

Festivals, Carnivals and Celebrations and Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month.

May, 2023.

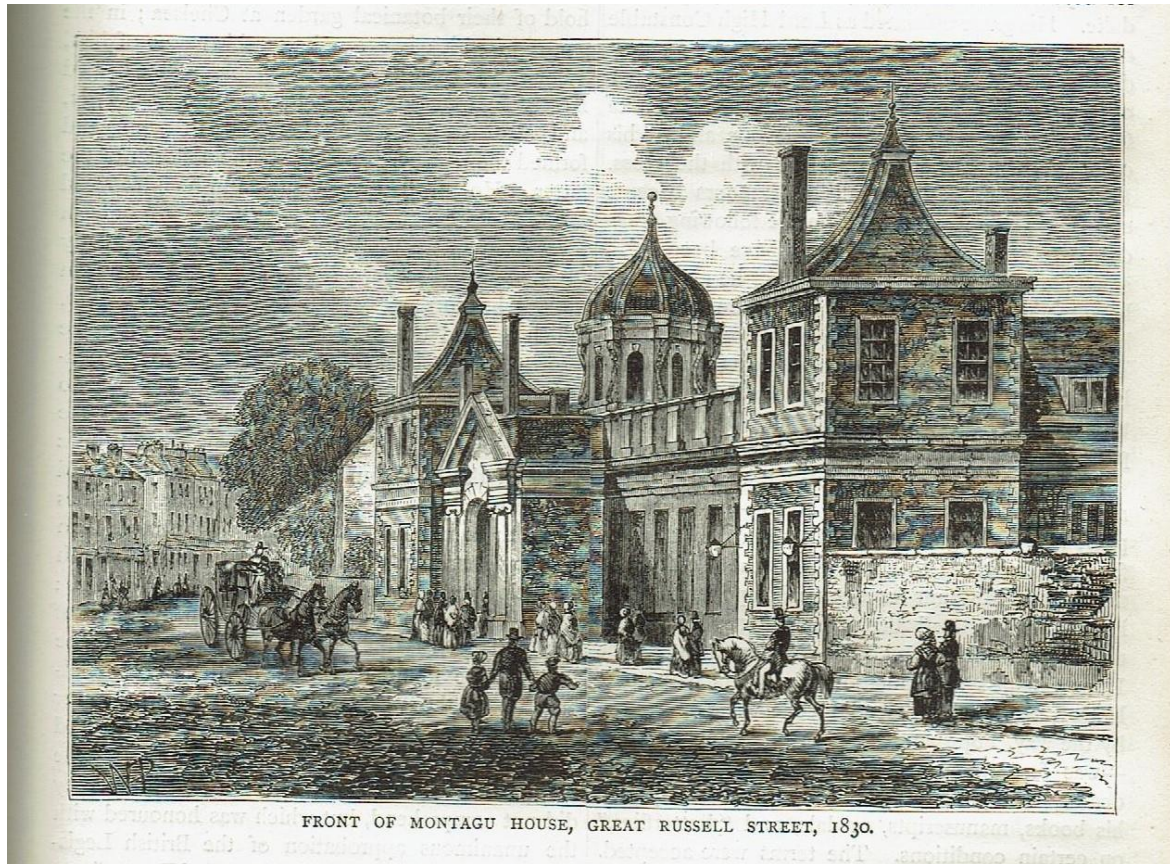
It was a bright sunny morning when William awoke in the house, he shared with his wife Emily, close to the yard his grandfather had established in the village of Lea in Herefordshire for the purpose of constructing small vehicles such as brakes, Cabriolets, dogcarts and phaetons to enable the then new tourists who were flocking to the Wye Valley following the writings of the Reverend William Gilpin and the artists who followed recording in paintings the picturesque nature of the valley and surrounding countryside. Since then, the business had flourished and although William's father was still alive he was now taking a less active role in the firm of James Ashbourne and Son. At 5:00 o'clock when William went out to check that all was well in the yard, he thought of the truism that sun before 7 rains before 11. How true this proved to be later in the day. William's father Albert, the second generation of the family, had agreed to look after the business for the next three days to enable his son and daughter-in-law to travel to London for the purpose of visiting the much-discussed new exhibition in South Kensington. It had been William's intention to take an early morning train from Mitcheldean Road Railway Station (Lea) to Paddington via Gloucester but unfortunately on arriving at the railway station they were informed that very early that morning a goods train conveying coal from the Forest of Dean to London had collided with a tank engine at Over Junction thus blocking the line and that clearance was not expected until much later that day. As the much-debated alternative route from Hereford and Worcester to Oxford was now available following the completion of the Ledbury and Colwall tunnels on the 15th of September 1861, and also, the modification of the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway, the "OW&WR" to both standard and broad-gauges from Worcester to Oxford to provide through running to the "Great Western" broad-gauge main line to Paddington. This involved two changes firstly travelling via Ross on Wye to Hereford and then from Hereford via Ledbury and Malvern to Worcester. From where there was a direct service to Paddington.

With the three changes of trains rather than two, and the longer route via Worcester it was mid-afternoon before Mr and Mrs William Ashbourne arrived at Paddington. Fortunately, William had booked a room for them at the Great Western Royal Hotel for three nights. An expensive treat for his pretty wife.



This was both a celebration and a festival for the young Ashbourne couple; they were celebrating their first wedding anniversary and visiting the international exhibition at South Kensington which in itself was a celebration and festival of both British and international achievement.

On the following morning William thought it would be exciting and a new experience to travel as far as then possible to the Exhibition on the new underground railway. But the Metropolitans Railway had not been extended from Paddington in the direction of South Kensington. The “Met” as it was referred to at the time, was not extended to Gloucester Road until the 1st of October, 1868, and to South Kensington until the 24th of December, 1869. William therefore hailed a passing Hansom Cab to take them to the Exhibition.



Have you visited the Natural History Museum? Or to give the museum its correct or original name the British Museum of Natural History for it was originally housed in Montagu House in Great Russell Street on the site of the present British Museum. The Montagu House Museum contained much of the present collections but combined in a rather smaller building.



After the resounding success of the Great Exhibition of 1851, in the early 1860's an exhibition was planned which opened on the 1st of May, 1862 as the International Exhibition of 1862 or the Great London Exposition on that part of the gardens which would later be occupied by the Natural History Museum. This was a great celebration of the achievements of the period.



The International Exhibition of 1862 was sponsored by the Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Trade, and featured over 28,000 exhibitors from 36 countries, representing a wide range of industry, technology, and the arts. There was an opening ceremony with music composed by William Sterndale Bennett and presided over by His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge deputising for his cousin Her Majesty Queen Victoria who was in mourning for the Prince Consort who died the previous year.



The western elevation of the 1862 International Exhibition,

The exhibition building occupied 21 acres to the design of Captain Francis Fowke of the Royal Engineers and was intended to be permanent. To minimise cost the design was for an unadorned or unornamental building with the intention of adding decoration when funds allowed. Construction was of cast iron, 12,000 tons with brick facades. The frontage on the Exhibition Road was 1,150 feet in length, 50 feet high and 50 feet depth, with a grand triple-arched entrance. Attention was paid to lighting pictures in a way that would eliminate glare. Behind the picture galleries were the "Industrial Buildings". These were composed of "naves" and "transepts", lit by a clerestory roof. Above the entrances in the east and west fronts were two great glass domes, each 150 feet wide and 260 feet high - at that time the largest domes ever built. The timber-framed "Machinery Galleries", the only parts of the structure intended to be temporary, stretched further north along Prince Consort Road.



Writing for the publication "Old and New London" volume V Edward Walford describes the 1862 exhibition, and records in the early 1880's that "the principal entrance in Exhibition Road was situated in the centre of the eastern transept and led directly to the orchestra erected for the opening ceremony, under the eastern dome cover which took place on the 1st of May, 1862. Space will not permit us to do more than notice a few of the most important objects here brought together. In the centre of the nave stood a trophy of small arms by the Birmingham gun makers, flanked on either side by an Armstrong and a Whitworth gun. The Armstrong was mounted on its carriage of polished wood, and presented in every detail the delicate finish of a trinket. Indeed, the Exhibition seems to have been rich in the display of these marvellous weapons. Elaborate fountains and trophies of a more peaceful kind - search as articles of food, and animal and vegetable substances employed in manufacture, together with others of different manufactured articles - made-up the miscellaneous collection. Dividing the British from the foreign portion of the nave was a huge screen in ironwork of elaborate design. At this end of the nave were some noble groups of bronze statues from various countries, and some magnificent candelabra and columns in polished Jasper and porphyry from Russia. A very fine collection of Berlin porcelain manufacturers was placed on raised counters under the western dome Sevres, Vienna, Berlin and Dresden made great efforts to recover the lost ground and the previous competitions with the English porcelain manufacturers. The attractions of the western dome balanced very fairly the features of interest at the other end of the building. The central object was a circular stand displaying the Prince of Prussia's collection of China, all of Berlin manufacture, which rivals the richest and most delicate Sevres. An adjacent parterre was appropriated to the exhibition of the silver objects

presented by the City of Berlin to the Princess of Prussia as a wedding gift. The great Koh-i-noor diamond was placed in the English portion of the nave near the jewellery cases and created, doubtless, as much interest as it occasioned in 1851. Her Majesty's magnificent desert service of Worcester porcelain was exhibited near here: it is said to eclipse the finest specimen that Sèvres, Dresden, or Vienna have yet produced."

"That this second international exhibition was a success no one will pretend to say; It is enough to admit that with the first great gathering in 1851 the charm of novelty was worn off, and that even the lapse of 11 years was not sufficient to cause a repetition of that great influx of visitors to London from every part of the civilised world, which we have already noticed."

Emily was excited and awestruck by the delights mentioned above, especially the Royal Worcester china and the Koh-i-noor diamond, whilst William was inspired and motivated by the engineering exhibits, and pondered how he could expand their business into the production of agricultural steam engines. William was rather bemused by Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine, and together with many other visitors failed to appreciate its future in the world of computers, not surprising in a world before mass use of electricity.



Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine

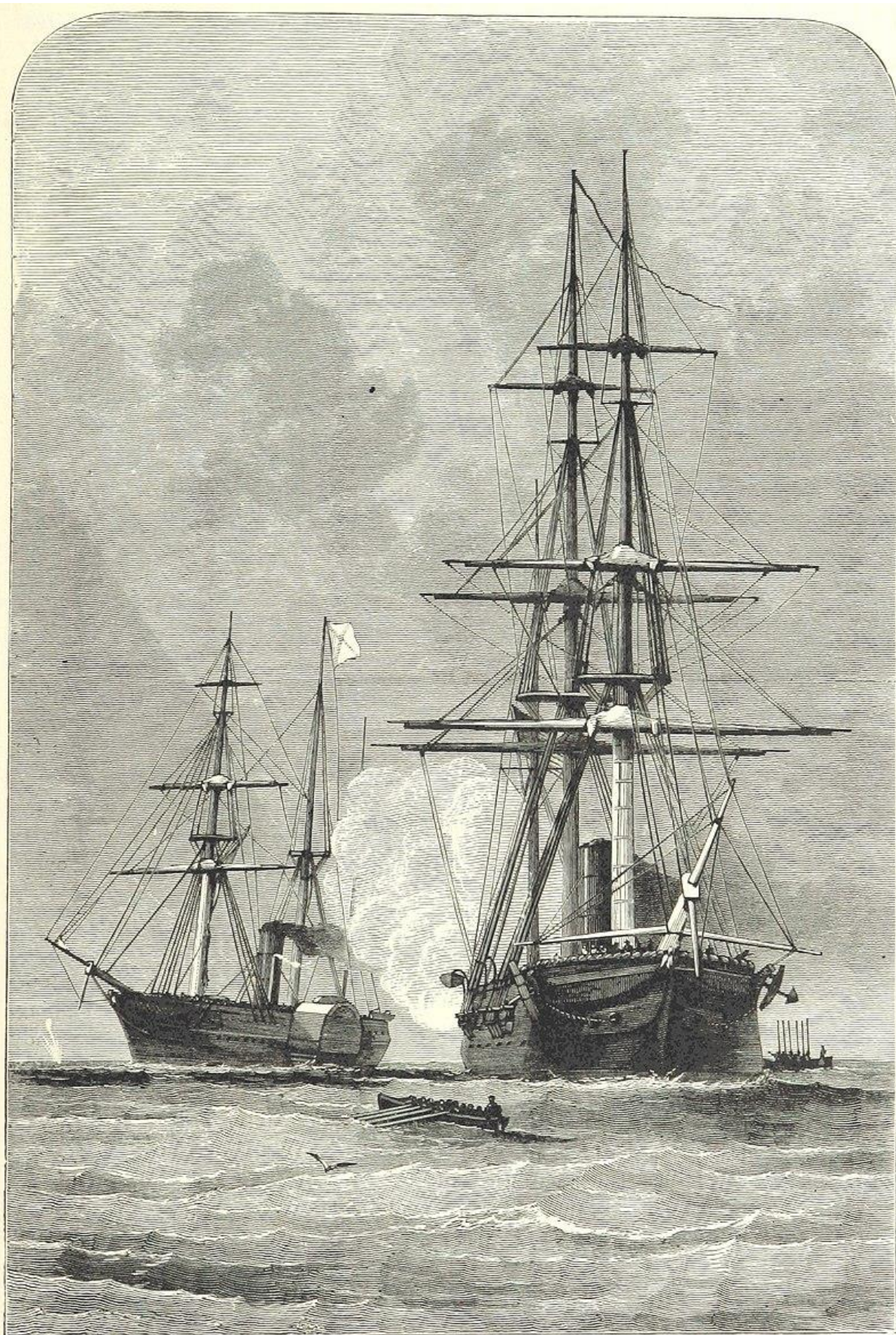
The exhibition demonstrated the advances made in the industrial and technological innovation since the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the exhibits on display included the electric telegraph, submarine cables, the first plastic known as Parkesine, Charles Babbage's Analytical Machine, possibly the exhibit of most interest to the generation of today. There were also a variety of machine tools, looms, and precision instruments.

Exhibits included such large pieces of machinery as cotton mills, marine engines, and the London and North Western Railway's express passenger locomotive, a single, compound engine of the "Lady of the Lake" class, no. 531 which was a great attraction. This standard gauge engine, designed by John Ramsbottom the locomotive superintendent of the northern sector of the "L&NWR". Lady of the Lake class engines had 7ft 6ins (diameter) driving wheels to achieve maximum speed rather than tractive effort.



“LNER” Lady of the Lake class locomotive.

The “Lady of the Lake” won a bronze medal at the exhibition whilst her sister locomotive “Watt” no. 229 had carried the Trent Affair despatches earlier in 1862. Although largely forgotten today, except by those interested in the Confederate States of America, the RMS Trent was a British Royal Mail paddled steamer sailing from Havana on the 7th November, 1861 and calling at St. Thomas before entering the Bahama channel and the open waters of the Atlantic bound for Liverpool; her passengers included two Confederate Government envoys, namely James Murray Mason and John Slidell. On the 8th of November having cleared the channel she was approached by the Federal war ship the USS San Jacinto commanded by the self-opinionated Captain Charles Wilkes who arrogantly signalled to the “Trent” to heave to, when Captain Moir commanding the “Trent” ignored the order the “San Jacinto” fired two shots across her bows. Captain Wilkes then despatched Lieutenant D.M.Fairfax in the cutter with a boarding party. The captain of the “Trent” was naturally furious at this outrage but was powerless to resist and the two envoys were taken aboard the “San Jacinto”. This action provoked an international incident between our Government of Viscount Palmerston’s administration who were sympatric towards the Confederacy and their adversaries, the Federal Government of the USA. The incident was still hot gossip the following year when war was narrowly avoided mainly because our forces in Canada numbering some 5,000 troops in total would have been grossly inadequate and the Government were more concerned regarding matters on the Continent where Louis Napoleon III was attempting to enlarge his European empire and Count Otto von Bismarck was busy constructing the German Empire. All this was very relevant in 1862 and important news at the time thus popular interest in the “Watt”.

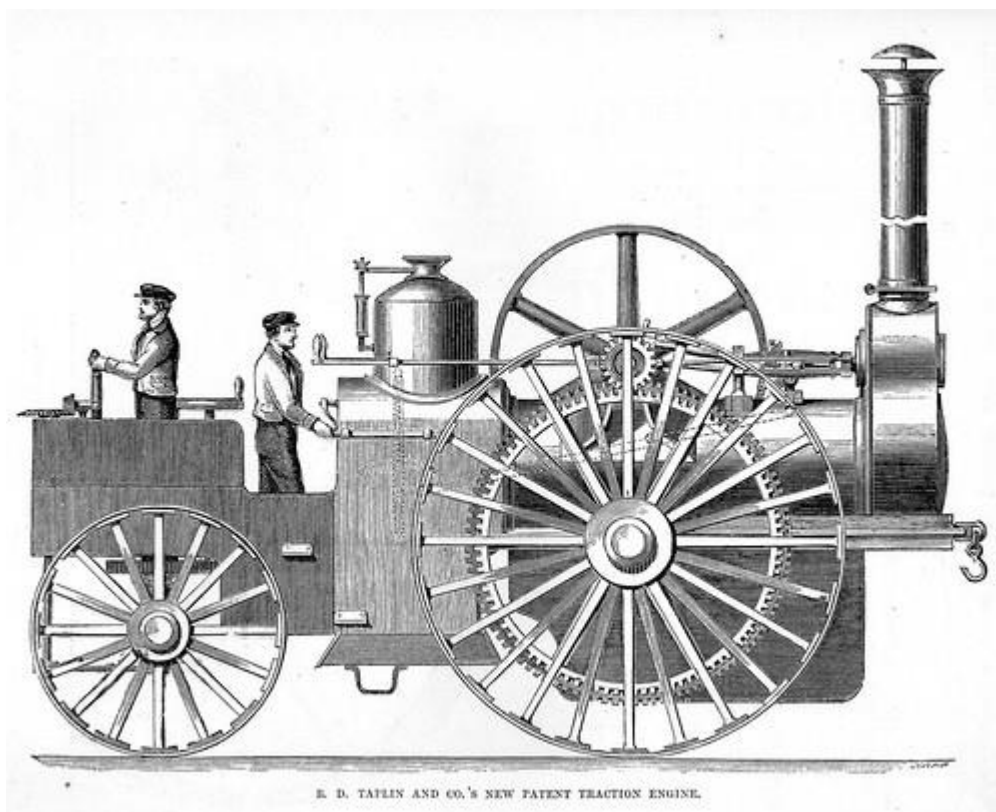


The USS San Jacinto seizing the RMS Trent.



Henry John Temple, Third Viscount Palmerston.

At the exhibition there was also a range of smaller goods including fabrics, rugs, sculptures, furniture, plates, porcelain, silver, glass wares, and wallpaper, whilst the manufacture of ice by an early refrigerator caused a sensation. Also displayed was the use of caoutchouc for rubber production, the Bessemer process for steel manufacture and a 16 Horsepower traction engine exhibited by B.D. Taplin and Company of Lincoln.



The Taplin 16 horsepower traction engine.

There was an extensive art gallery designed to allow an even light without reflection on the pictures. The work shown by William Morris' decorative arts firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. attracted much notice, whilst Benjamin Simpson displayed photographs of the Indian subcontinent.

The London Stereoscopic Company produced a series of 350 stereo views of the exhibition which were available for visitors to purchase in boxed sets and a set was delivered to Her Majesty to enable her to experience the Exhibition from the privacy of Osborne House. The images were produced using the new collodion wet plate process which allowed for exposure times of only a few seconds. These images provide a vivid three-dimensional record of the exhibition. Additionally, there was an international chess tournament, the London 1862 Chess Tournament, whilst the skin of a large tiger shot the previous year by Colonel Charles Reid was displayed and is now known as "the Leeds Tiger" and can be seen today in the Leeds City Museum.

Unlike the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1851, music was both commissioned and selected for the opening ceremony and at other times during the exhibition. Composers of the works performed included William Sterndale Bennett, Giacomo Meyerbeer, and Giuseppe Verdi. Gioacchino Rossini was asked to write a piece for the opening but declined due to his advanced age. William Sterndale Bennett wrote his "Ode" written expressly for the opening ceremony, upon a text by Alfred Lord Tennyson.



The Guide to the exhibition, William purchased one for the princely sum of One Penny.

Unbeknown to Emily, William had corresponded in advance with a business contact in London, initially with the idea to taking Emily to one of the London Music Halls during the evening, but was advised that this would perhaps not be such a good idea as the audience could, at times, be rather boisterous and the throwing of beer bottles and other objects at the stage if they disapproved or disliked the performers was not uncommon. As

the “Cricket on the Hearth” or “Dot”, which had opened at the New Adelphi Theatre on the Strand on the 14th of April, and was receiving critical acclaim, William decided to try to obtain tickets. “Dot” was an adaptation of the book by Charles Dickens, the novel the “Cricket on the Hearth”, by the playwright Dion Bouclault, then at the height of his career. William was fortunate to obtain two tickets for their evening in London. Following dinner at Simpson’s in the Strand which had opened in 1848. The New Adelphi was the second theatre of the same name on the site in the Strand and had been opened on the 26th of December, 1858. There was seating for 1,500, plus 500 standing and was much more spacious and less overcrowded than its predecessor. The whole day had been a great success and whilst William was well pleased Emily was delighted, her eyes sparkled and although a little restricted by the crinoline dress she wore, as was fashionable at the time, she fairly skipped along on their return journey to the Great Western Hotel at Paddington singing some of the ditties from “Dot”. In the second-class railway carriage on their return journey, which was considerably faster than their outward travel as they now journeyed via Gloucester to Mitcheldean Road Railway Station for Lea, Emily wondered if she could persuade her Husband to purchase a larger house, one in which shed could display some of the furnishings and paintings she had seen at the exhibition. She knew the business was flourishing, but also that William would need funds for some of the expansion projects he had discussed with her the previous evening over dinner.



The New Adelphi Theatre in 1860.

The official closing ceremony of the exhibition was held on the 1st of November, 1862, although it remained open to the public until the 15th of November. There had been by its final closing about 6.1 million visitors generating revenue of £459,632, slightly more than the expenditure of £458,842 thus generating a small profit of £790, far less than the 1851 exhibition.

Parliament declined the Government's wish to purchase the building and the materials were sold and used for the construction of the Alexandra Palace near Muswell Hill in North London, designed as the North London counterbalance to the Crystal Palace which had been moved to Sydenham in South London from its original location in Hyde Park.

Notes:

1. Reference to Emily and William Ashbourne and their business is entirely fictional, although except for the railway accident at Over Junction all other activities including the travel to London and locations visited are historically accurate.
2. Broad-gauge railway lines, the permanent way, were set 7 feet 1/4 inches apart, whilst standard gauge, sometimes referred to at the time as narrow gauge, as now were and are set 4 feet 8 1/2 inches apart.
3. The West Midland Railway (the WMR) was established on the 1st of July, 1860, being an amalgamation of the Newport, Abergavenny and Hereford Railway, the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway and the Worcester and Hereford Railway. The "WMR" on the 1st of July, 1861 leased the Coleford, Monmouth, Usk and Pontypool Railway, the Leominster and Kington Railway and the Severn Valley Railway. On the 1st of August, 1863 the "WMR" was merged with the "Great Western".

Saucy Sophia's Snippets



**Another post card from
the Author's private collection.**

Trailer for next month.

Midsummer's day, as you will all know, is on the 20th or 21st June, the summer solstice when the northern hemisphere enjoys the longest number of daylight hours. It has been celebrated for thousands of years, one could say since the dawn of time. Next month I will be looking at the present-day midsummer festivals and their origin. I will also include a further episode of the Ashbourne family saga.

Dorian Osborne

1st May, 2023.