

Vauxhall

Sex and Entertainment

London's Pioneering Urban Pleasure Garden



by

PENELOPE J. CORFIELD

Second edition, rewritten and expanded with new chapter
'Sex and Entertainment'

History & Social Action Publications

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- 1 Adapted from *A General Prospect of Vauxhall Gardens* (1751):
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- 2 *William Hogarth's Token for Life Admission to Vauxhall Gardens*: from W.W. Wroth, *Tickets of Vauxhall Gardens* (1898), pp. 13–14.
- 3 *Thomas Rowlandson's Vauxhall Gardens* (1784): © Victoria & Albert Museum.
- 4 Detail from Illustration 3, depicting two famous lovers, the young Prince of Wales courting Mary 'Perdita' Robinson.
- 5 Detail from Richard Horwood's *Map of London, Westminster, Southwark and Parts Adjoining* (1799): © Guildhall Library, City of London.
- 6 *Sale Catalogue–Plan of Royal Gardens, Vauxhall* (1841): © Reproduced by kind permission of Lambeth Archives Department
- 7 Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens 2011. © DSDHA & Friends of Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens.

Dedication

The first edition *Vauxhall and the Invention of the Urban Pleasure Gardens* was published in 2008 and was developed from two lectures during the 2005 and 2006 Lambeth Riverside Festivals. This second edition is dedicated to all who campaign to keep open access to amenities in urban green places, and especially to all supporters of the successor garden in today's Vauxhall.

Friends of Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens

Vauxhall Spring Gardens was a run down and unloved inner city green space in North Lambeth situated on the site of the historic Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. The Friends of VSG were founded in 1996 to save the park from a major redevelopment plan and to campaign for improvements. On 16 February 2012 VSG was re-named Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens and FVSG is now Friends of Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens:

www.friendsofvauxhallpleasuregardens.org.uk.

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I

Introduction

Vauxhall Gardens – a name that conjures the pleasures of big city life. While much has been written of the potential perils and pitfalls within the urban experience, there is also scope for creativity and community interactions on a mass scale. Together the tensions between dangers and delights added to the excitement of big city life, as they still do today.

Eighteenth-century London, which was already sprawling far beyond the confines of the old City to become a giant metropolis, pioneered not only many of the classic urban problems but also confirmed the countervailing pleasures of urbanism as well.

On the positive side, one significant bonus was the emergence of a newly strengthened public entertainments industry, where people met together, peacefully, for festivities and fun on a mass scale. And the showcase venue for this was the special resort known as the ‘New Spring Gardens at Vauxhall’, later abbreviated as the ‘Vauxhall Gardens, or even more simply and universally as ‘Vauxhall’.

Originally opened in 1661 on the twelve-acre site of a traditional manorial estate, the pleasure grounds were never exceptionally large. But the luxuriant wooded plantation was already well established on the south bank of the Thames. Mature oaks, elms and sycamores provided leafy foliage where nightingales sang. Later, however, the site became surrounded by new roads and buildings, making the Gardens very much less sylvan over time. In particular, many of the mature trees were felled in 1810/11, notably decreasing the woodland effect.

At the start the appeal of Vauxhall was specifically ‘green’. It became a huge urban pleasure garden, which became so cleverly laid out, with walkways and long vistas through the trees, that it appeared more spacious than it actually was. By this means it offered the illusion of rural delights but within easy reach of the city centre.

Given that the metropolitan region was already one of the largest urban concentrations to be found anywhere in the world, it is not surprising that it generated a rich and diverse entertainments industry. London,

with close to a million inhabitants in 1801, was surpassed in size only by Beijing and probably by Edo, as Tokyo was then known.

In eighteenth-century Britain not only did the metropolis house immense numbers of people, it also attracted numerous visitors from Britain and overseas, who came to town both for business and sociability. This continuous flow of population provided the context for the success of London's many pleasure gardens. These were relatively simple to establish, with a range of facilities according to each patron's initiative. The customers thronged not only to enjoy the entertainments but also to participate in these informal gatherings of people, where part of the fun was – proverbially – 'to see and be seen'.

Encouraged by consumer demand within the growing metropolis, at least 65 pleasure gardens are known to have existed at various times in eighteenth-century London; and, in reality there were probably many more.¹ A characteristic venue was a field or plot of green attached to a tavern. Some were traditional sites, perhaps situated by a mineral spring that had a reputation for providing health cures. Others were new commercial ventures in populous locations.

One enterprising example was the Adam & Eve tea gardens, situated on the busy Tottenham Court Road leading from central London towards Hampstead, then a semi-rural suburb. The location was just outside the built-up area but within easy access for citizens in search of refreshment. A tavern was opened there by 1718 and soon after were added tea gardens, a skittle alley, and a small menagerie with a monkey, parrots, a heron, wildfowl, and goldfish in an ornamental pool.² The venture had a modest success for some decades. Yet the business was unable to resist the northwards march of London housing. Much of the site was sold for development and, although the old name was retained by a public house for some years, eventually that too disappeared.

As the fate of the Adam & Eve indicates, success in the provision of urban pleasure gardens was by no means guaranteed to last. Not only was there strong competition from rival entertainment venues but there were also urgent competing demands for land use as the metropolis expanded.

For those studying Vauxhall three related questions come to mind. *Firstly, how did these pleasure gardens on London's south bank become established as the 'brand leader' among so many rival venues?*

A second question takes a longer term view, continuing until the eventual closure of Vauxhall in 1859. *How did this brand leader maintain its prominence for such a long span of years even while central London's south bank was becoming increasingly industrialised?*

Within the fluidity of this metropolitan transformation, other general themes arise. Some historians see Vauxhall's success as symbolising a vaguely defined 'Modernity'. But a third question demands a more precise answer than that. *What does the story of Vauxhall Gardens mean in terms of both history and its long-term legacy?* For answers, please read on ...

II

Vauxhall – Inventing the Brand

A major reason for Vauxhall's appeal lay in the bountiful provision of entertainments, supplemented by the prompt service of food and ample refreshments. While long keeping their sylvan appearance, the Gardens developed an efficient commercial infrastructure that provided amenities for the crowds who promenaded under the trees.

After the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660 smart society began to flock to London not only for business but also for pleasure. Already responding to this burgeoning market, Vauxhall's Spring Gardens acquired in the 1660s a bowling green, simple booths where food and drink were available, and a troupe of musicians who serenaded the visitors.

Samuel Pepys, the diarist, was an early *aficionado*. His account in May 1662 recorded one of his typical visits: he took a boat along the Thames for an open-air evening at Vauxhall, accompanied by his wife, two maidservants, and a house-boy. Their outing was a great success. Pepys noted pleasantly that 'the boy creeps through the hedge and gather[s] abundance of roses'. The entire party enjoyed 'cakes and powdered beef and ale', which were staple English refreshments of his era. 'And so home again by water, with much pleasure'.³

The programme for *al fresco* success was relatively simple to institute; and it worked well, especially in the summer months in England, with their generally warmer weather and infallibly long hours of daylight. Food, drink, and fashionable company provided the human interest, while the river and the trees provided a rural ambience without the need for protracted travel. 'Equal here the Pleasures ravish/ Of the Court, and of the field', claimed a 1730s song, serenading *The Pleasures of Ye Spring Gardens*.⁴ At the summer concerts which quickly became a Vauxhall speciality, such 'puffing' verses were proudly featured.

It took much more than this agreeable combination of facilities, however, to propel the Gardens to the forefront of fame. That surge to prominence came in June 1732, with an inspired invention from a new manager. He was Jonathan Tyers, a Londoner of middling social standing who first leased the site from the Duchy of Cornwall in 1728

and, having greatly developed the business, eventually purchased the grounds outright.

Tyers was a brilliant impresario.⁵ Not only did he know his own business, which was to act as an unofficial Master of Ceremonies, meeting and greeting the visiting crowds, but he quickly saw the need for a substantial redesign of the Gardens, to elevate Vauxhall above its competitors as the key venue for summer evening entertainments.⁶

Retaining the wooded characteristics of the site, with its established elms and sycamores, the new plan added sophistication to the greenery, as well as considerably improved facilities to cater for large numbers without losing the sylvan atmosphere. Long gravel walks were laid out, criss-crossing the site. And the sight-lines were enhanced by an eye-catching array of special features. There were obelisks, grand ornamental arches, painted scenery on canvas—including a celebrated *trompe l'oeuil* showing mock ruins—a Moorish tower, a ‘pavilion of concord’, a hermit’s cave, and a water-mill with its own waterfall. Homage to the arts was indicated by two prominent statues, one depicting Handel, the Anglicised German who was England’s new musical hero, and the other John Milton, England’s own great epic poet. Vauxhall also showed that it was au *courant* with the latest literary sensation in 1740, by displaying paintings of would-be seduction scenes from Richardson’s *Pamela*.

Thousands of oil-lamps were hung from the trees to create a glittering effect. The supplier was a local manufacturer named Richard Dawson, who was rewarded by a season ticket for the Gardens. With the aid of an ingenious system of flax threads, a team of workers managed to light all the lamps simultaneously at nightfall.⁷ The sudden blaze was thrilling. One of the many poets who wrote in praise of Vauxhall enthused about the sparkling moment of ‘lamp-rise’ with the comment that:⁸

*Adam scarce was more enchanted
When he saw the sun first rise –*

Who precisely redesigned the visual effects for the grand reopening with a special *Ridotto*, or masked ball, in June 1732 is unknown. One possibility is that the young Hogarth, who took summer lodgings in nearby Lambeth, had a hand in encouraging the overall plans. He is known to have provided some assistance, including presenting

copies of his paintings to decorate the pavilions.⁹ Clearly, the person who redesigned the eighteenth-century Gardens had a good eye for perspective. The arches between the trees provided a majestic framing. And the outer walks were initially bounded only by a sunken ditch or haia, so that the neighbouring fields were incorporated into the overall effect as ‘borrowed’ landscape. The effect is depicted in the *General Prospect of Vaux Hall Gardens* (1751). [ILLUS/1] Behind the house that contained the ticket-office, there are densely packed trees stretching into the distance, interspersed with long walkways and archways, so that the walkers could saunter into a magical garden.

The impresario Jonathan Tyers knew that his guests, after strolling in his ‘enchanted grove’, would expect a similarly spectacular environment for the evening entertainments. An orchestra lodged in its special pavilion, rebuilt grandly in ‘Gothic’ style in 1757, provided music, while refreshments – by this time including the notorious Vauxhall rum punch—were served in an array of elegant supper-booths, each seating six or eight persons.

A magnificent Rotunda was added in 1743 to allow the company to meet under cover, in the event of rainy evenings. This building was lavishly decorated with plaster-of-Paris ornamentation by a London carpenter named Maidman, who later embellished the ‘grand Gothic orchestra’. His efforts indicated how Tyers drew upon contributions from the great metropolitan reservoir of skilled craftsmen.¹⁰ ‘The whole place is a realisation of Elysium’, gasped one onlooker, dazzled by the ‘heavenly’ special effects.

Another popular set-piece was introduced in 1755. This took the form of a water scene with a mill and a dramatic cascade (its piping hidden in a high hedge), which flowed every evening from nine to nine-fifteen. A special bell was rung to summon the admiring visitors.

Formidable programmes of entertainment were organised to draw the crowds. Over time, the Gardens hosted concerts, song recitals, dances, masked balls, firework displays, ballets, acrobatic entertainments, pantomimes, naval fetes, balloon displays, races, horse shows, clowns, archery displays, all manner of exhibitions, flower-shows, and even lion-taming (in the early 1840s), as well as many special gala evenings.

Music was, above all, one of Vauxhall's most significant trump cards. Its concerts welded a wide range of compositions from both the popular and what later became the 'classical' repertoire, to provide eclectic and crowd-pleasing programmes. Indeed, between them the London pleasure gardens functioned as the 'nurseries of English song',¹¹ keeping alive old popular favourites and simultaneously adding new items to the repertoire. As the premier concert ground, Vauxhall's regular summer seasons of music were in the vanguard of the process.

Special events drew astonishing crowds. Thousands crammed into the Gardens at eleven in the morning on 21 April 1749 to hear a public rehearsal of Handel's scintillating Fireworks Music, days before its first official performance. There were long tail-backs of coaches queuing for admission. This attendance was even more notable in that the entry charge on this occasion was more than doubled, to two shillings and sixpence. Initially Handel was unhappy about previewing his new composition. However, he was pressurised to agree because, in return, Jonathan Tyers provided an array of Vauxhall lamps plus thirty lamp-lighters to illuminate the official premiere in Green Park six days later.¹²

Musicians who could please audiences in the testing *al fresco* environment became favourites with the public as well as in court and aristocratic circles. The London-born Thomas Arne was the most famous English composer associated with Vauxhall. He built up its musical programme and his song *Rule Britannia* (1740) became a perennial concert favourite.¹³ Women were also stars in the Vauxhall galaxy. Arne's first wife Cecilia was a celebrated vocalist. And another popular singer in the 1790s was Miss Leary, described enticingly as 'the siren of Vauxhall'.

Bolstered with a roster of crowd-pleasing performers, the Gardens functioned at once as an arena for elite concerts *and* simultaneously as a clear forerunner of the popular Victorian music halls. This double-sided aspect of Vauxhall's musical role cannot be stressed too strongly: it was poised on the high plateau before the parting of the ways between 'classical' and popular music. Of course the gap has never been absolute. But in the eighteenth century, there was no breach. Thus the composer Handel wrote a special *Hornpipe for Vauxhall* in 1740; and his *Dead March* from Saul was a standard in the Gardens' repertoire.

The venue moreover showcased not only the musicians but also the music. Thus song-sheets were sold to promote the latest favourites in the repertoire with the enticing legend: ‘Sung at VAUXHALL.’¹⁴ The name was enough on its own to add selling power. Hence it appeared in the titles of many eighteenth-century songbooks. And late in Vauxhall’s history, its aptly named musical director J.W. Sharp, himself a successful performer at the Gardens, felt encouraged to produce his *Vauxhall Comic Song Book*, with separate editions in 1847 and 1848.

Such a widely varied repertoire of vocal and orchestral music, both old and new, was very hard for other places to copy. The supply of successful musicians was not limitless. Consequently, the cost of engaging orchestras and singers on the Vauxhall scale, even if only for a restricted summer season, was well beyond the reach of the smaller pleasure gardens.

Inspired entrepreneurship did much to create a framework for success. Yet the context had to be right to attract the crowds and then to keep attracting them. One necessary element was good communications. Vauxhall was near enough to the growing metropolis to be reached without too much difficulty. Initially, river barges and rowing-boats brought many customers – like Pepys and his household–along the Thames to Vauxhall Steps, where the jostle was sometimes alarming as the pushing crowds all tried to jump onto dry land simultaneously.

After 1750 many more visitors arrived by coach or on foot across the newly opened Westminster Bridge and then by road along the south bank of the winding river. The journey from the heart of the metropolis was not far. When events were exceptionally popular, however, the queue of equipages sometimes stretched back for long distances. Another option, for those unworried about social style, was to arrive on foot. And in the early days some impecunious revellers entered the Gardens simply by climbing the open banks of the surrounding haha.

Keeping an ambience of accessibility without losing social cachet was a difficult balancing act. An important part of Vauxhall’s appeal was its relative openness. It was not a location reserved for any one social group, nor for any one age-group, come to that. The element of social mixing was facilitated as relaxed crowds strolled in an ornamental open-air environment, whereas in their ordinary domestic lives the social conventions were much more constraining.

Significantly, domestic servants in livery were explicitly banned from Vauxhall's Walks,¹⁵ so that aristocratic grandees were not surrounded by a formal retinue of personal attendants but paraded informally with the rest of the company. The presence of princes and other social leaders attracted the urban crowds. They in turn furnished the buzz and animation, as they came to rub shoulders with the great and famous. Together the fashionable and the unfashionable collectively generated the substantial custom that made Vauxhall's lavish entertainments commercially viable.

Other competitor pleasure gardens in London could not match that combination. Some places, like the Adam & Eve, attracted an essentially local clientele. Only one other challenged the fame of Vauxhall. The pioneering south-bank Gardens had a north-bank rival in the form of Ranelagh, which was established further west along the river at Chelsea in 1742. This venue was much more socially exclusive than Vauxhall. It offered a cultivated alternative to elite customers, when they wanted to avoid the press of the crowds.¹⁶ But Ranelagh deliberately cultivated a different market niche. It did not seek to emulate the popular animation and show-business variety of Vauxhall. The south-bank site remained the brand leader.

Following the 1732 redesign of the Vauxhall Gardens, the entrance ticket for a single visit was set at the sum of one shilling; and, except for special events, it remained pegged at that level for many years, until price inflation in 1792 led to its first increase. This tariff was no barrier to the rich or middling sort, although it was enough to exclude the very poor.

Return custom was particularly encouraged by selling season tickets, in the form of engraved silver medallions. Each one admitted two people, with the subscriber's name etched on the reverse. These medallions were attractively produced, making them desirable objects to acquire.

No less an artist than William Hogarth provided skilful graphic designs for the very earliest season tickets.¹⁷ His overall contribution to 'styling' Vauxhall was acknowledged by the award of a special medallion, granting him free access to the Gardens for life. Its design showed two graceful goddesses in flowing drapery, representing 'Virtue' (*Virtus*) hand-in-hand with 'Pleasure' (*Voluptas*). [ILLUS/2] This combined imagery symbolised the ideal Vauxhall brand image.

Organisational problems, however, became apparent when season-ticket holders either lost or loaned their tokens. Sundry persons of 'evil repute' were found to have gained admission. 'Such will not be permitted to come in on any consideration whatsoever', announced the Vauxhall management, with thunderous dignity. But it proved hard to keep strict control.

Episodes like these indicated that there was a covert battle waged by the London crowds who were pressing to gain admission. Their enthusiasm was a clear sign of the Gardens' great popularity. Hence the management's stern proclamations against 'low' characters indicated that the social mix was always more eclectic than the theoretical pricing policy prescribed.

'There was a prodigious deal of good company present', it was reported in 1737.¹⁸ Yet alongside the princes and aristocrats, who brought fashionable society to Vauxhall, there were always plentiful numbers of London traders and shopkeepers, not to mention humbler citizens such as the gin-drinking 'bunters' (female rag-pickers) depicted in one satirical print. A juxtaposition of high and low was an important part of Vauxhall's legendary appeal. Needless to say, the extent of genuine social mixing should not be exaggerated. Vauxhall neither sought nor managed to subvert class differences in any permanent way. Its promise was not one of permanent equality but of temporary common ground, with a shared conviviality. [ILLUS/3]

Particularly enticing was the fame of Vauxhall as a meeting place for young men and women. One of the long-standing roles of the town was to provide occasions for the classic encounter of 'boy meets girl'. When the couple in question were scandalous socially and amorously, the excitement was heightened. In reality, the rowdy young Prince of Wales (later George IV) did not conduct much of his liaison with the actor Mary 'Perdita' Robinson in public places. But the fact that Rowlandson's iconic 1784 watercolour of Vauxhall included this couple prominently, next to Robinson's grimacing and cuckolded husband, showed how the Gardens gained a reputation as a showcase for amorous drama. [ILLUS/4]

With its theoretically controlled entry and formalised entertainments, Vauxhall was not a disorderly or licentious gathering. It was a respectable venue, although not as 'refined' as Ranelagh which was

a favoured location for aristocratic courtship. In its own distinctive style, Vauxhall Gardens provided a relaxed and sensually decorated meeting-place where men and women, young and old, from upper and middling backgrounds, assembled in public together to promenade in their finery, while enjoying the light and warmth of the long summer evenings.

Eventually the real-life nightingales that once delighted Samuel Pepys disappeared from the woodland that had turned into a pleasure park. The mid-eighteenth-century lovers would hear only the muffled whispers of other couples in the dark—and the floating tunes, chatter, and laughter coming from the nearby lighted areas. Vauxhall's combination of vivacious public spaces and semi-private darkness gave it an invaluable 'brand' image of sensuous promise.

III

Vauxhall – Sex and Entertainment

Vauxhall's reputation for sexual glamour merits special attention, because it throws light on the Gardens' mixed appeal to basic instincts as well as to sophisticated pleasures. Most of the contemporary commentators were coy about the details. But it is still possible to glean some information on what exactly went on in the famous (or infamous) Dark Walks.

Before Vauxhall became an enclosed garden, the wooded site had already in the later seventeenth century become a place visited by courting couples. In crowded towns, lovers need tranquil places to visit and enjoy each other's company. And, in particular, young adults who are not yet heads of their own households seek secluded places for courtship or more.

A degree of privacy was much valued, especially in the days when bedrooms and beds were often shared – and not just by married couples. The history of sleeping arrangements is surprisingly understudied. But in these times children in poor and even 'middling' households often co-slept in shared beds and/or shared bedrooms. Family rooms might also be shared by living-in servants. Many used light truckle beds, which were stored away during the day-time.

For people living in such crowded circumstances places to meet and places for sexual encounters, whether introductory or more advanced, were much appreciated. In a mass society, the opportunities multiplied. Accordingly, metropolitan London in the eighteenth century contained many different meeting-places, formal and informal, which catered for a range of tastes.

Sexual variety was part of the attraction of metropolitan life. Homosexual men, for example, gathered in taverns known as 'molly-houses'; or in known outdoor locations like sections of St James's Park, Lincoln's Inn Fields, Moorfields, and Covent Garden.¹⁹ Heterosexual encounters were associated with some of the more raffish special events, like the 'three days' fever' of festivities each Easter at Greenwich Fair. This popular gathering was not for the prudish. A mythology in song and sayings accordingly warned incautious female revellers at Greenwich that they would reap the cost of their sexual abandon nine months later.²⁰

Alongside intermittent events like fairs and markets, there were also continuous possibilities in open spaces. Gardens, parks, common lands and river-banks were all well-known places for *al fresco* assignation. It was in that context that the wooded groves of Vauxhall had already become a prime courtship site for seventeenth-century Londoners. In that guise, it had already become sufficiently well known to attract peeping-toms and other ‘rogues’.

The pleasures promised by Vauxhall, however, outweighed the inconveniences. Not only citizens but also newcomers to the metropolis knew of its reputation as a place to find sexual companions.

One self-documented case was that of the Virginian planter William Byrd, then a forty-four year old widower. During a prolonged stay in London, he often toured through different parks and gardens. In June 1718, he noted in his private diary the not untypical outcome of a trip to Vauxhall with a male friend:²¹

We went to Spring Gardens where we picked up two women and carried them into the arbour ... and about 10 o'clock we carried them to the bagnio [commercial bath-house], where we bathed and lay with them all night and I rogered mine twice and slept pretty well, but neglected my prayers.

Vauxhall’s sexy reputation was commercially valuable to Jonathan Tyers, as he redeveloped the site in the 1730s. He was, after all, no clergyman. It did not matter to him if people left off their prayers. But he did want to attract the custom of the young and sexually adventurous, without letting the venue become too sleazy. Too much notoriety would deter too many fashionable ladies and respectable families.

The redesign of the Gardens under Jonathan Tyers was thus finely judged. About half the site was allowed to remain wooded. While the entertainment section was brilliantly lit, the Dark Walks were left in the dark. People could thus promenade under the trees in the summer gloaming. They could hear voices and music from nearby, so they were not completely isolated. But they had a piquant element of privacy. The result was a suggestive social liberty that added a special excitement to the Gardens, with a hint of erotic licence but without teetering over the brink.

In the early days groups of musicians were deployed to serenade the lovers from hidden positions behind a number of ‘Musical Bushes’. However, this ingenious idea proved difficult to sustain. ‘The damp of the earth was found to be prejudicial to the instruments’, it was reported prosaically.²² Within a few years the musicians were removed into the concert stands.

The Dark Walks were left in peace. One much less than romantic consequence was that some visitors (both men and women) relieved themselves under the trees, although latrines were provided within the Vauxhall site.²³ But such lavatorial details were too normal in eighteenth-century London to provoke much comment. The mystique of the Walks survived.

Unmarried and courting couples could promenade there without the woman automatically losing her reputation. Contemporary accounts, however, indicate that unaccompanied young women often strolled in groups, seeking safety in numbers. By the later eighteenth century, Vauxhall’s reputation for attracting prostitutes meant that respectable ladies had to stay on their guard.

When the heroine of Fanny Burney’s novel *Evelina* (published to acclaim in 1778) gets lost among the ‘dark alleys’, she is grabbed by disrespectful men who salute her as a pretty ‘actress’ and assume that she is fair game for sexual romping. She is saved by a gentlemanly admirer but he is then emboldened to make improper advances in his turn.²⁴ He gasps:

By Heaven, you distract me, ... why do I see you here? ... these dark walks! – no party! – no companion! – by all that’s good, I can scarce believe my senses.

Evelina’s virtue survives the ordeal. But this titillating scene constituted a literary warning that the normal social controls were relaxed within the Dark Walks. Romping could easily turn into sexual harassment. Already by the later 1750s there were allegations of ‘dangerous terrors’, which produced shouts and screams from the Dark Walks. There were calls for greater restraint. As a result in 1764 a modest element of lighting was introduced into the main Lover’s Walk, which ran parallel to Kennington Lane.²⁵

Given the crowds not far away and the risk of peeping toms, there was as much or more kissing and petting than there was full intercourse. Samuel Pepys, for example, recorded in his secret diary for April 1668 a visit to Vauxhall with a female actor. They drank together, while he kissed her and touched her body ‘all over’ but he ‘did not offer *algo mas* [anything more]’.²⁶ He was, however, unusual in keeping a secret diary on such intimate matters, so it is hard to assess his typicality or otherwise.

Vauxhall’s reputation for accommodating lovers provided an atmospheric titillation for the general company, who could enjoy the febrile mood without loss of reputation. A good parallel was found in Samuel Richardson’s novel *Pamela*, which had a runaway success upon first publication in 1740. It insinuated the young master’s unmistakable sexual arousal as he tried to seduce his mother’s maid, until her affectionate resistance was eventually rewarded by marriage. Readers could follow the love play, without condoning impropriety. So it was similarly appropriate that Vauxhall visitors could enjoy viewing two paintings of scenes from *Pamela*, as already noted.

Given the perennial human interest in sexual matters, the Tyers’ formula entailed the successful ‘incorporation’ of sexuality into the Gardens’ appeal. Or another way of describing the Vauxhall effect would be the sexualisation or eroticisation of public entertainment.

Such a process risked turning a basic human need and pleasure into a packaged commodity. Yet the arrangements at Vauxhall fell well short of the full commodification or commercialisation of sex. There were women of the utmost social respectability at the Gardens, alongside the more rakish ‘demi-reps’, who were often invited by male companions as escorts to provide good company. In August 1777 a jovial account came from the pen of the African-Briton Ignatius Sancho, born on a slave ship but by this date a Westminster tradesman. He visited Vauxhall with ‘some honest girls who were treated with expenses for a Vauxhall evening’. The event was a great success: ‘*Fine evening – fine place – good songs – much company – and good music ... Heaven and Earth! – how happy, how delighted were the girls!*’²⁷

Female prostitutes were also known to congregate there, as they clustered at many other entertainment hubs, like Covent Garden. According to a shocked visitor to Vauxhall in the 1780s, there were

many 'loose women' who regularly accosted the male revellers, boldly demanding drinks.²⁸ In fact, there are no statistics that prove or disprove such claims. But it was probably the case that, over time, Vauxhall did gain increasing number of prostitutes, given that its aura of sexual dalliance tended also to attract men in search of amorous possibilities.

But, while the Gardens provided informal venues for assignations and encounters, much sexual delivery took place elsewhere. One reason was that Jonathan Tyers employed discreet watchmen to police the Dark Walks. For commercial motives already explained, he wanted to avoid scaring his respectable visitors. And another reason was the organised nature of prostitution itself, which collectively amounted to big business. Whilst the poorest street-walkers did have sex *al fresco* in London's streets and parks, many prostitutes took clients back to privately rented rooms in ale-houses or bawdy-houses (as opposed to large brothels).²⁹ Hence many of the 'women of the town', who had sufficient time, money and social style to get into Vauxhall, would have their own places to take their clients. That applied particularly to the high-class courtesans, who were sufficiently well dressed to be confused with women of fashion. Some courtesans *were* style-setters, whose public parade at Vauxhall enhanced their lovers' private pleasures.

The reality of the pick-up gambit by cheerily demanding a drink from strangers was corroborated in a recorded exchange between two witnesses during an Old Bailey criminal case in 1745:³⁰

Mr Rondeau: *I knew Mrs. Moore twenty years ago ... She walked in Spring Gardens at Vauxhall, and picked up men there.*

Mrs Moore: *Pray, did you pick me up, or did I pick you up?*

Mr Rondeau: *She asked almost everyone to give her a glass of wine.*

Mrs Moore: *You know Vauxhall is a very pleasant place; I know you very well, for I remember you picked me up there once.*

Their frank and feisty words confirmed the sexy reputation of Vauxhall. Hence, as the venue developed, it appealed simultaneously to two strong strands in eighteenth-century culture: the ‘polite’ and the ‘bawdy’. While Vauxhall displayed classical statues and motifs, and was visited by wits and savants, its amorous image could range from the dreamy to the earthy. No less a poet than John Keats was inspired by the romantic possibilities of this venue for young lovers. His sonnet *‘To a Lady seen for some Few Moments at Vauxhall’*³¹ was by no means his best; but it caught a yearning response to fleeing beauty, tantalisingly glimpsed among the trees.

This double appeal was made to those visitors who enjoyed pornography, scatological cartoons, and unsentimental comic literature (a genre whose popularity historians have recently stressed),³² as well as to those visitors who loved classical learning, etiquette books, and sentimental literature – and to all those who participated in polite and impolite cultures simultaneously.

Everyone could find something to praise – or indeed to blame. Not only was Vauxhall inventing the myth and reality of the urban pleasure garden but it also featured as the epitome of immorality and debauchery for all who thundered against the vices of the age.

Within the history of sexuality Vauxhall’s eighteenth-century role and reputation corresponded with a period of relative permissiveness. The relaxation of church controls over personal behaviour, especially after the 1689 Act of Toleration, encouraged a greater freedom of action and, especially, a much franker public display. Advocates of sexual freedom drew upon Enlightenment ideas of personal choice and applied them within an impersonal urban environment – a juncture of theory-and-practice that has been dubbed the ‘origins of sex’.³³ Needless to say that terminology should not be taken as a literal description. Sex is as old as the species. And sexual behaviour and the public expression of sexual mores (which are not the same phenomena) do not generally display single turning points. Changes are often slow and cumulative.

In eighteenth-century England, and especially in its towns, publicly-sanctioned attitudes were certainly different from those obtaining in the Puritan days of Oliver Cromwell. Vauxhall’s sexual electricity was a flamboyant sign of the times. Far from all onlookers were amused. For example, the philosopher David Hume deplored ‘that torrent of

vice, profaneness, and immorality, by which the age is so unhappily distinguished.’

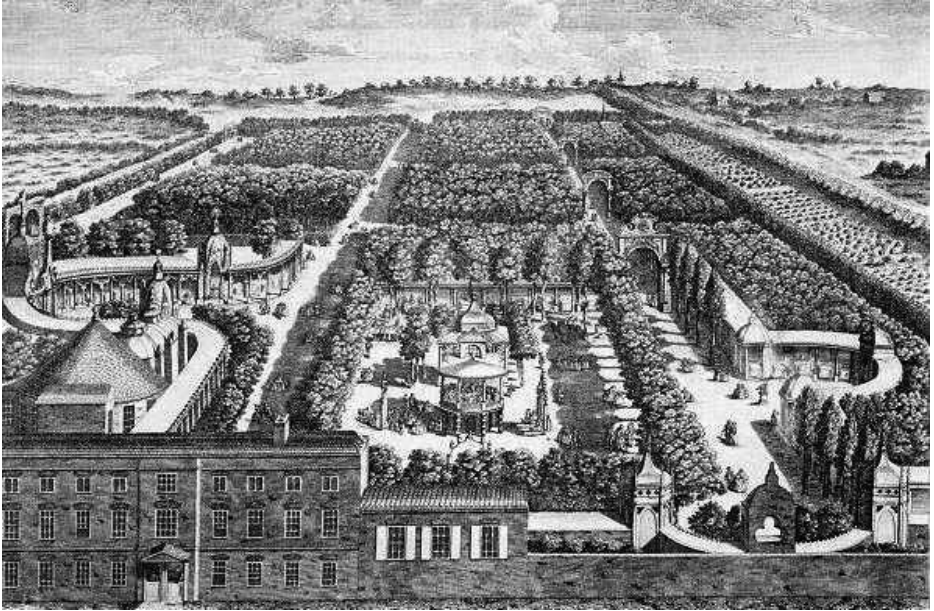
Similarly, a much lesser literary figure, Thomas Amory, joined the ranks of the malcontents. Puritan sermons went unread, he complained in 1756, while people relaxed self-indulgently ‘in these days of pleasure, in this age of *Vauxhalls* and *Ranelaghs*’. But, since Amory also referred to people travelling to the pleasure gardens in ‘coaches full of love and laughter’, his account was hardly devised to discourage visitors.³⁴ The eroticisation of leisure was in full swing.

It is worth noting, however, that over time the pendulum of fashion and public sexual mores began to change once more. Too much licence was alarming to the respectable Victorian middle class. In the case of Vauxhall its wooded area was also physically on the retreat. More and more space was given over to mass entertainments, as has already been noted. The economic need to pack in the crowds had taken precedence.

Lovers had to find other more discreet places to go. The critics of vice and immorality, alarmed at the flouting of traditional morality, fought back. By the 1830s there was increasing middle-class support for public respectability. Private behaviour did not necessarily change. Yet ‘Victorianism’ entailed a greater emphasis upon public decorum. There were and are swings and counter-swings in what is considered as socially acceptable as well as legally permissible.

Associating sex with entertainment, however, has never gone away. For example, the Victorian music halls, with their suggestive songs and dances, were very much in the saucy spirit of Vauxhall, albeit indoors out of the rain. The south London Gardens cannot be credited for inventing the sexualisation and eroticisation of popular culture. Clearly, not everything that followed Vauxhall was consciously copying its legend. Influences are often indirect and hard to trace, as well as direct.

Nonetheless, whenever sexual allure is used to glamorise and titillate any form of popular entertainment (as now in TV game shows, for example), it can at least be said that in terms of capitalising upon sexual electricity, Vauxhall Gardens had got there first. Moreover, its excitements in the eighteenth century were enacted as well as implied.



1 *Vauxhall Gardens as transformed by Jonathan Tyers mingled the woodland effect with arched walkways and entertainments among the trees.*



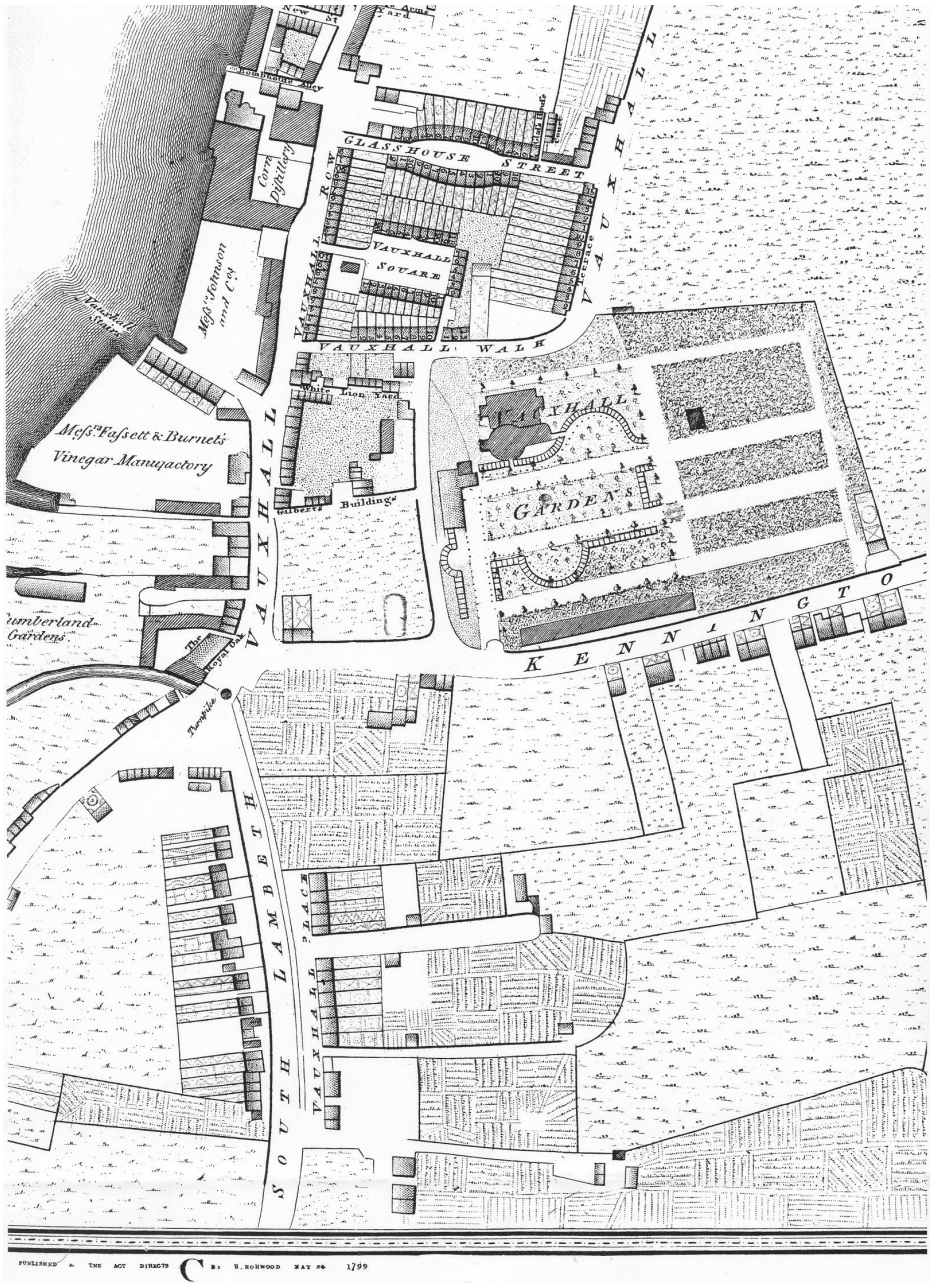
2 *An early admission token, depicting Vauxhall's ideal of Virtue (Virtus) and Pleasure (Voluptas) walking together hand-in-hand.*



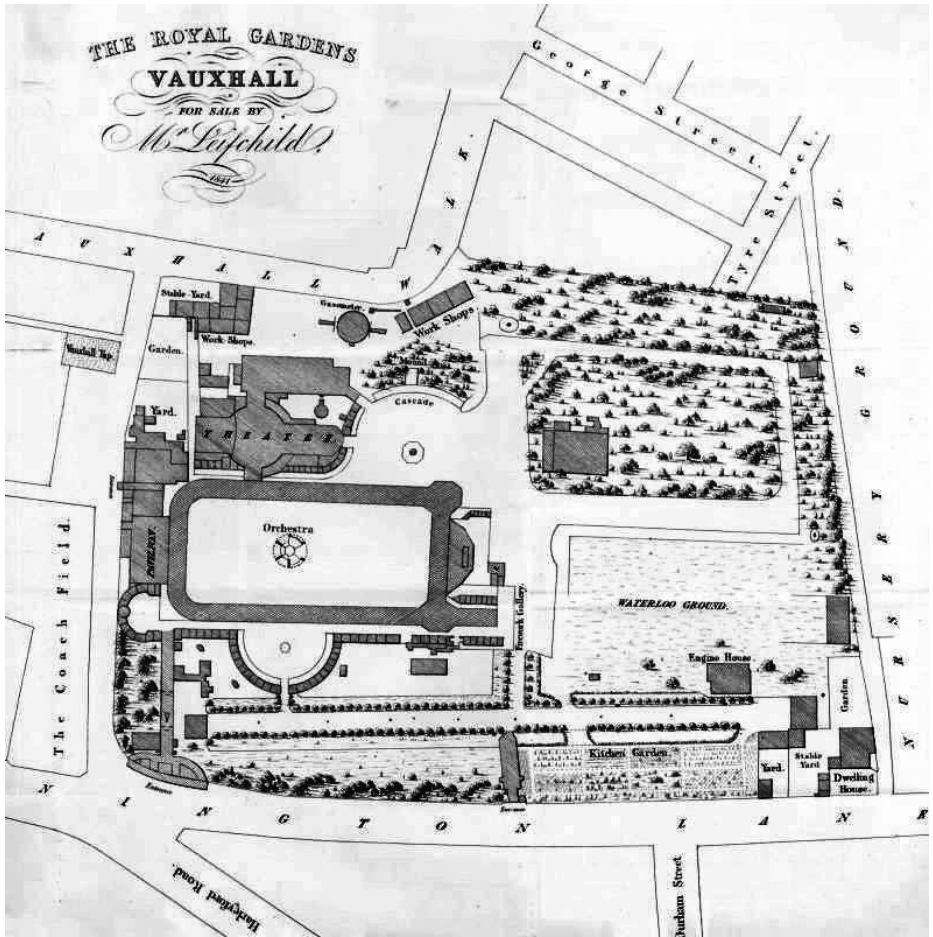
3 *Thomas Rowlandson's iconic watercolour (1784) caught Vauxhall's gaiety, glamour, bustle, and variegated entertainments.*



4 *'Amorous Vauxhall' is incorporated into Rowlandson's watercolour (detail) - with two real-life lovers, the young Prince of Wales and the fashionable actor Mary 'Perdita' Robinson.*



5 In 1799 Richard Horwood's Map of London found Vauxhall on the cusp, with the still-wooded Gardens becoming surrounded by the industrial south bank.



6 Vauxhall's site plan in 1841 shows how the wooded area had been reduced to create space for mass displays, while still leaving some of the old features.



7 *Vauxhall's Pleasure (formerly Spring) Gardens are now restored as a small parkland memory-marker, tucked behind the railway and riverfront developments on the Thames.*

IV

Vauxhall – Coping with Competition

Becoming Britain's premier pleasure garden was a pioneering achievement. By the later eighteenth century copycat venues were being constructed in The Hague, Antwerp, and Dublin, although these rival pleasure-parks were but pale shadows of the original. In pre-revolutionary Paris there were at least ten rival 'Vauxhalls', as the French termed them. One, founded in 1785, offered a concert pavilion and a leafy garden, on a site that is today commemorated by a wall-plaque in the busy boulevard de Magenta, leading prosaically to the *gare du nord*.

Each venue developed its own brand of entertainment, with regular firework displays being a popular speciality that were imported into England from France in the later 1790s.³⁵ The element of copying between the different Gardens was a tribute to the emergence of an internationally competitive urban business. Vauxhall, however, remained the pioneering prototype, as the loaning of its name into other languages indicated.

Public promotion as well as sustained effort behind the scenes was needed to maintain its market leadership. The fate of Ranelagh, which was closed for good in 1803, shows that fashionable success in one era would not necessarily translate into survival in another. And Vauxhall faced competition not only from rival Gardens in London and Paris but from other amenities in many provincial capitals as well.

Patterns of leisure were also beginning to change, especially with the growth of specialist holiday resorts. In the eighteenth century, for example, people travelled to the fast expanding spa towns, like Bath or Tunbridge Wells, for summer entertainment as well as for a health 'cure'.³⁶

Accordingly Vauxhall's owners worked hard, continually re-inventing their brand to attract custom and to encourage return visits. Their programmes of music were notably eclectic, with new sensations and productions every season. In 1780, an ingenious division of the orchestra and singers allowed for a clever effect. The visible musicians sang a new song: 'They say there is an echo here', while another choir,

concealed in the nearby shrubbery, answered with a perfect copy.³⁷ This *coup de theatre* was much admired.

Crowds under the trees also joined in the dancing, which was ‘executed with jumping, thumping and laughter’, as Thackeray later recalled affectionately. And a popular addition to the ritual was invented in 1783. At the end of the concert, the orchestra, with its band of drums and fife, perambulated the entire Gardens, with the crowds following in pied-piper merriment. This grand finale was so successful that it was regularly incorporated into the programme, giving all comers a chance to participate spontaneously in the show.

Gradually over time, however, concert audiences were tending to become more specialised in their demands. By the nineteenth century the musical world in particular was becoming more segmented.³⁸ Ultra-fashionable concerts of what became the classical music repertoire were no longer held at Vauxhall. Instead its programmes concentrated increasingly upon dance music played by military bands and upon crowd-pleasing songs.

Thus, as musical London developed an immense array of places where music was performed, the role of Vauxhall became more specialised. But demand was ever buoyant. Music always remained part of Vauxhall’s allure.

Throughout all these changes, the management strove to keep the crowds coming in sufficient numbers to make the business profitable during the restricted summer season from April to September (initially excluding Sundays), but without driving away the fashionable society whose presence attracted the crowds in the first place. Vauxhall’s continuing aim was to be neither too refined nor too notorious.

Jonathan Tyers and the members of his family, who followed him as owners of Vauxhall, kept a close eye on the business. They employed a large staff to provide food, drink, and entertainments, as well as to tend the grounds and lamps.³⁹ The workforce was organised behind-the-scenes with great efficiency. Specific waiters were responsible for numbered tables. Standard lists of prices were publicly displayed. And, as a result, visitors were served promptly, despite the throng.⁴⁰

The rank-and-file employees were all well trained in discretion. They told no tales of scandal and secrets. Instead, they went entirely

unnoticed, except upon the rarest of occasions—such as in July 1749 when, in apparently unrelated incidents, not one but two members of staff (the head cook and a waiter) drowned in the Thames near Vauxhall.⁴¹ In general, however, it was the star visitors who made the news, along with the Masters of Ceremonies, who hosted the revels.

Learning from the success of Jonathan Tyers, his son Tom Tyers continued to play the same role from 1771–85. He was a convivial figure, who ‘ran about the world with a pleasant carelessness, amusing everybody by his desultory conversation’, wrote James Boswell approvingly in 1778.⁴² Attracted by the ties of companionship, leading figures in London’s literary world were encouraged to visit and revisit the Gardens. Many novelists of the era thus mentioned Vauxhall as a symbol of metropolitan pleasures, whether their fictional characters enjoyed the bustle or complained at the crowds.⁴³

From 1797 the idiosyncratic Charles Simpson was engaged as Master of Ceremonies. He remained in post for over thirty-six years, retiring only just before his death in 1833. His long career provided continuity, even after the Tyers family relinquished their dynastic control of the Gardens in 1822. Moreover, Simpson made himself into a Vauxhall talking-point. He dressed elaborately as a veteran dandy in knee-breeches, brandished a special silver-headed cane, and addressed visitors in a richly parodic style of traditional courtesy.⁴⁴ His death was marked by the special illumination of a forty-five foot effigy in coloured lights, filling the sky with his unmistakable silhouette.

Even before the Tyers family relinquished their role, however, there were some signs that Vauxhall risked becoming a victim of its own success. Pickpockets regularly trawled snuff-boxes, watches, purses, and ladies’ shawls – a characteristic hazard of life among the urban crowds.

Complaints were also voiced from time to time that the Gardens encouraged rowdyism, especially among the convivial young men who drank too deeply of Vauxhall’s heady rum punch. In Thackeray’s novel *Vanity Fair*, that was the fate of Jos Sedley, whose meditated proposal to Becky Sharp got lost between his absurd tipsiness under the Vauxhall bright lights and his dire hangover next morning.

In real life the management worked hard at keeping order amidst the merriment. One instance of that occurred in 1763. To deter the wilder gate-crashers the open ditch or haha was replaced with a row of iron railings. In annoyed response a group of fifty or so young ‘rakes’ promptly threw down the new fence and noisily joined the celebrations. But the railings were eventually restored. Order was confirmed. Yet it was done at the cost of losing the pleasant vista across the nearby fields which contributed to the Gardens’ original charm. Regulating the crowds seeking admission had to take priority over visual amenities.

Nonetheless, it was a massive tribute to the Gardens’ prestige that Vauxhall managed to retain its piquant mixture of popular and fashionable success for as long as it did. On the busiest summer nights the numbers in attendance ran into the thousands; and the revels often continued into the early hours. One famous gathering occurred on 29 May 1786, which was decreed for publicity purposes to be the fifty-year Jubilee of the Gardens. A special *Ridotto* was held, mimicking the grand masked festival of that name which launched Jonathan Tyers’ new regime in June 1732.

Some sarcastic wits among the smart set in the later eighteenth century did begin to claim that Vauxhall was losing its glamour. Nonetheless, it was still the done thing to attend, though not every evening. The season’s finale in late September was notoriously *louche*. Thus a young blood in *Evelina* exclaimed cheerily:

Why, Lord, it’s the best night of any; there’s always a riot,—... and then there’s such squealing and squalling! — and there all the lamps are broke,—and the women run skimper scamper;—I declare I would not take five guineas to miss the last night!

Fanny Burney’s fictional account was out-matched by a real event that had occurred a few years earlier. On 4 September 1774 the London press reported that: ‘upwards of fifteen foolish Bucks, who had amused themselves by breaking the lamps at Vauxhall, were put into the cage there by the proprietors, to answer for the damage done’.⁴⁵ This incident was relatively unusual for the scale of the rowdiness. It is instructive, however, in revealing the ‘instant justice’ exacted by the management. Very few other references can be found to the ‘cage’. The episode indicated the discreet way in which order was maintained by a shadowy team of Gardens’ watchmen.

Combining style with good management allowed Vauxhall to draw many visitors from its large consumer market close at hand. Over time, however, the vicinity of London became a threat as well as a bonus. The traffic to and from the site continually multiplied and the transport system showed signs of strain. Busy evenings often meant delays and irritations for would-be visitors. ‘After scrambling under the bellies of horses, through wheels, and over posts and rails, we reached the Gardens, where there were already many thousand persons’, wrote Horace Walpole half-jokingly half-complainingly, after attending a crowded *Ridotto* in 1769.⁴⁶

Worse still, from the point of view of Vauxhall’s proprietors and customers, the new bridges that improved access to the south bank of the Thames also accelerated the process of industrial development along the riverside. The economic logic of metropolitan demand was generating conflicting pressures upon land use in London’s immediate vicinity.

Already attracted to the river banks were barge builders, brewers, and miscellaneous manufacturers. In 1747 the Gardens found themselves cheek-by-jowl with a massive plate-glass manufactory, as revealed in Rocque’s map of that date.⁴⁷ By 1799 the London map by Richard Horwood indicated the further presence on the riverbank of a corn distillery and a vinegar factory. [ILLUS/5] Rows of housing were also in evidence between Glasshouse Street and Vauxhall Walk. The old pathway that once led visitors from the river at Vauxhall Stairs through grassy fields to Vauxhall Gardens was already becoming overwhelmed by industrial might – and blight.

Without owning any of the adjacent properties, the Tyers family and their successors had no way of safeguarding the local ambiance. And even had the proprietors acquired more terrain in the vicinity, it was highly unlikely that they could have halted the economic trends that were bringing runaway growth to London and concentrating many industries on the unfashionable south bank, where manufacturers had good water supplies and water transport as well as rapid access to metropolitan markets.

Ultimately, there was no overriding reason why the premier open-air leisure resort in the country should be located in this particular spot and no other. Vauxhall did have the claim of priority. Yet that

could not counter-act the lure of profits from industrial and housing developments. As the nineteenth century unfolded, Vauxhall became increasingly down-at-heel and its location dingier. The Thames was becoming an industrial waterway and ‘poverty clings to the water’, as Charles Booth noted bleakly when surveying the London labour market in the 1880s.⁴⁸

In general it is observable that the entertainment industry is a mobile one that is highly sensitive to amenities and fashionability. Without being able to stem the rising industrial tide around it, Vauxhall faced multiplying pressures.

Nevertheless these famous pleasure gardens took a very long time to die. Signs of change were apparent, it is true, long before the end. Many of Vauxhall’s mature trees were felled in 1810/11, in order to create more open space for popular exhibitions and events that could attract great crowds.⁴⁹ As large numbers of visitors were needed to make the Gardens financially viable, the style moved down-market.

After all Vauxhall still remained locationally handy for middle-and working-class revellers seeking lively entertainments close at hand. The new owners in 1822 had done their best to augment the Gardens’ status by renaming them as the ‘Royal. This change was made with the blessing of George IV, who as Prince of Wales in the 1780s had been a jovial Vauxhall devotee—though as monarch he kept his distance.⁵⁰

New ‘Juvenile Fetes’ in the years 1823–35 gave free entry to children under 12. The bumper summer season in 1823 saw as many as 140,000 people passing through the ticket-gates.⁵¹ Handbills and posters were continually circulated to advertise the programmes.⁵² From 1823 onwards a dedicated journal entitled the *Vauxhall Observer* appeared for over 50 issues, with ‘critical remarks’ upon the amusements and plaudits for the latest songs. A similar venture followed in 1841, when the spirited *Vauxhall Papers* were issued three times a week during the season.

Successful innovations had already come in the form of sensational firework displays, first introduced in 1798 and then becoming a Vauxhall speciality.⁵³ And in the afternoons ballooning exhibitions were popular, being witnessed by large crowds. Skilled performers were recruited from around the world – including many, but no means

a majority, from the English-speaking colonies. In 1816–22 one popular star was Madame Saqui, a French tight-rope walker. In 1821 and 1822 another was Ramo Samee, an Indian juggler and sword-swallower. In 1842 the star billing went to Isaac Van Ambergh ‘the celebrated Lion King’ from North America, whose three lions spent the winter of 1842/3 at Vauxhall. And in 1848 the hero was the New Yorker William Henry Lane, dancing under the stage-name of Master Juba. With his touring company of ‘Ethiopian minstrels’, he pioneered a new and thrilling tap-dance, in a fusion of styles including Irish, Spanish and African inheritances.⁵⁴ Other performers also came from Belgium, Germany, Italy, Greece, Russia, Japan, Mexico, Algeria, and Africa, including a lithe troupe of ‘Bedouin Arab’ acrobats.⁵⁵

Yet the pressures of organising an *al fresco* variety show in an increasingly unpromising site were obvious. Commentators in the nineteenth century began to note the forlorn state of the trees and the drab nature of the décor. The critical Leigh Hunt denounced Vauxhall in 1815 as ‘a confined and comparatively mean place ... only a better sort of tea-garden’, with an unattractive reputation for vulgarity and debauchery.⁵⁶

Social pressures from the Surrey magistrates, who licensed the Gardens, were beginning to exert control over the wilder revels. In 1806, the Saturday night frolics generated so many complaints that weekend openings were halted for some years. Another blow came in 1825, when the entire Dark Walks were illuminated – by order of the local magistrates.

Later the management took a radical decision in 1836 to open the Gardens in the mornings, to boost visitor numbers. Yet much of Vauxhall’s magic was lost in the harsh light of day. Charles Dickens as ‘Boz’ was an instant critic. Vauxhall by day was ‘a disappointment at every turn; our favourite views were mere patches of paint; the fountain that had sparkled so showily by lamp-light, presented very much the appearance of a water-pipe that had burst; all the ornaments were dingy, and all the walks gloomy.’⁵⁷ The clumsy rope-dancing performance, he added cuttingly, was as dispiriting as ‘*a country dance in a family vault*’.

Profit margins were increasingly squeezed. In response the portions of food served there were gradually minimised. Thackeray wrote wittily

in *Vanity Fair* (1847) that Vauxhall was a place where ‘happy feasters made-believe to eat slices of almost invisible ham’.⁵⁸

Fading glamour was signalled by an eventual fall in the value of the Vauxhall Gardens site, even while London land values were generally rising. In 1821 the business with its commercial goodwill was sold for £30,000. Yet twenty years later in 1841 the site was purchased for only £20,000 at an auction in which many of the old fittings were dispersed.⁵⁹ The sale plan shows that the trees had been further culled, leaving most of Vauxhall as an open exhibition ground. [ILLUS/6]

It still remained one of London’s growing list of attractions. If no longer a regular haunt of aristocracy, then aristocrats might still visit Vauxhall to enjoy the popular entertainments. When she came out in the 1840s, the future horticulturalist and daughter of the 3rd Earl of Orford, Lady Dorothy Nevill wrote enthusiastically about the place: ‘*Vauxhall at that time was a great fashion, and the smart world often went there and had their fortunes told by a picturesque old gipsy in a grotto*’.⁶⁰ If her account had slight implications of conscious slumming, then it was clear that the slumming was highly enjoyable. With the aid of its long tradition and ever-varying programmes, Vauxhall kept its reputation for entertainment in the context of safe social mixing.

Much yet remains to be understood about the place and its magic. The role of music in advertising the pleasures of Vauxhall has been mentioned already. Songs and dances were particularly well suited to appeal to people from a wide range of ages and backgrounds. Even the minority who did not enjoy Vauxhall might find themselves humming or singing its tunes. Later, too, music and prints alike contributed to the survival of the legend of the Gardens, as collections of Vauxhall songs and memorabilia were gathered and recirculated.⁶¹

But there came a final blow. In 1848 a viaduct for the railway-line into the new Waterloo Station was constructed close to the Gardens’ north-west corner, creating an even greater barrier to the river and furthermore bringing noise, soot, smoke, and overlooking. Repeated announcements in the 1850s tried to goad the crowds by advertising positively the ‘last season’.

By this time, however, London had an ever-growing and ever-diversifying number of rival places for public entertainment. The great

Crystal Palace exhibition in Hyde Park in 1851 drew huge crowds, before relocating in 1854 to Sydenham in south London. In Regent's Park, the open-air London Zoo lifted its initial restrictions upon entry and welcomed fee-paying visitors from 1847 onwards. And for popular music-lovers, the new Alhambra Music Hall in Soho opened its doors in 1854.

So 'Old Vauxhall' finally closed—after an extra-festive Last Night on 25 July 1859. The fireworks spelt out 'Farewell for Ever'. Unkindly, a commentator in *The Times* remarked that it was like saying good-bye to '*the ghost of some friend who has been dead for some years*'.⁶²

V

Vauxhall – Meanings and Legacy

Overall, Vauxhall's legacy conveys many messages. Its saga of rise and fall can be interpreted in terms of gradual change from year to year, and yet again, at times, in terms of response to major urban upheavals. But its role also illuminates some human continuities that cross the barriers between town and country, and between one era and those that follow. All these dimensions interlocked to produce Vauxhall's chequered history.

Continuities in human social life are often very persistent. One example is the continuing interest in face-to-face social gatherings, despite many other forms of change. Even in today's world of distance communications, the human species remains intensely gregarious. And the earlier shift from a rural to an urbanised society did nothing to curb that characteristic. Indeed, towns as meeting-places multiplied the possibilities. The success of eighteenth-century Vauxhall, situated in a great world metropolis, indicated that great cities are not just spasmodic aggregations where people come just to work and sleep. Nor are they merely travel inter-changes that are traversed on the way to somewhere else. Instead, towns and cities foster human sociability, not just among small groups of friends but also among crowds of strangers.

How social encounters are organised in a mass urban environment not only differs from the forms of social life in small communities, it also varies from one urban culture to another. Some traditions place various restrictions upon the visible role of women, so that public sociability becomes a predominantly male experience. In Britain, however, as in many parts of Europe, that sort of gender segregation did not apply.

Triumphantly Vauxhall in its prime showed how social meetings of men and women, old and young, rich and (relatively) poor could be harmoniously organised to share in communal entertainments and festivities. The open-air venue of the Gardens gave scope for spontaneity and informality, while its programmes provided 'specialness' by their topical responses to market opportunities. Meanwhile Vauxhall's sylvan surroundings confirmed the perennial attraction of in-town

greenery for people living in densely-built city environments.⁶³ Many rival parks and gardens continued to be developed across London. Other cities too saw the creation of their own green areas and pleasure grounds. Some even took the name of the pioneer, in tribute. Thus, as well as the already-mentioned 'Wauxhalls' in Paris, there followed a Vauxhall Gardens in Birmingham and another in New York (to name but two examples).⁶⁴

Here is a theme of undoubted interest for later generations of town planners and urban developers. As the process of urbanisation continues to bring more and more people into towns, so the quest continues to provide great cities with opportunities for gatherings that are spontaneous yet orderly, popular yet distinctive, accessible yet somehow special.⁶⁵ The nature of such amenities is bound to remain variegated. But the future of urban pleasure gardens seems assured, especially given the growing appreciation of the green agenda. Indeed, for a comparison, visitors today can enjoy Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens (initially named as *Tivoli & Vauxhall*, in tribute to both Paris and London). This venue was founded in 1843, in the heart of Denmark's capital city, and continues to flourish under the protection of local bye-laws, which keep 75% of the site green.

Successful shared assemblies and popular entertainments moreover play an important social role. They both draw from and reinforce the communal 'glue' that bonds people together in towns, including tourists, travellers, new residents, and long-term urban stayers. Conflicts, tensions, and differences are not thereby eliminated. Human societies retain their disconcerting capacity to switch suddenly from apparent calm to uproar. Victorian Britain was a case in point. It was hardly conflict-free. Indeed, Vauxhall, where the crowds drank and danced, was located close to Kennington Common where the last great Chartist rally took place in April 1848 as Britain's workers campaigned to gain new political rights.

Nonetheless, while there are many sources of dispute and conflict, particularly when people feel that justice has not been served, there are also countervailing social forces that operate to hold societies together. One of those remains a broadly shared sociability and sense of *communitas*. Such cohesive elements were symbolised and

augmented by the mass pleasures of Vauxhall – not uniquely, of course, but symptomatically.

Changing times, meanwhile, indicated the need for constant adaptation to maintain a successful role. Here was a second message of micro-change. Vauxhall was a business as well as a social exemplar. Throughout its history, from a small-scale Restoration tea-garden among the trees, to its magnificent eighteenth-century heyday, and its dogged Victorian survival, successive managers displayed an ability to update and amend its amenities and programmes.

Emblems of national unity were invoked upon occasion, especially in war-time years of crisis. In the 1750s, at the time of the Seven Years War, Vauxhall saw many patriotic displays; and the same was true again during the prolonged wars against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Victories, when they came, provided occasions for special festivities. For many years after 1815, there was a grand commemorative display in the Gardens each June on the anniversary of Waterloo. The atmosphere of intense relief joined with triumph was prefigured, too, by Vauxhall's *Grand Fête* in June 1813, celebrating Wellington's decisive victory at Vittoria against the French in the Spanish peninsular war.

Tactical manoeuvres to entice in the crowds were part and parcel of commercial management in a competitive leisure industry. Vauxhall did invoke patriotic loyalty when it seemed appropriate. But its programmes and imagery were carefully diversified, rather than just confined to one theme. The design of the site was eclectic, with architectural curiosities among the walkways alluding to the rustic (a water-mill), the romantic (ruins, a hermit's grotto), and the exotic (a Moorish tower). And among the trees stood Roubillac's two imposing statues, not to kings and generals, but to John Milton and George Handel.

All this made Vauxhall into a great cultural bazaar. It was not possible to provide everything for absolutely everyone. Vauxhall could not offer the social exclusivity of Ranelagh. Yet successive managers tried hard to cater for a broad swathe of customers throughout changing tastes and times and did so successfully for many years. By the end its historic legend was part of its reputation. It became known as 'Old Vauxhall' in the mid-nineteenth century, adding nostalgia into the mix.

Nothing, however, is permanently safe-guarded against upheaval. History incorporates a dimension of turbulence and macro-change, whose impact is hard to forecast. The process of rapid urbanisation is often disruptive in itself. Within fast-growing cities, the demand for urban entertainments is far from the only factor to be accommodated. And in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century Britain there were no planning controls to prevent or slow or even to manage changing patterns of land use.

Admittedly not far to the south-east of the Vauxhall site, the new Oval cricket-ground did succeed in establishing itself from 1845, on the site of a former cabbage garden, cheek-by-jowl with main roads, inner urban housing and a gas-holder that still looms nearby. Its patrons, however, were seeking not an urban Elysium for evening entertainment but the more modest aim of a good sporting wicket for day-time use. They organised themselves as the Surrey County Cricket Club and in 1855 purchased the ground-lease from the Duchy of Cornwall to prevent the site from being developed for housing.⁶⁶

By contrast Vauxhall had no organised fans to lobby in its defence. The business was always privately run, with no share-holders who might rally in support. Even if a benefactor had emerged to purchase the Gardens for the public – and, better still, to enlarge the cramped site by gaining land access to the riverside – Vauxhall’s location was fast losing its allure for the entertainment industry.

Successive transformations were part and parcel of metropolitan expansion. Such changes make it implausible to equate the history of Vauxhall simply with a thrusting ‘Modernity’, as suggested by the cultural geographer Miles Ogborn.⁶⁷ The Gardens faded as well as rose. But the demise of Vauxhall did not mark the end of ‘Modernity’. The two were far from identical. The concept of ‘Modernity’ is itself a fluid and subjective one, which has no agreed definition – whether commercial, industrial, political, or cultural – and therefore no agreed historical dating.^{68, 73}

Linking Vauxhall to ‘Modernity’ thus does not say anything very specific. That terminology might as well be applied to (say) the flourishing theatre world in Shakespeare’s London⁶⁹ when the leisure sector was first expanding on a grand scale but before Vauxhall was planned. By the later sixteenth century the metropolis was already

becoming celebrated as a centre for ‘conspicuous consumption’.⁷⁰ Or it might be applied to the nineteenth century when ‘modern’ London was becoming a world city and imperial capital,⁷¹ while Vauxhall was experiencing problems and eventual demise.

The processes of urban transformation have continued unabated since then. Other historians attribute metropolitan ‘Modernity’ not to the eras of the Stuarts, the Hanoverians, or Queen Victoria, but to the twentieth century.⁷² In the case of London the years after 1951 brought many new processes, this time of industrial relocation and partial slum clearance. By the early twenty-first century the Thames riverbank at Vauxhall is home to high-rise luxury housing, while on the old Gardens site a small patch of inner-urban grassland has been restored. [ILLUS/7].

If therefore it is claimed that an urban ‘Modernity’ *made* the Vauxhall Gardens possible in the eighteenth century, then an equally urban ‘Modernity’ *unmade* them in the mid-nineteenth century, whilst a later urban slum-clearing ‘Modernity’ in the later twentieth century has yet again *remade* a patch of local greenery. It bears the old name of Spring Gardens as a memory marker. After restoration it was re-named Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens in early 2012.

Historically, Vauxhall’s saga represented something much more specific than a general sign of ‘modern times’. Entertainment industries in mass societies have to remain continually on their toes, to keep abreast of changing patterns of supply and demand. They also thrive most spectacularly when they establish their own brand magic. Vauxhall did that with the added glamour of sexual excitement. Meanwhile, in a turbulent world, they have no guarantee of permanent survival.

Consequently a better explanation for the processes that made and unmade Vauxhall would be *the meeting of mass sociability with the restless dynamics of commercialised leisure and the repeated upheavals of urban transformation.*

VI

Vauxhall – Walking into History

Things were not always perfect in the real Gardens that preceded the later legend. Sometimes it rained and the revellers stayed at home. Sometimes the celebrities did not attend and/or the festivities fell flat. Sometimes the eager visitors with high hopes were disappointed. Sometimes, too, the place became too raucous and unruly to please the local magistrates. As time passed, moreover, Vauxhall faced every-greater competition from rival venues and from other forms of entertainment.

Legends, however, rise above such gritty realities. In its prime Vauxhall represented the appeal of communal enjoyment *al fresco* amongst an eclectic mix of people. It signalled that mass living may bring not only potential problems but also real social pleasures. In practical terms its success was shown by the many rival ‘Vauxhalls’. It was also the ancestor of countless festival gardens, theme parks, civic promenades, seaside gardens, and carnival grounds. Within London it is a reminder of what can be done on the south bank of the river, close to the heart of the city. For example, there was a distinctly Vauxhallian echo in the 1951 Festival in Battersea Park.

Hence wherever there is a harmonious conjunction between convivial mass entertainments, with their own glamour, and an attractively managed urban environment, the Vauxhall message applies. One enthusiast in 1750 expressed appreciation of the dream:⁷⁴

When the Night is warm and serene, the Gardens fill'd with fine Company, and different Parts of them are illuminated, the Imagination cannot frame a more enchanting Spectacle.

So the revellers promenading to the sound of music under the trees hung with glimmering Vauxhall lamps—along with the diners, the drinkers, the dancers, the musicians, the entertainers, the Masters of Ceremonies, the discreetly efficient workforce, the pick-pockets, the watchmen, and the lovers strolling amorously in the secluded Dark Walks – all these together walked into a living history.

Endnotes

- 1 64 venues (with Vauxhall as the 65th) are reported in W. Wroth with A.E. Wroth, *The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century* (1896; in 1979 reprint). A further 59 minor gardens in the nineteenth-century metropolis are surveyed in W. Wroth, *Cremorne and the Later London Gardens* (1907), pp. 93–7.
- 2 Wroth and Wroth, *London Pleasure Gardens*, pp. 76–80.
- 3 Entry for 29 May 1662, in R. Latham and W. Matthews (eds), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription* (1970), Vol. 3, p. 94.
- 4 *The Pleasures of ye Spring Gardens, Vauxhall*, c. 1735 (libretto Mr. Lockman; music Mr Boyce), in British Library Bound Vol: Broadsheet English Songs, G316d.
- 5 For Jonathan Tyers (1702–67), see *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. His name is recalled today by Jonathan Street and Tyers Street, both in S.E.11. D. Coke and A. Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens: A History* (2011), pp. 175–206, is notably strong on Vauxhall as a business enterprise.
- 6 See Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, *passim*; Wroth, *London Pleasure Gardens*, pp. 286–326; J.G. Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens: A Chapter in the Social History of England* (1941); W.S. Scott, *Green Retreats: The Story of Vauxhall Gardens, 1661–1859* (1955); and M. Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680–1780* (1998), pp. 119–33, 142–48, 150–7. There is also a superb website produced by David Coke: see www.vauxhallgardens.com. And the Victoria & Albert Museum British Galleries offers an engaging video (3 mins/ 09sec) of *An Evening at Vauxhall Gardens*.
- 7 Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 67–8. In 1846 the lamps were converted to gas-lighting.
- 8 For poetry about Vauxhall, see the collection in www.victorianlondon.org.uk.
- 9 J. Uglow, *Hogarth: A Life and a World* (1997), pp. 315–20; R. Paulson, *Hogarth: His Life, Art and Times* (1971), Vol. 1, pp. 347–8.
- 10 For the craftsmanship of Mr. Maidman, of whom otherwise little is known, see Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 43–4. But Coke and Borg suspect, perhaps unfairly, that other help was supplied, since the work seemed too sophisticated for an ‘otherwise unknown tradesman’: Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, p. 218.
- 11 This verdict from Frank Kidson is cited in Sands, *Invitation to Ranelagh*, p. 9. See also Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 139–74; H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, c. 1780-c.1880* (1980), pp. 164–5; A.L. Borschel, ‘Development of English Song within the Musical Establishment of Vauxhall Gardens, 1745–84’ (unpub. PhD thesis, British Columbia University, 1985) and J.B. Bach, *Favourite Songs Sung at Vauxhall Gardens, Originally Published in London, 1766–79*, ed. S. Roe (1985).

- 12 C. Hogwood, *Handel: Water Music and Music for the Royal Fireworks* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 84–6, 88–9, 94. But for a corrective against taking inflated contemporary estimates of the numbers in attendance too literally, see D. Hunter, ‘Rode the 12,000? Counting Coaches, People and Errors En Route to the Rehearsal of Handel’s *Music for the Royal Fireworks* at Spring Gardens, Vauxhall in 1749’, *London Journal*, 37 (2012), pp. 13–26.
- 13 Arne’s song *Rule Britannia* (1740) still features, suitably enough, at the Last Night of the Proms – these concerts (1895-present) being indirect descendants of the Vauxhall summer showcase of music for promenaders. In recent years, the simultaneous transmission of the Proms to outdoor audiences is even more reminiscent of the Vauxhall *al fresco* experience.
- 14 For Vauxhall and music, see Wroth *London Pleasure Gardens*, pp. 67–80; Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 144–70, and information in the website: www.vauxhallgardens.com.
- 15 Tyers’ 1738 announcement is cited in Scott, *Green Retreats*, p. 26.
- 16 Ranelagh’s entrance fee was 2s.6d (including refreshments): see M. Sands, *An Invitation to Ranelagh, 1742–1803* (1946); and Wroth, *London Pleasure Gardens*, pp. 199–218.
- 17 See W. Wroth, *Tickets of Vauxhall Gardens* (1898), pp. 3–5, 7–12; Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 397–410: Appendix 2. A touch of Hogarthian drollery can be seen in John Robinson’s medallion (1751), featuring Orpheus with his lute, accompanied by a tiny ape playing a violin.
- 18 Wroth, *London Pleasure Gardens*, p. 291.
- 19 R. Norton, *Mother Clap’s Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England, 1700–1830* (1992), pp. 70–91; and P. Carter, *Mollies, Fops and Men of Feeling: Aspects of Male Effeminacy and Masculinity in Britain, c. 1700–80* (1995).
- 20 C. Dickens, *Sketches by ‘Boz’: Illustrative of Everyday Life ...* (1836), Vol. 1, p. 314.
- 21 Diary entry 26 June 1718 by William Byrd II (1674–1744), as cited in Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 28–9.
- 22 Anon. [C.F. Partington], *A Brief Historical and Descriptive Account of the Royal Gardens, Vauxhall* (1822), p. 29.
- 23 For a brief report on a rarely mentioned topic, see Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, p. 202.
- 24 F. Burney, *Evelina: Or, the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (1778), ed. E.A. Bloom (1982), p. 197. The next quotation comes from the same source: p. 195.
- 25 Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 76, 193.
- 26 Diary entry 23 April 1668 by Samuel Pepys (1673–1703), as cited in Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, p. 22.
- 27 P. Edwards and P. Rewt (eds), *The Letters of Ignatius Sancho* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1994), p. 104.

- 28 Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, p. 221.
- 29 See D. Cruickshank, *The Secret History of Georgian London: How the Wages of Sin Shaped the Capital* (2009), esp. pp. 165–73; and T. Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730–1830* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 27–35.
- 30 *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, consulted 28 March 2012), Jan.1745, trial of Henry Sims (t17450116–15): the witness Mrs Moore, who gave her occupation as a wine-seller, was alleged by others to be a bawdy-house keeper.
- 31 J. Keats, ‘To – ’, in J. Barbard (ed.), *John Keats: The Complete Poems* (1976), p. 226.
- 32 On the impolite world, see variously J. Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books: The Development of Pornography in Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 2003); V. Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (2006); S. Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, 2011).
- 33 F. Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (2012), esp. pp. 3–4, 77–8, 80–98, 138–40, 232–3, 363–4. But for a critical review, which argues that Dabhoiwala not only underplays earlier libertinism and the sporadic nature of sexual monitoring but also glosses over later shifts in sexual behaviour, see Germaine Greer, *The Observer*, 22 Jan. 2012: www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/Jan/22/origins-of-sex-review.
- 34 J. Bunclie [T. Amory], *The Life of John Bunclie, Esq: Containing Various Observations and Reflections, Made in Several Parts of the World ...* (1756), Vol. 1, p. 460.
- 35 Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 84–5, 91–2.
- 36 P.M. Hembry, *The English Spa, 1560–1815: A Social History* (1990); and P.J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700–1800* (1982), pp. 51–65.
- 37 Wroth, *London Pleasure Gardens*, p. 311.
- 38 On this, see variously S. McVeigh, ‘Introduction’, in S. Wollenberg and S. McVeigh (eds), *Concert Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2004), pp. 9, 27; W. Weber, ‘Musical Culture and the Capital City: The Epoch of the *beau monde* in London, 1700–1870’, in Wollenberg and McVeigh (eds), *Concert Life*, pp. 77–81, 86–7; and C. Ehrlich, *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (1985), pp. 47–8, 54–61.
- 39 Much the best source for information about Vauxhall’s behind-the-scenes staff, who are ignored in the older histories, is the website: www.vauxhallgardens.com.
- 40 Anon. [J. Lockman], *A Sketch of the Spring-Gardens at Vaux-Hall* (1750), p. 24.
- 41 Vauxhall head cook found drowned: *Whitehall Evening Post*, Sat. 15 July 1749; Vauxhall waiter suffered cramp while washing in the Thames and drowned: *General Advertiser*, Wed. 19 July 1749.

- 42 J. Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R.W. Chapman (1976), p. 960.
- 43 Key novels with scenes set in Vauxhall are listed at the end of Suggestions for Further Reading. Paintings of episodes from Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) were hung at Vauxhall, even while Richardson referred disapprovingly to the place as symptomatic of luxury and moral decadence.
- 44 See Anon. [C. Simpson], *The Life and Adventures of C.H. Simpson, ... Written by Himself* (1835), p. i: addressing his 'Most illustrious, Eminent, Puissant, and Distinguished Readers ...'
- 45 Wroth, *London Pleasure Gardens*, p. 306.
- 46 Quoted in Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens*, p. 30.
- 47 Compare J. Rocque's 'Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster' (1747) in R. Hyde (ed.), *The A to Z of Georgian London* (1981), p. 39; and Richard Horwood's 1813 'Map of the Cities of London and Westminster', in P. Laxton (ed.), *The A to Z of Regency London* (1985), p. 67.
- 48 J. Roebuck, *Urban Development in Nineteenth-Century London: Lambeth, Battersea and Wandsworth, 1838–88* (1979), pp. 128, 130–1.
- 49 For the changing ground plans of Vauxhall, see Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 417–22.
- 50 For patriotic displays at Vauxhall, see Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity*, pp. 142–8.
- 51 J. Conlin, 'Vauxhall Revisited: The Afterlife of a London Pleasure Garden, c.1770–1859', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 45 (2006), pp. 718–43; Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 249–360.
- 52 For the Vauxhall Gardens Archive, visit the Lambeth Archives at the Minet Library, London SE5, or consult online at www.landmark.lambeth.gov.uk. See also 71 fiches in Adam Matthew Publications (2005), for which see also www.adam-matthew-publications.co.uk/.../vauxhall.
- 53 Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 84–5, 91–2; Wroth, *London Pleasure Gardens*, pp. 312–14; Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 265–7. For Vauxhall's association with pyrotechnic displays, see C. Antonio, *The Art of Making Fire-Works, as Displayed at Vauxhall ...* (1840).
- 54 See J. Newman, *Windrush Forbears: Black People in Lambeth, 1700–1900* (Lambeth Archives, 2002), pp. 50–62; plus images between pp. 63–4; and website www.masterjuba.com. With thanks to Sean Creighton for drawing these resources to my attention.
- 55 Drawn from list of performers in www.vauxhallgardens.com.
- 56 Leigh Hunt in *The Examiner*, no. 282 (1815).
- 57 C. Dickens, *Sketches by Boz ...: The Second Series* (1837), pp. 217–18.
- 58 W.M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero* (1847; in 1954 edn), p. 63.
- 59 Wroth, *London Pleasure Gardens*, pp. 316, 322.

- 60 R. Nevill (ed.), *The Reminiscences of Lady Dorothy Nevill* (Edward Arnold: London, 1906), p. 71.
- 61 In 1890, a four-day fundraising event for the London & South Western Railway Company's Orphanage, held in Kennington, was entitled 'Grand Illuminated Revival of the Old Vauxhall Gardens, with its Quaint Old Evergreen Bowers, and Illuminations', based upon collection of old Vauxhall prints: see Poster in British Library, Evanion Collection 631. www.bl.uk/catalogues/evanion/Record.aspx?EvanID=024-000000525&ImageIndex=0.
- 62 See Coke and Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, pp. 324–5; and Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens*, p. 180.
- 63 See discussion in P. Clark and J.S. Jauhiainen, 'Introduction', in P. Clark (ed.), *The European City and Green Space: London, Stockholm, Helsinki and St. Petersburg, 1850–2000* (2006), pp. 1–29.
- 64 Much helpful further information is provided in S. Creighton, 'Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens: Its Continuing Historical Influence' (History & Social Action Publications, pdf/4: 2009), www.historysocialaction.co.uk.
- 65 H. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870–1914* (1976), esp. pp. 5–18.
- 66 See E. Midwinter, 'Darling Old Oval': *A History of 150 Years of Surrey Cricket at the Oval, 1845–1995* (1995), pp. 3–7.
- 67 For this argument, see Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity*, pp. 1–28, 118–19, 122–8.
- 68 P.J. Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History* (2007), pp. 131–44.
- 69 See variously D. Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. pp. 1–28; A. Leggatt, *Jacobean Public Theatre* (1992), pp. 9–45; and A. Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge, 1996 edn).
- 70 See F.J. Fisher, 'The Development of London as a Centre for Conspicuous Consumption in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in F.J. Fisher, *London and the English Economy, 1500–1700*, ed. P.J. Corfield and N.B. Harte (1990), pp. 105–18.
- 71 Among many studies, see J. White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: 'A Human Awful Wonder of God'* (2007).
- 72 As argued by P. Brooker, *Modernity and Metropolis: Writing, Film and Urban Formations* (Basingstoke, 2002); and J. Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (1999).
- 73 On the fluidities of periodisation, see P.J. Corfield, 'Post-Medievalism/Modernity/ Postmodernity?' in *Rethinking History*, 14 (2010), pp. 379–404; also available online via websites www.tandfonline.com; and www.penelopejcorfield.co.uk, Pdf/20.
- 74 Anon. [Lockman], *Sketch of the Spring-Gardens*, p. 15.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Historians on Vauxhall

D. Coke and A. Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens : A History* (Yale University Press: London, 2011)

J. Conlin, 'Vauxhall Revisited: The Afterlife of a London Pleasure Garden, c.1770–1859', *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), pp. 718–43

J. Conlin, 'Vauxhall on the Boulevard: Pleasure Gardens in London and Paris, 1764–84', *Urban History*, 35 (2008), pp. 24–47

P.J. Corfield, 'Fantasias and Pleasure Gardens in Georgian and Victorian London', *International Magazine for Follies, Grottoes and Garden Buildings*, 77 (Autumn, 2010), pp. 16–18

T.J. Edelstein, *Vauxhall Gardens* (Yale Centre for British Art: New Haven, Conn., 1983)

M. Ogborn, *Spaces of Modernity: London's Geographies, 1680–1780* (Guilford Press: New York and London, 1998), pp. 116–57

W.S. Scott, *Green Retreats: The Story of Vauxhall Gardens, 1661–1859* (Odhams Press: London, 1955)

J.G. Southworth, *Vauxhall Gardens: A Chapter in the Social History of England* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1941)

W. Wroth with A.E. Wroth, *The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century* (Macmillan, London, 1896; reprinted 1979), pp. 286–326

Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century Novelists on Vauxhall

F. Burney, *Evelina: Or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) – letter 15 (a scene of sexual scandal averted just in time)

C. Dickens, *Sketches by 'Boz': Illustrative of Everyday Life and Everyday People* (1836), Vol. 1 (sardonic humour on Vauxhall by daylight)

C. Lennox, *The Female Quixote: Or, the Adventures of Arabella* (1752), Book 9, ch. 1 (the quixotic heroine mistakes a prostitute for a damsel in distress)

T. Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) – ch. 9 (contrasting responses to the Gardens from the different characters, young and old)

W.M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero* (1847), ch. 6 (scene of a key moment in the fortunes of Becky Sharp, set in the Vauxhall of 1814)

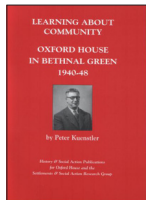
Vauxhall Resources on the Web

Vauxhall Gardens Archive in www.landmark.lambeth.gov.uk

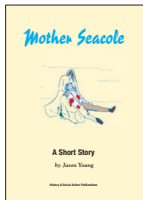
Websites: www.vauxhallgardens.com and www.vauxhallsociety.org.uk

Poems inspired by Vauxhall Gardens in www.victorianlondon.org.uk

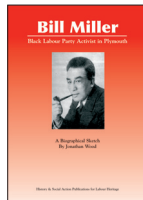
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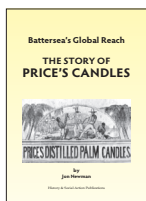
Peter Kuenstler. *Learning About Community. Oxford House in Bethnal Green 1940-48*. For Oxford House and the Settlements & Social Action Research Group. ISBN 0-9548943-0-8. (2004) £5



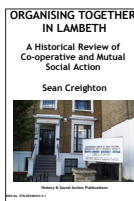
Jason Young. *Mother Seacole. A Short Story*. ISBN 0-9548943-1-6. (2005) £2. About Mary Seacole in the Crimea.



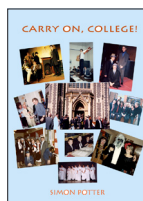
Jonathan Wood. *Bill Miller. Black Labour Party Activist in Plymouth*. A Biographical Sketch. In association with Labour Heritage. ISBN 0-9548943-2-4. (2006) £3.



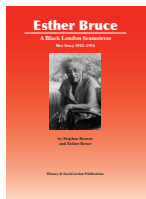
Jon Newman. *Battersea's Global Reach. The Story of Price's Candles*. ISBN 978-0-9548943-4-4 (2009) £5.



Sean Creighton. *Organising Together in Lambeth. A Historical Review of Co-operative and Mutual Social Action in Lambeth*. ISBN 978-0-9548943-5-1. (2010) Free as emailable PDF.



Simon Potter. *Carry On College. Forty Years at Wimbledon College. A Memoir*. ISBN: 978-0-9548944-6-8. (2011). £18 plus £5p&p



Stephen Bourne. *Esther Bruce: A Black London Seamstress. Her Story 1912-1994*. ISBN 978-0-9548943-7-5. (2012) £4.

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Penny Corfield

Vauxhall Gardens is a name that conjures the pleasures of big city life. It reminds us that great towns provide opportunities for communal festivities and concord, as well as the often-stressed potential for urban problems and conflict.

This study explains how Vauxhall emerged as the brand-leader of the urban pleasure garden, from among the ranks of sixty or more rival gardens in post-Restoration London. Vauxhall became fashionable; it was popular; it was brilliantly organised; it was musical; it was entertaining; it had fireworks; it was a meeting place for lovers ... it had it all.

Yet the continuing transformation of London brought change in its wake. Vauxhall did not endure for ever. While the new Oval Cricket Ground managed to survive in nearby south London, Vauxhall's Pleasure Gardens disappeared. It took more than fame and, later, nostalgia to keep a front-rank leisure amenity going on the south bank. By studying Vauxhall's rise and fall, we can understand the upheavals of the entertainment sector in the 'modern' city. A new chapter in this second edition highlights Vauxhall's justified reputation for sexual glamour – and its legacy of eroticising the leisure industry by linking sex and entertainment.

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