. 53-55). The ceremony commenced with the national anthem, followed by the speeches of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. The Archbishop of Canterbury said a special prayer for the exhibition and several choirs sang together a rendition of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus (Shears, 2017 p. 95). Afterwards, the royal procession began their tour accompanied by John Paxton and Charles Fox⁶ at the front, followed by commissioners and other people connected with the organisation, foreign ambassadors, members of the Government, the

⁶ His associate Henderson was unfortunately ill and therefore couldn't attend (Liepman, 2011 p. 57).

Bishop of Winchester, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and members of the royal household. This meant that the queen was walking only a few steps from her subjects, fortunately, no incidents or danger happened. When the royal tour finished, the Great Exhibition officially opened for the public tours (Liepman, 2011 pp. 57-58).

For Queen Victoria, the event represented two significant meanings, a celebration of Albert's great work and the family celebration of their youngest son Arthur's first birthday (Shears, 2017 p. 94). She was really thrilled and proud of her husband and all the people behind it. She personally visited the exhibition repeatedly always before the opening to the public, and reportedly spent more than 50 hours in total⁷ there (Liepman, 2011 pp. 57-61).

4.2 Visiting Hours and Admission

People could visit the Exhibition every day, except on Sunday, from 9 am to 6 pm. Almost all of May the upper class had Palace to itself due to the relatively high price, which was £1 for the first two days and 5 shillings for the remaining three weeks. On 26th May, the Commission announced new admissions: 1 shilling from Monday to Thursday (known as „Shilling Days“), 2 shillings and sixpence on Fridays, and 5 shillings on Saturdays. That system was intended to guarantee the separation of the upper and lower classes (Liepman, 2011 p. 89). The price of the season tickets was £3 and 3 shillings for men and £2 and 2 shillings for women (Shears, 2017 p. 269).

4.3 The Exhibits

The whole exhibition took place in the spirit of observation and inspiration and therefore, the Commission forbid the sale of the products within the event itself (Shears, 2017 pp. 106, 107, 120). Among other forbidden things were paintings, since the Exhibition was supposed to be more about manufacture and design than art. For that reason, a great number of sculptures were displayed (Liepman, 2011 p. 80).

The Exhibition contained more than 100 000 products from 14 000 exhibitors, almost half of whom were foreigners (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 66). The display was divided into two main parts. The first section, in the western nave, was dedicated to Britain alone, and the second one, in the eastern nave, to the rest of the world. The Commission had to devise an important and difficult classification system of products. The space division

⁷ One visit took around two hours (Liepman, 2011 p. 60).

was completed with the four-part categorisation: *Raw Materials*, *Machinery*, *Manufactures* and *Fine Arts*, which was Albert's idea to represent the product path from its very origin to the form delivered to the customer. The British liked the organization and for that reason, they decided to extend it even further into the final 30-class taxonomy (Shears, 2017 pp. 108-110).



Figure 2: The transept, seen from the Grand Entrance (Craig, 2017)

4.3.1 The British Section

The British part was heavily inspired by the Industrial Revolution, hence there were many machines powered by steam, perceived as a source of power superior to water, wind or horses. Visitors could view James Watt's model of steam engine evolution from the very beginning. The displays of machines in motion, both British and foreign, were the most popular group of the exhibition since the public viewed them as something new and magical. Part of this display were many items connected to the railway, also containing a "*design of 'railways in the streets', later known as trams* (Liepman, 2011 p. 70)." Another interesting means-of-transport design was an improved omnibus, the famous London double-decker predecessor.

The royal couple also acted as exhibitors with Albert's cashmere fabrics and Victoria's jewel case, Sèvres porcelain or the world-famous Koh-i-Noor diamond⁸, the most popular attraction of the exhibition. The British section included the exhibits from its colonies (India, Canada, The Newfoundland, The West Indies, Australia, South Africa) typical for their environment. Among the inspiring exhibits that brought a great impact to the future, were for instance a ventilation system, gas cookers, a telegraph, an electric clock (hanging above the main entrance), a machine for folding envelopes, printing devices (the predecessor to the copier), hydraulic press, microscopes or a washing machine. One of the most significant inventions of that time was definitely the photograph, and thus its many innovations were displayed.

Visitors could also admire the world's largest mirror by Thames Plate Glass Company, which reflected the entire Main Avenue and gave the impression of infiniteness. The very centre of the building was dominated by the Osler's crystal fountain. Upstairs, there were galleries that accommodated smaller items.

4.3.2 The Foreign Section

The foreign section was primarily divided by countries rather than categories. It was no surprise that France took up most of the space as it had no competition in its sophisticated products, for instance, Sèvres porcelain, Gobelins tapestries, Limoges enamels or Parisian bronzes and clocks. The United States of America represented the second largest section after France, nevertheless, many of their products had not arrived in time due to the large distance, so it was not completely filled. They reaped success with the agricultural implements over the British ones. The most popular were McCormick reaping and the Colt revolver⁹. Most of the German states displayed united as States of the Zollverein. They were famous for the musical instruments and the Christmas tree that belonged to German tradition. It had only recently been introduced and popularised by Prince Albert in Britain. Austria, the richest country in continental Europe, also had a great representation at the Exhibition. One of its typical products was

⁸ Originally a 191-carat diamond has been a part of the Crown Jewels only since 1849. Later prince Albert ordered it to be recut to oval shape and 109 carats. It was worn as a crown accessory, for instance, Queen Elizabeth (mother of Elizabeth II.) wore it in her crown at the coronation of her husband King George VI.

⁹ The famous weapon was designed by Samuel Colt on the basis of its carved wooden model (Liepman, 2011 p. 82).

matches, known as „Lucifer matches“. The rest of the countries (Spain, Portugal, Russia, Belgium, „Italy“,¹⁰ Brazil, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, China, Greece, etc.) had quite smaller displays (Liepman, 2011 pp. 63-87).

For many people, the Exhibition provided the first opportunity to see foreign goods, even the ones of their nation but from distant regions (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 66).

4.4 Services

4.4.1 Refreshments

The refreshments occupied three sections. The main area was located in the centre of the building, and it was functioning as a tea room where the most food was provided. In the other two, the offer was limited to mainly bread, butter and cheese. The menu contained no cooked meals, only warm drinks and also no alcohol. The water was free. The contract for refreshments was signed with company Schweppes (Liepman, 2011).

4.4.2 Toilets

The equipment with lavatories was rather more difficult since London ranked among generally filthy and unsanitary cities. Two years before the Exhibition, The Metropolitan Sewers Act had been issued, which was supposed to provide public lavatories around the city, however none of them were actually open at the time. George Jennings eventually designed the so-called „monkey closets“ that worked by the system of one penny per use.¹¹ The statistics said that more than 800 000 people used the toilets at the Exhibition. Since the design was so successful, it was used all around the city and even copied abroad (Liepman, 2011 pp. 42,43).

5 The End

The total attendance of the Exhibition reached over 6 million visits. Most people visited on the Shilling Days and before the forthcoming end (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 69). It sold over 25 000 season tickets and displayed around million exhibits. Almost 3 000 items earned a Prize Medal (Shears, 2017 p. 317) and 164 were awarded the more prestigious Council Medal (British gained 78, French were second with 54) (Liepman, 2011 pp. 118, 119). The great number of visitors. that flooded the city was also beneficial for

¹⁰ Italy appeared as a group of Rome, Sardinia and Tuscany (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 66).

¹¹ The interesting thing is, that maybe that's where the phrase „to spend a penny“ came from (Liepman, 2011 p. 43).

London sights or railway companies. Railways functioned as the main means of transport, both from other British cities and from ports by foreigners. Moreover, the companies cooperated and offered better prices (for instance, the British and French ones) (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 70).

5.1 Closing

The public visited the Exhibition on 11th October for the last time. After that, the Exhibition was opened for two more days for exhibitors, jurors and their friends. On the 15th of October 1851 was an official and complete end. The Commission decided to carry out the closing ceremony in a lowkey manner compared to the opening one. The President of the Council of Chairmen of Juries presented the Jury reports and prince Albert thanked jurors, exhibitors, members of committees, foreign and local commissioners and members of the Society of Arts (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 75). At last, the final verse of the National Anthem sounded and the Bishop of London gave a prayer of thanksgiving for the success (Liepman, 2011 p. 118).

5.2 The Fate of the Building

„Nothing physical remains (Shears, 2017 p. 336).“

Based on the agreement with the Commission, Fox & Henderson became the owners of the Crystal Palace (Liepman, 2011 p. 124). In order for the building to be pulled down, the exhibitors first had to clear their goods within one month although foreign exhibitors did not manage it until January 15th (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 77). Naturally, many people spoke up against the removal of the building, among them Cole, Paxton and Fuller, who wanted to preserve it as a permanent monument (Shears, 2017 p. 336). Paxton suggested to use it and extend it as a Winter Garden. The request for retention was submitted to the House of Commons, however unsuccessfully (Hobhouse, 2002 pp. 78, 79). The great advantage of the Crystal Palace was that it did not have to be demolished but dismantled since it was the first prefabricated building (Liepman, 2011 p. 125). Ultimately, a newly-established company involving, among others, Francis Fuller and the Chairman of the Brighton Railway Company, bought it for £70, 000 and let it move to Sydenham, where it was rebuilt and even extended. It became known as a „People’s Palace“ and served for more than 80 years hosting exhibitions, concerts and many other events. On 30th November 1936, a fire broke out and unfortunately the Crystal Palace burned down (Hobhouse, 2002 p. 80).

5.3 Financial Outcomes

The profit amounted to £186,436 whereupon a question about its utilization became heavily discussed (Shears, 2017 p. 362). The Commission wanted to use the money for something that would continue carrying the focus of the Exhibition, namely education (Liepman, 2011 p. 121). Albert's idea represented a purchase of a 35-ha land in South Kensington used for the establishment of a complex of educational institutions, later approved and called "Albertopolis" (Shears, 2017 pp. 375, 376). Nowadays it houses, for instance, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Imperial College of Science and Technology, Royal Colleges of Art and Music and the Royal Albert Hall. The rest of the money was deposited in a fund used to pay scholarships and grants for the support of education, science and art (Halada, et al., 2000 p. 29).

5.4 Legacy

„Like many significant events in history, the Great Exhibition arose out of a chance combination of essentially unrelated circumstances: a Consort anxious to make his mark; a burgeoning manufacturing industry looking to expand its horizons; the dawn of the age of mass travel: a world riven by fractiousness but recognising that self-interest demanded greater levels of international co-operation (Liepman, 2011 p. 130).“

It can be concluded that the Great Exhibition was a triumphant success. The press praised it, even those who had originally criticized it, and it was clear that the whole event united the nation, especially different social classes (Liepman, 2011 p. 115).

Furthermore, the Exhibition served in the future as a precedent for the upcoming exhibitions, both national and international (Shears, 2017 pp. 320, 321). *„The Exhibition was significant in providing a new basis for future action a sort of social contract – resting on broad acceptance of principles such as material consumption, good design, international cooperation, industrial development, and commercial liberalism (Davis, 1999 p. 242).“* There were three national exhibitions in Britain¹²

¹² The first one was the Exhibition of Art-Industry in Dublin in 1853 (by the Royal Dublin Society), followed by the 1862 Exhibition in South Kensington (as a 10 years anniversary from the Great Exhibition) and the most innovative the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857.

during the next few years and also many foreign ones in the 19th century, for instance, in Paris or the USA¹³ (Hobhouse, 1995 p. 49).

The original aims of the Commission stood for the support of peaceful internationalism using commercial enterprise, stimulation of British design, and capitalising on free trade by creating new markets abroad. Given the forthcoming conflicts, for instance, the Crimean wars, a revolution in Italy and India, and the American Civil War, there was not much to talk about international peace. On the other hand, the stimulation of design had a more positive effect, since trade was growing and free trade became popularized. However, one of the most significant contributions was achieved in the field of culture, mainly Art and Science, and education. According to Albert, the aim of education signified the main purpose of the Exhibition from the very beginning (Shears, 2017 pp. 318-320).

¹³ - The New York exhibition of 1852-3, the World's Columbia Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the Trans-Mississippi Exhibition of 1898 in Omaha and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904 in St Louis (Hobhouse, 1995 p. 49)

FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

6 Historical Context

If the 19th century was characterized by a big transition making Britain one of the greatest economic powers, the 20th century began with the exact opposite. As a result of the unfortunate events striking the whole world, namely the First World War, the Great Depression in the 1930s and the Second World War, the economy collapsed in an enormous way. Although Britain ended on the winning side of the war, a great amount of money had been spent and the state reserves were depleted. For this reason, they were forced to take out a loan of \$3,750 million from the United States, which brought even more considerable concerns.

The postwar period began with the polls in 1945. On 5th July, the victorious Labour Party replaced the Conservative Party and Clement Attlee acceded as the new Prime Minister after Winston Churchill's resignation. The people saw Conservatives as the party of wealth and primarily the past connected with war, therefore, Labour represented a better choice for the new chapter of peace, recovery and hope (Childs, 2013 pp. 2-11).

The leadership of the Labour Party brought a social revolution and the promise of a new welfare state associated with economic and social reforms (Conekin, 2003 p. 5). Socialism propagated partial public ownership, hence Attlee initiated the nationalization of most businesses, especially the railways, mines, gas, electricity, waterways, airways and the Bank of England (Turner, 2011 p. 8). In 1946, health reforms were introduced. The National Health Act nationalized hospitals and the National Insurance Act provided financial aid during unemployment, illness, maternity, guardianship, retirement or decease. All those changes were designated to improve public conditions and equally raise the national budget (Childs, 2013 pp. 12-16).

Around 20 million people lived in homes without hot water resembling slums (Turner, 2011 p. 8). During the war, almost one third of houses were damaged or destroyed, therefore over a million new ones had to be built (Childs, 2013 p. 18). All essential products, for instance, food, clothes, tea or coal, were in great shortage and for that

reason, they continued to be rationed.¹⁴ People blamed the government for the homes without heating caused by the lack of coal associated with the nationalization of the mines. Factories started to shut, creating alarming unemployment. It was like the 1930s all over again. Almost half of the nation stated that they would emigrate if there was a chance. The resulting image of postwar Britain was grey, gloomy, depressing, and ultimately the Festival of Britain was to change all that (Turner, 2011 pp. 8-10).

7 Reason for Realisation

The first idea of organizing another international event had already been suggested by the Royal Society of Arts in 1943. The reason was to be the hundredth anniversary of the Great Exhibition in 1851, the biggest British success which could not be surpassed by just anything. Nevertheless, the government did not pay much attention to the proposal due to the ongoing war.

Later, the idea was revived again by Gerald Barry, the editor of the *New Chronicle*, who published an open letter about the issue directed to Sir Stafford Cripps, the President of the Board of Trade. Cripps, also a proponent of modernism, was intrigued since he saw it as a prospect for export promotion, especially to the USA. He charged a commission headed by Lord Ramsden, a former Tory MP, with analysing whether holding a festival would be appropriate (Turner, 2011 pp. 11-13). In 1946, Ramsden's report recommended the event as suitable „*to demonstrate to the world the recovery of the United Kingdom from the effects of the war in the moral, cultural, spiritual and material fields*“ (Atkinson, 2012 p. 8).

8 Preparations

The Royal Society of Arts organized a Festival Conference for individuals and organisations interested in the Festival. They discussed mainly two topics, size and price. The size was not such a problem since the event should be distributed to central London and also other places. The important decision was made that the Festival would not be international. The convention between 92 states had been made and stipulated that an international event can only take place every 3 years. Belgium and France had already announced theirs to be held in 1950 and 1953, thus the next free option was not

¹⁴ In 1950, the rations included „7 ounces of butter, 1 egg, a pound of sugar, 10 pence worth of meat, 2 rashers of bacon and 2 ounces of tea per week“ for one working person (Magnetic Vision, 2019 pp. 4:33-4:49).

until 1956 (Turner, 2011 pp. 15-17). The second reason was money. It would be too expensive and it was something Britain could not afford in an economic crisis (Conekin, 2003 p. 28). The government also raised concerns about limited material sources and the lack of manpower that was primarily needed for reconstruction after the war (Atkinson, 2012 p. 11). Nevertheless, in the end, a reduced national version was approved in 1947 (Conekin, 2003 p. 33) with a budget of £12 million (Turner, 2011 p. 43).

Unfortunately, Cripps's vision of improving export fell apart with that version and the leadership was taken over by Herbert Morrison, the Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the House of Commons. He saw a great significance in education as the path to success and, consequently, the Festival's idea appealed to him (Turner, 2011 p. 19). Later, he earned the title „Lord of Festival“ (Conekin, 2003 p. 33).

8.1 Festival Council

The Festival received a lot of criticism concerning bias in favour of the Labour Party, since many key figures belonged among its supporters or members. If the event was to be successful, it had to be non-partisan or at least not be bound to primarily one party. Morrison had to carefully choose people who would form the Council. Conservatives were in a habit to disapprove of everything that could benefit Labour, and therefore needed to be soothed. According to Morrison, the perfect way to do this was to choose Lord Ismay, Churchill's chief of staff during the war, as the Chairman of the Council.

8.2 Festival Executive Committee

The leading post as „the Festival Director“ was acquired by Gerald Barry, who had drawn attention to himself earlier with the idea of an international festival. He turned out to be the best choice for the job and surrounded himself with a team of young, ambitious and educated people. The official Festival Committee was formed consisting of Bernard Sendall of the Admiralty, Cecil Cooke of the Central Office of Information, Mary Glasgow of the Arts Council and Leonard Crainford as Secretary to the Festival (Turner, 2011 pp. 21-25). In addition to this core of the committee, representatives of councils of art, science, architecture, industrial design and the British Film Institute also contributed with their fields of knowledge (Conekin, 2003 pp. 33, 34). Morrison's instructions to the committee were to create „*a national display illustrating the British contribution to civilisation, past, present and future in the arts, in science and*

technology and in industrial design“, and Barry had 2 years, 11 months and 2 days to accomplish all that (Turner, 2011 pp. 24, 26). He also stated that this time the festival should not primarily focus on trade and industry, but above all on the story of the people and their country (Conekin, 2003 p. 29). Everything was partly planned at Barry’s residence in the country, which brought a lot of inspiration since love of the countryside and outdoors was perceived as a very important part of the national identity (Atkinson, 2012 p. 19).

8.2.1 Other Influential People of the Festival

The post of Director of Architecture was filled by Hugh Casson, who knew Barry from the *News Chronicle*. His Design Group included James Holland and James Gardner, the Chief Designer of Battersea Pleasure Gardens. Thanks to Ralph Tubbs, who was also an architect and publisher, the iconic Dome of Discovery was created. A number of other people belonged to the Ministry of Information or had taken part in organizing the Britain Can Make It exhibition in 1948. One of the most experienced designers in Europe, Misha Black, also greatly helped shape the Festival, and Paul Wright was in charge of marketing (Turner, 2011 pp. 27-41).

8.3 Site

As for the question of site, two fundamental requirements were specified. First, to surpass the New York World’s Fair of 1939 and the Paris Exhibition of 1937 with an area of 300 acres, which was not so easy to find. Second, the location should be situated in central London. Hyde Park was presented as the obvious and best choice because of the Great Exhibition. The other option was an area on the south bank of the Thames, which was a literal wasteland (Turner, 2011 p. 13). Ultimately, the South Bank won for being close to the city centre and more accessible thanks to newly built bridges. It was chosen as a symbol. The wasteland of bombed ruins was transformed into a „magical city“ with new modern buildings symbolizing a metaphor for the rebirth of Britain. Furthermore, the Festival took place in other places as well, namely in Lansbury in East London, South Kensington, Battersea, and outside London in Wales, Belfast and Glasgow (Atkinson, 2012 pp. 12, 13).

8.4 Themes

The vision of the Festival was completely different from all previous events. Since it focused only on Britain, the planners conceived the main themes as „an autobiography

of a nation“ and „Britishness“ or national identity. Its individual parts had a specific order and sequence (Conekin, 2003 p. 28) and in practice, it was to look as if the Festival was telling a story with a chronology from the past and history, through the present to the vision of a new and bright future (Turner, 2011 p. 40). Further, the themes focused on the land and people of Britain (Atkinson, 2012).

8.5 Festival Emblem

Due to the fact that the Festival was not a single-place event, a symbol needed to be created to unify the scattered venues (Atkinson, 2012 p. 19). It represented „*the profile of Britannia above a compass star with a lower border of pennants*“ (Turner, 2011 p. 56)“, all in blue, red and white as a reference to the Union Jack and designed by Abram Games. The emblem brought great popularity since it marked everything connected with the Festival, from events, souvenirs to stamps or even flower beds, which were cut to its image (Atkinson, 2012 pp. 19, 20).



Figure 3: Festival Emblem from the cover of the South Bank Exhibition Guide, 1951 (Wikipedia, 2022)

8.6 Advertisement

The right and engaging advertising was one of the key factors in greater success. Therefore, Paul Wright acceded as the Festival’s Director of Public Relations and his job involved promotion and advertising, especially the production of leaflets and posters. It was not only to reach the entire country, but also abroad. Eventually, two million leaflets were produced in eight different languages. In addition, the movie

„Family Portrait“ was released about British achievements, which toured European countries, for instance, Germany, Portugal, and others. Festival marketing also aimed to attract tourists, who were more than welcome to visit the Festival, even though it was not an international event. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) also had a large share of publicity (Atkinson, 2012 pp. 18-21).

9 PARTS OF THE FESTIVAL

9.1 South Bank

London's South Bank, which had a relatively small area of 27 acres, was chosen as the main centerpiece of the Festival (Turner, 2011 p. 51) and featured 22 pavilions divided into two main parts, „The Land of Britain“, and „The People of Britain“. It showed the most iconic architectural works of the Festival. The Dome of Discovery, the largest building in the world up to that time with a diameter of 365 feet and made of aluminium, stood out in the centre. It housed an exhibiton about pioneering Britons and exploration (Atkinson, 2012). The Council had decided that the Festival should have something spectacular and memorable, similar to the French Eiffel Tower. The winning piece was a vertical cigar-shaped structure named Skylon,¹⁵ which measured 300 feet in height and looked as if it was floating in the air. It represented a modern and futuristic aspect and immediately became a well-known symbol of the Festival. Moreover, it was illuminated from the inside and therefore seen all over London, serving as a landmark and indicator (Turner, 2011 pp. 51, 57).

¹⁵ It was a combination of the words „skyhook“ and „nylon“ (Turner, 2011 p. 57).



Figure 4: South Bank with Skylon and Dome of Discovery (The National Archives)

Downstream, there was a Festival Hall focused more on the people with its exhibitions of arts and crafts, education or the English at home (Turner, 2011 p. 52). It was the only building that remained after the Festival. The rest were temporary (Atkinson, 2012). Another building that people could visit downstream was The Lion and Unicorn pavilion. The name had a symbolic meaning for the qualities of a nation, where the Lion stood for realism and strength and the Unicorn for fantasy, independence and imagination¹⁶. The display focused on the English language, eccentricity, craftsmanship, country life and instinct of liberty (Conekin, 2003 pp. 94-98). The film had been an integral part of British culture and very popular since the 1930s. For that reason, it also found representation on the South Bank in the form of the Telekinema, organised and established by the British Film Institute. It offered stereophonic films and documentaries (Easen, 2018). An imitation of vacation was created along the river with the typical holiday scenery as a promenade, deckchairs, ice cream stalls and sunshades (Turner, 2011 p. 52). When the sun went down, the entire South Bank lit up with lights. Everything was illuminated, the buildings, pathways, trees, ponds and fountains

¹⁶ They have symbolised the union of crown and nations of England and Scotland since the 17th century and they have decorated the full royal coat of arms of the United Kingdom. The lion stands for England and the unicorn for Scotland (Wikipedia, 2022).

(Atkinson, 2012). It was a magical atmosphere, especially after the wartime blackout (Turner, 2011 p. 137).

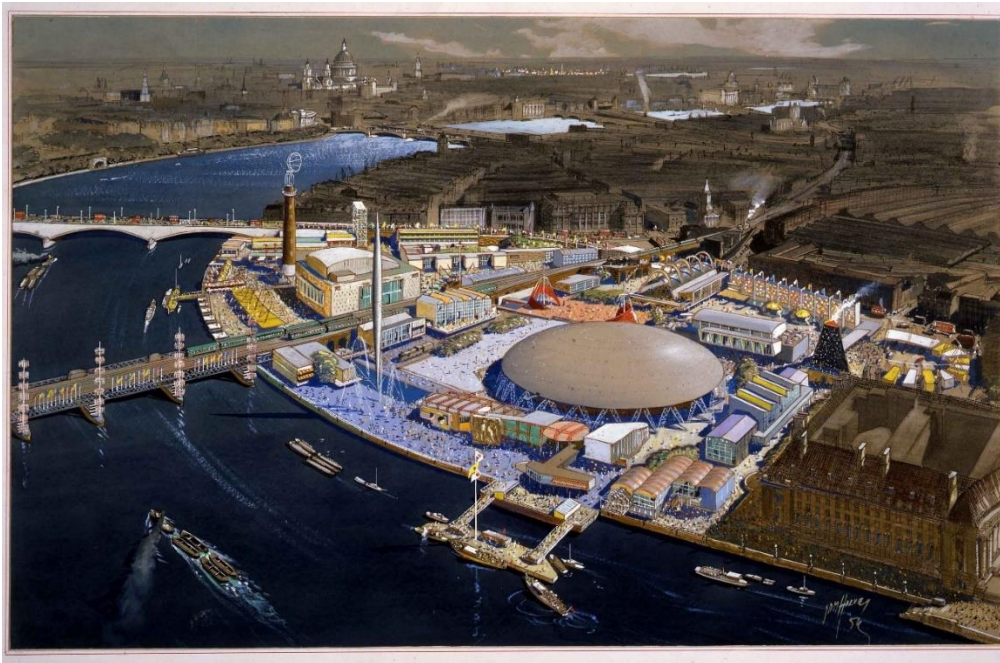


Figure 5: artist's view of South Bank Festival (Wilton, 2017)

9.2 Battersea Pleasure Garden

Three miles up the river from the South Bank, people could enjoy a Pleasure Garden at Battersea (Turner, 2011 p. 89). It served as a place for relaxation and fun, thus it offered an amusement park, children's zoo, theatres, a tree-top walk and a dance pavilion (Atkinson, 2012). According to Barry, the Battersea experience should evoke a feeling of „*elegant fun*“ (Turner, 2011 p. 89). The main designer of the Pleasure Garden was James Gardner who received inspiration from Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen and Vauxhall Gardens that functioned in London from the 17th to 19th century. Essentially, it represented a park with music, theatre and refreshments (Turner, 2011 pp. 89-92).

9.3 Poplar

Poplar was one of the boroughs in the East End with its residents called Cockney (Conekin, 2003 p. 120). It was also badly damaged by the bombing and for that reason, planners decided to rebuild it as a new quarter with new houses and its own schools, church, an old people's home, a shopping centre, market place, pubs or open spaces (Turner, 2011 p. 53). Officially, it was called an exhibition of „live“ architecture

including town planning, building research (Atkinson, 2012) and new planned housing estates (Conekin, 2003 p. 121).

9.4 South Kensington

In South Kensington, the Exhibition of Science took place. It aimed more at people who were curious about science than at visitors who came for entertainment. In fact, it contained exhibits that were already too sophisticated for the South Bank. Nevertheless, the exhibition found its audience and the visit rate was even higher than expected (Turner, 2011 pp. 165-167).

9.5 Travelling exhibitions

These exhibitions were designed to visit other regions whose people could not come to London. As the miniatures of the South Bank exhibition, they spread the story across the country and aimed for the government's wish that the Festival was to be as widespread as possible (Conekin, 2003 pp. 122, 123).

9.5.1 Land Travelling Exhibition

A fleet of trucks transported 3000 objects to four cities, namely Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham and Nottingham (Atkinson, 2012). It carried the same message as the South Bank one, nevertheless, it was more focused on industrial design. The objects were divided into six sections: Materials and Skills, Discovery and Design, People at Home (classic rooms complemented by design and scientific innovations), People at Play (sports and hobbies), People at Work (including the invention of gas turbine engine by Sir Frank Whittle) and People at Travel, which was connected with the previous section by using the engine as the means of transport (Conekin, 2003 pp. 126, 127).

9.5.2 Festival Ship Campania, Sea Travelling Exhibition

Campania, a former aircraft carrier, also conveyed a smaller South Bank exhibition to 10 port cities, namely Southampton, Dundee, Newcastle, Hull, Plymouth, Bristol, Cardiff, Belfast, Birkenhead and Glasgow (Atkinson, 2012). In each of them it remained for about 10 to 14 days. The exhibitions showed 3 main themes: The Land of Britain (agriculture, mining, landscape diversity), Discovery (discovery of land, discovery in science and space) and The People at Home (Homes and Gardens displays – displays of countryside and seaside, solving lack of space in the home) (Conekin, 2003 pp. 127, 128).

9.6 Northern Ireland, Belfast

Belfast, specifically the Castlereagh district, hosted the Ulster Farm and Factory Exhibition, which mainly focused on agriculture and industry (Atkinson, 2012). In a factory building, there were displays of industry and agriculture typical for Northern Ireland, for instance, cotton, wool, shipbuilding, whisky, mineral waters and tobacco. Outside, new and old farmsteads were seen for comparison. The farm displays included eggs, potatoes, food processing, machinery, livestock and country life (Conekin, 2003 pp. 137, 138).

9.7 Scotland, Glasgow

Scotland organized an Exhibition of Industrial Power, which was the largest after the South Bank. The main theme represented a conquest of power, chiefly coal and water (Atkinson, 2012). In addition, there was a demonstration of the energy of the future, atomic energy. People could visit Halls of Power, Coal, Steel, Industry, Electricity, Hydro-Electricity, Civil Engineering, Shipbuilding and Railways and the last one of Future (Conekin, 2003 p. 140).

9.8 Wales

Although the Festival officially did not take place in Wales, it was involved within the annual festivities, for instance, the Pageant of Wales, the St Fagan's Folk Festival and the National Eisteddfod Festival. These events naturally focused on Welsh things and music and dancing. The only event sponsored by the British government was the Dolhendre Hillside Farming Scheme in North Wales. It resembled the Poplar exhibition because there were demonstrations of modern living with the goal of farm renewal (Conekin, 2003 pp. 134-136).

10 Opening

The opening ceremony started on Thursday 3rd May 1951 in St Paul's Cathedral. After the arrival of the royal family, the anniversary of the Great Exhibition was remembered and followed by a mass by the Archbishop of Canterbury and a speech by King George VI, which was broadcasted all over the country. In the evening, the ceremony continued with a concert at the Royal Festival Hall. Outside, the sky lit up with fireworks

throughout the country. The next morning, the South Bank was inaugurated by the King¹⁷ accompanied by heavy rain and the National Anthem (Atkinson, 2012).

11 Closing

11.1 Ceremony

The closing ceremony took place on 30th September 1951. The Archbishop of Canterbury gave a service at the Royal Festival Hall, followed by Gerald Barry's speech. He mentioned the important connection of the Festival between enjoyment and productivity, the contribution to the enlightenment of the nation, and how the serious purpose of the Festival was fulfilled with joy. Further, Gerald's Embassy Orchestra performed, Gracie Fields sang „Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye“ and the BBC Choral Society sang popular songs. Ultimately, the lights went out, the flags were pulled down and the Festival ended (Atkinson, 2012).

11.2 Afterlife

The next day, on 1st October, the cleaning and demolition work began. Another election was held in October and the Conservative Party returned to power with Winston Churchill as Prime Minister. They wanted to speed up the clearance as much as possible due to their vision of the Festival's tight connection with the Labour Party and saw it as a government's great financial failure. In an effort to recover some money, the Battersea remained open for some time and an auction of exhibits and festival equipment was held. Ultimately, all buildings were demolished except the Royal Festival Hall and the Telekinema (Atkinson, 2012).

11.3 Legacy

The Festival was attended by more than a third of the nation, and more than 8 million people visited the South Bank alone. It gave people inspiration and the opportunity to see different styles and more colours. Two styles were introduced, the contemporary one as clean, modern and seen at the South Bank, and the fantastical one seen at Battersea. The new term „Festival style“ began to be used, characterised as cheerful with atomic patterns and bright colors. Barry also introduced a new type of exhibition,

¹⁷ It was the last event which the King opened because of his poor health condition (Atkinson, 2012).

the so-called narrative exhibition¹⁸. A huge improvement came in the design branch. A new generation of designers was born. First, the young people who participated in preparations, for instance the architect and interior designer Hugh Casson. Second, the students who visited the Festival took inspiration and widened their knowledge. The next field that thrived was architecture. It received positive responses from abroad and Hugh Casson even created a film about the Festival's architectural legacy called „Brief City“. He said: „*It may have taught the men who are building our cities something. It may have given impetus to new building here in Britain. But for ordinary people it was fun*” (Atkinson, 2012 p. ch.8). And that was exactly the fulfilment of the very purpose, that is to provide entertainment and to show the power of modernism. In fact, it was the end not only for the Festival, but also for Attlee's government and almost the reign of King George VI. In 1952, the king died of a long-term illness and the New Elizabethan Age began with the accession of Elizabeth II. The royal coronation took place in 1953 and the Festival personalities Hugh Casson and Misha Black were asked to design it.

It can be concluded that „*it did what it set out to do: to inspire hope in a generation that the future would not be as terrible as the recent past, that Britain would go from strength to strength and that the people would again be able to embrace their land*” (Atkinson, 2012).

¹⁸ It is a special type of exhibition which is characterised with storyline, therefore is more interactive than usual one.

THE EVENTS AND THE BRITISHNESS

12 National Identity

The term national identity is rather complicated and not easy to be defined. There are many definitions published and one of the famous ones, which I chose, is by Benedict Anderson who say that „*nations are ‘imagined communities’ since the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion*” (Anderson, 1991 p. 6). Nevertheless, nationality can be viewed from two fundamental perspectives. The first one is civic, which is connected with the political entity people live in, and whose rules and laws they are expected to follow. In this sense, nation basically means citizenship. The second one is ethnic and it is defined by traditions, language, religion, and origin. The predominance of this type could be found in states with very fragmented communities, for instance, the Austro-Hungarian empire. There is a huge difference between nationality as a part of inner identity, and citizenship as a state obligation. When talking about Britain, it is not so clear, but rather a combination of both (Kiss, et al. pp. 2, 3).

13 Britishness

As mentioned above, British national identity is a quite ambiguous concept, since Great Britain is a multinational country consisting of the English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh. Consequently, some people identify themselves rather by these individual identities and consider them their primary ones. Their British identity is therefore secondary or almost non-existent and insignificant. Despite this, Britain was dominated for a long time by one nation, the English (Gamble, et al., 2009 p. 1). It follows that we can speak of a so-called fused Anglo-British identity (Jacobson, 2004 p. 184). Nevertheless, according to Linda Colley, Britishness emerged neither by fusion of multiple cultures, nor directly by forcing the dominant English culture on others (Colley, 1992 p. 6). Likewise, the process of destroying old identities and creating only a single one has never been successful, like in some other countries. In Britain, it was not needed as Britishness was at least partially accepted over time (Gamble, et al., 2009 p. 2). It is still true that individual subnations have completely different cultures nonetheless „*identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time*” (Colley, 1992 p. 6). It can

be concluded that „*to be British is to feel a part of the whole United Kingdom, not just one of its components*” (Gamble, et al., 2009 p. 3).

14 How the Events Shaped the Nation

The following part deals with the influence of the Great Exhibition and Festival of Britain on the British nation. It compares how both events helped shape the image of British national identity. Furthermore, it clarifies in what regards they resembled each other or differed.

14.1 International vs. National

One of the most obvious differences was certainly their range. The Great Exhibition was the first event ever to take place on a global international scale, and the reason for this decision was to put Britain on display, which offered a possibility for comparison within a global context. Britain was one of the leading economic powers and wanted the whole world to see it. Besides, it allowed people to form a clearer image of British identity (Shears, 2017 pp. 104, 144). This is an example of exercising a definition of Britishness by differentiation from „the Other“. The term primarily represented France, with whom Britain had had a great and long-standing rivalry, and it was a key aspect of shaping Britishness from the 17th to the 19th century (Colley, 1992 pp. 1-3).

On the other hand, the Festival of Britain took place only nationally, although the initial plan presented the international vision as well. Nevertheless, the British situation and the perception of Britishness were different from those in the 19th century. The economic crisis and recovery process after the war changed the general national mood from boastful, ruling, and imperial to humble, ordinary, and domestic. It follows that it made more sense to focus the event only on the country, since the qualities mentioned represented the main image of national identity in the 1950s. The Festival also put the nation on display, however, not in the sense of comparing or showing the difference, but rather showing belonging and home bond and not for the whole world but primarily for British people (Conekin, 2003 pp. 31, 32).

14.2 Exhibition vs. Festival

Another aspect in which the two events slightly differed, and also directly evident from their names, is the main type of the event. The first was the typical form of exhibition where objects are displayed. The exhibits focused on the best quality and design, but

also on cheapness. It follows that only the best were chosen, and being on show certainly meant great prestige. Moreover, they were awarded with medals in the end. It was becoming more and more common to own and spend on multiple things, resulting in a new period of consumerism. Mass and mechanical production were promoted to facilitate work, which also naturally brought a wave of criticism due to the replacement of human labor and craftsmanship. The Exhibition took place in the spirit of observation and admiration, and it also allowed seeing foreign cultures and even domestic remote exhibits for the first time (Shears, 2017 pp. 106,107,120). Given the above, „*the Victorians understood cultural identity as and through the collection, display and labelling of an array of objects*” (Shears, 2017 p. 106).

It is true that the Festival was also partly an exhibition. Actually, it consisted of several exhibitions which took place simultaneously across the country with the main base at South Bank, and put important and interesting objects on display. However, there were no awards like medals as the emphasis was not primarily on the best and the most innovative, but also on the defining of the nation. The key difference from the Exhibition itself represented addition, that the Festival was contemporaneously constructed as a fun fair to provide people with entertainment and a relaxed atmosphere after the war and post-war hard times. They could enjoy all of this mainly in the magical Battersea.

14.3 Image of Empire and Participation of Colonies/Regions

Within the framework of the Exhibition, it was decided to provide room to the colonial countries, for instance, India, Canada, Australia, and West Indies. It was a period of the peak Empire, thus Britain wanted to boast about its power and richness in the form of the colonies it possessed. Especially India, which was advertised as the jewel of the British Empire. It presented the exotic colonial cultures and objects with no mention of the sufferings brought by colonialism.

Since the Festival took place in the period after partial decolonization, when Britain had lost a number of its colonies,¹⁹ it was not the same case as the Exhibition. On the contrary, the Festival pretended as if the Empire had never happened and was almost

¹⁹ The government withdrew from India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon between 1947 and 1949 (Atkinson, 2012).

completely absent. There were several reasons. First, colonialism and imperialism were already considered inappropriate at the time. Second, Britain was indebted to America, and therefore it was not right to remind people that it had once belonged to its colonies. Third, Britain denounced the terrible war crimes of Germany, yet as an Empire, it was not much better. It was even claimed that the British in the first half of the 20th century were so ignorant that some could not even name their existing colonies (Conekin, 2003 pp. 183-198).

Nevertheless, in a similar way as the Exhibition devoted the appropriate space to the colonies, the Festival did that not only to England but also to Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales. Naturally, it was also without mention of past occupations and disputes. Towns and villages were invited to participate in the festivities, in order to make the idea of the Festival as widespread as possible. The motto „unity through diversity“ offered a wider perspective on national identity (Conekin, 2003 pp. 116-130). This idea of spreading is an interesting contrast between the two events. They both aimed for it with a different approach. The Exhibition accumulated the whole world into one place, the Crystal Palace, to pass the message. On the other hand, the Festival spread the idea by organizing smaller events throughout the country and creating traveling exhibitions.

14.4 Industry, Agriculture, Architecture, Science, Trade, Culture, Design

Both events contributed to the betterment of selected sectors such as industry, design, architecture, science, art, culture, and trade. As the official name „The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations“ already suggests, the event was mainly focused on industry and manufacturing. It took place during the Industrial Revolution period of enormous fundamental transition when there was a reorientation from manual to machine production. Consequently, it brought many new inventions and technologies that deserved to be properly acknowledged by putting them before people’s eyes and admiration. It provided a chance to improve and create new connections in terms of the international market and free trade, which continued to flourish as a result. As a form of advertisement, it gave a boost to businesses of many people and companies give. To say that architecture had no place at the Exhibition would not be exactly true, since the place itself, meaning the Crystal Palace, was the most iconic architectural building at the time. It brought a huge dose of inspiration to the future. Moreover, as mentioned

earlier, the exhibition profit was invested in building a complex of museums and institutes that were dedicated to these sectors selected for exhibition, and have helped shape them until today, just as the Royal Society of Arts still exists and is devoted to its purpose.

Similarly, the Festival also bore fruit in these fields. Although the organizers had decided that industry would not be the main focus, it still occupied a significant part. Britain was no longer in the booming period of the Industrial Revolution but rather in the desperate postwar period characterised by bombed and destructed areas. For this reason, the main focus shifted to architecture and recreation. This does not mean that the industry was excluded. It was also part of certain exhibitions, but it was no longer given such attention. Actually, all fields found their place at the Festival. There was an Exhibition of Science, Ulster Farm showing agriculture, Factory Exhibition and Exhibition of Industrial Power focusing on industry, or Poplar and South Bank showing architecture. It influenced town planning and home design. It was the most fertile field precisely for design, which focused primarily on the households (Conekin, 2003 p. 49). The same as the Exhibition, the Festival also produced some iconic architectural monuments that will be always remembered as its symbols, namely the Dome of Discovery and Skylon. Since the event was only national, it did not open the door for international trade as it did at the Exhibition. Consequently, organizers wanted to distance themselves from trade and focus on telling the national story (Atkinson, 2012). There is one thing that could not be found in any form at the Exhibition, but only at the Festival. The reason is that it simply did not exist yet, and it is a cinema, TV, and radio. It opened a new door of possibilities but also brought a greater effort with traditional entertainment (Liepman, 2011 p. 131).

14.5 Education

The purpose of education was definitely one of the main similarities. Both events aimed to achieve this along with gaining inspiration through their displays and to create a more educated society where knowledge is provided to all. The Exhibition and Prince Albert left a legacy in the form of „Albertopolis” that until today houses many educational institutions, museums and language schools, for example, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Royal College of Art, Imperial College, the Royal College of Music, the Royal Geographical Society, or the

Royal Albert Hall. When the Exhibition ended, the Crystal Palace was transferred to a different location and continued carrying its educational and exposition purposes until 1936 (Liepman, 2011 pp. 121,128). Another important legacy is the Royal Commission, originally established only for the event and eventually running a long-term programme providing scholarships for students of Science, Industry, and Arts (Hobhouse, 2002).

Although the Festival's profit was not invested in any particular type of education, but in attempt to fix the economy by the Conservative Party, the event still had a great impact on it. It was mainly connected with design and architecture since they were the most praised disciplines. The new educational field, named „graphic design“, was created and new era of designers and architects was born.

14.6 Future and Modernity

Another similarity was the aim and representation of a better future connected with modernisation. The Exhibition chose the path of the railway over the countryside, global over local, and trade over conquest (Auerbach, et al., 2016 p. 23). Ultimately, *“the Exhibition was significant in providing a new basis for future action, a sort of social contract resting on broad acceptance of principles such as material consumption, good design, international cooperation, industrial development, and commercial liberalism”* (Shears, 2017 p. 321). The Crystal Palace was the biggest symbol of modernity occupied by the modern nation on display. Taken together, it created an introduction to the modern era.

The future was one of the focuses of Festival. It told the story of the nation from the past to the future with the ambition of creating a better “New Britain” after the dark years of wars and economic crisis. Everything was supposed to be different, culture, science, industry, agriculture, and also living conditions, especially housing. The Festival was dressed in the coat of modernism (Conekin, 2003 p. 46). It produced new techniques, buildings, design styles, and educated people in the fields of architecture and design.

In conclusion, the Exhibition wanted to show that they are the best, but can do even better, whereas the Festival aimed for a vision of better times after the bad ones. Similarly, both promised a brighter future with their actions, however, built on different

past foundations. In a similar way, they were also very important milestones in the era of modernism.

14.7 The People (Class, Gender, Race)

Class

One of the major contributions of the Exhibition was an attempt at breaking the class barriers since it was designed to be accessible to all classes. Working-class issues were among the main topics in politics during the 19th century, as workers suffered from very poor conditions and had no political representation. Exhibition planners encouraged accessibility for the working class by aiming for affordable travel, accommodation and tickets. The Shilling Days were specially designed for the working class to visit the Exhibition, but at the same time they worked as class separation when needed (Shears, 2017 pp. 249-269). It is said that the Exhibition „*sought to improve the taste of the middle class, to inform manufacturers about mechanical improvements and to morally educate the working class* (Turner, 2011 p. 11). “

On the contrary, the Festival almost completely ignored the differences in gender and class. As it turned out, it was sometimes oriented mainly toward the middle class which could be seen, for instance, in the project of home interiors and housing or in the demonstration of the mythical countryside as a place for relaxation accompanied by quaint cottages. It completely ignored poverty and the lack of water and electricity in rural areas, largely populated by the lower classes. In addition, the Festival was also criticised for not so easily affordable admission of 5 shillings, which was not flexible as it had been with the Exhibition. Other than that, it tried to create an illusion of classless society, as did the Exhibition, nevertheless, the illusion was only temporary and neither event managed to resolve class differences in the long term (Conekin, 2003 p. 44).

Gender

Even though the Exhibition was mostly related to the planning and achievements made by men, women actually also took a small part in preparations in the form of a women committee. It consisted of noble ladies and helped to raise donations and secure exhibits focused on female skills and inventions, for instance, tailoring and sewing. However, women were still considered to be predominantly consumers and, therefore, exhibits in the fields of interior decoration and art were aimed especially at them. In fact, Queen

Victoria represented a very strong symbol of female empowerment as well as a symbol of the Kingdom and the Exhibition. She was the most portrayed personage at the event (Shears, 2017 pp. 146, 218-227).

Regarding the role of gender at the Festival, women tended to be disappointed by finding no acknowledgement other than that associated with their role in the household although they had to fill in the roles of the missing men during war times, for instance, by working in the factory. It raised their self-confidence and value, nevertheless, the Festival still showed traditional values. However, the future changes were not impossible with the addition of modernisation and reduction of housework (Turner, 2011 pp. 7, 61-63).

Race

The Exhibition was visited by foreign people „of every clime and colour: - the European, the American, the Indian, the Chinese, the African, the Greenlander, the white, the black, the brown, the red; all the forms and figures, shades and colours of the human family” (Young, 2009 str. 53). There was a multicultural and multiracial crowd and the exhibition was promoted as an event „for all nations“, therefore, Britain also included the its colonies in, and ultimately, the whole event passed without visible racial discrimination. However, it did not change the way in which people of colour were viewed in Victorian Britain. The perspective of British superiority over colonial, uneducated, and inferior people still remained.

Despite „the people of Britain“ being one of the central topics of the Festival, it tended to exclude certain groups. It promoted a mixed British nation, however, it ignored immigrant colour races. Again, there was a depiction of „otherness“ in the sense of colonial countries and the formation of national identity by differentiating from „the Others“. The Festival story told the not-so-true history of the mixed nation as a settlement by people from different places, but all of the white skin (Conekin, 2003 pp. 192-197). As can be seen, the events again created a sort of illusion that no matter the colour, the people still belong to Britain. Nevertheless, in both periods of time, white supremacy still persisted and defined the British nation.

CONCLUSION

This chapter will conclude the thesis by summarizing the findings about the relation between the Great Exhibition and the Festival of Britain and by showing the image of British identity that they forged.

Firstly, I would like to clarify that the main relationship between the events was not the celebration of the centenary, though it was the first impulse for organizing the Festival and it had its celebratory part there, however, the Festival ended up taking place in a different spirit.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 was the first international exhibition that took place on a global scale. It was an event organised mainly by the Royal Society of Arts, including Prince Albert and Henry Cole. The main symbol of the Exhibition was the innovative Crystal Palace located in Hyde Park and it was divided into two sections: the British one with its colonies and the foreign one for the rest of the nations.

The Festival of Britain in 1951 was a national event that took place all over the country. As the main centrepiece, a bombed area of South Bank that was recreated into the new modern quarter representing the metaphor for the rebirth of Britain was chosen. Altogether, it consisted of eight official exhibitions including those in each region and two traveling expositions. It took place in the spirit of telling the story of the nation from the past, through the present, to the vision of the future, and connected education with entertainment.

Next, I would like to mention the similarities that were discovered from the analysis. Both events put the nation on display and had a huge impact in the fields of industry, architecture, design, culture, and art. They also contributed significantly to improving the level of education because they provided knowledge to everyone throughout their course. With the help of modernity, they moved the nation to a better and brighter future, and they are considered to be important milestones in the era of modernism.

The main difference is that the Festival was national and the Exhibition international, by means of which it gained the advantage of mediating global and free trade. The Exhibition was associated with the Empire, which the Festival decided to ignore, and instead it was associated with the welfare state and the Labour Party, although, the connection with politics was not intentional and it fiercely tried to distance itself from it.

An interesting contrast is in the way they were organized. The Exhibition accumulated the whole world into one place, the Crystal Palace, to pass its message. On the other hand, the Festival spread the idea by organizing smaller events throughout the country.

According to Benedict Anderson, nations can be interpreted as “*imagined communities*” (Anderson, 1991) and the term national identity can be divided into civic, based on the political state, and ethnic, based on traditions and origin. As Britain is a multinational country, it is a combination of both types. Britishness is hard to define due to the multiple nations that are interconnected with it together with their own cultures. However, it can be simplified as “*to be British is to feel a part of the whole United Kingdom, not just one of its components*” (Gamble, et al., 2009 p. 3).

The notion of Britishness promoted during the Exhibition was tightly connected with the British Empire, and therefore it can be characterised as boastful, ruling and imperial and in need to be compared to others. It was understood through the display and collection of objects. On the other hand, in the 20th century, it transformed into a more humble, ordinary, and domestic feeling associated with the sense of belonging and home bond. The nation did not want to be associated with imperialism and colonialism anymore due to the horrors of the war. Since all regions (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales) participated in festivities, the identity was guided by the motto “unity through diversity”.

One of the ways to define British identity was the differentiation of “the Other” represented primarily by France and the colonies during a period of the Exhibition and by immigrants from those colonies to Britain during a period of Festival. The difference was that the Festival did not put it explicitly on the show, since the immigrant culture was not part of it. In a similar way, they also tried to create an illusion of a classless society, nevertheless, neither event managed to resolve class differences in the long term. In both periods, even though they were separated by a hundred years, white supremacy still persisted and defined the British nation. Women also did not receive much recognition beyond their traditional roles, otherwise, the achievements of men were mainly celebrated.

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