



ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST/© HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II 2019

Prince Albert: Founder of Albertopolis



Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851

Sherfield Building, Imperial College, London SW7 2AZ

Telephone: 020-7594 8790 Fax 020-7594 8794

E-mail: royalcom1851@imperial.ac.uk

Website: www.royalcommission1851.org.uk

Bernard Taylor CBE DL FRSC *Chairman*

Prince Albert's immense contribution to this country has taken some time to be truly appreciated. In his lifetime he was often dismissed as a meddler and his grand ideas were frequently ridiculed, none more so than his proposal for an Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations. His initiative was shunned by Londoners and by Parliament, who feared it would be a hotbed of revolution, and doom mongers predicted that Paxton's Crystal Palace would blow down in the first gale. Yet the Great Exhibition captured the hearts and minds of the nation to the extent that it was visited by a third of the population of the day. Its success resulted in a handsome profit and it was in the use of this that Prince Albert's extraordinary vision came to the fore.

His memorandum of August 1851 led to the foundation of the cultural quarter around Exhibition Road in southwest London, known affectionately as 'Albertopolis', which today thrives as one of the world's leading hubs for the arts, science and innovation. His memorandum is reproduced here, followed by a printed transcript and accompanied by a thought-provoking essay by 1851 Bodleian Fellow Dr Andrew Cusworth, in celebration of the 200th anniversary today of His Royal Highness's birth and as a tribute to a very remarkable man.

The Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, which he initiated, is proud to continue the work he started nearly 170 years ago.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bernard Taylor'. Below the signature is a horizontal line with an arrow pointing to the right.

26 August 2019

Registered Charity No. 206123

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Memorandum by the Prince on the Appropriation
of the Surplus
Memorandum. (1)

It is estimated that, after defraying the expenses of the Exhibition, the Royal Commission will be left with a surplus of from £150,000 to £200,000.

The question arises; what is to be done with this surplus?

Schemes abound for its application & a great movement is being made to get it expended upon the purchase & maintenance of the Crystal Palace as a Winter Garden.

It becomes necessary for the Royal Commission to mature some plan for itself on a careful & conscientious consideration of its position, powers & duties, in order not to find itself at the end of its important labours driven into the execution of ill-considered

Projects by the force of accidents or popular agitation.

In order to arrive at a sound opinion on what is to be done, we must ask ourselves: what are the objects the Exhibition had in view; how far have these objects been realised & how far can they be further promoted?

I take the objects to have been: the Promotion of every branch of human industry by means of the comparison of their processes & accoutrements as carried on & obtained by all the Nations of the Earth, & the Promotion of kindly feelings of the Nations towards each other by the practical Illustration of the advantages which may be derived by each from the labours & achievements of the others.

Only in a close adherence to this governing idea, & in a consistent carrying

out of what has been ^{to} done, can we find a safe guide for future plans.

But even if this were not the case, it will be found that by former announcements to the Public we have distinctly pledged ourselves to expend any surplus, which may accrue towards the establishment of future Exhibitions or objects strictly in connexion with the present Exhibition.

The purchase of the Crystal Palace for the purpose of establishing a Winter Garden or a Museum of Antiquities, or a public Promenade, Ride, Lounging place &c. &c. has, in my opinion, no connexion whatever with the objects of the Exhibition. Our connexion with the Building has been an incidental one, merely as a covering to our Collections & ceases with the dispersion of the latter, & therefore, even if we were not bound by legal contracts to remove the Building on a specified day, & the

dictates of good faith did not induce us strictly to fulfill our moral engagements towards the Public, should we be released from our legal engagements, — I consider that we have not the power to divert any part of the surplus towards providing the London, or even English Public with a place of recreation. —

But should the Public wish to maintain the Building we ought not to stand in the way of the Government keeping it up to the 1st of May, should they feel it their duty to take such a course.

If I am asked what I would do with the surplus I would propose the following Scheme:

I am assured, that from 25 to 30 acres of ground near, opposite the Crystal Palace on the other side of the Kensington Road, called Kensington Gore (including Soyer's Symposium) are to be purchased

at this moment for about £50,000. — I would buy that ground & place on it four Institutions, corresponding to the 4 great Sections of the Exhibition: Raw Material, Machinery, Manufactures & Naval Art. —

I would devote these Institutions to the furtherance of the industrial pursuits of all Nations in these 4 divisions.

If I examine what are the means by which improvement & progress can be obtained in any branch of human knowledge, I find them to consist of four: 1.) personal Study from books, 2.) Oral communication of knowledge by those who possess it to those who wish to acquire it, 3.) acquisition of knowledge by ocular observation, & comparison & demonstration, 4.) exchange of ideas by personal discussion.

Hence I would provide each of these Institutions with the means of forming

1.) Library & rooms for study, 2.) Lecture rooms 3.) an store of Glass covering the purposes of Exhibition & 4.) Rooms for Conversation, Discussions & commercial Meetings. — The surplus Space might be laid out as gardens for public enjoyment, & so as to admit of the future erection of Public Monuments there, according to a well arranged plan. The Centre might be applicable for a public Conservatory — if wished for. —

The Institution for the Raw Material would be most usefully subdivided into Metallurgy, Metallurgical Chemistry & Mineral & Vegetable Physiology, (Agricultural Chemistry, Microscopy) —

That of Machinery would embrace the whole branch of Polytechnic Science with its subdivisions. —

That of Manufactures would comprise a School of design & Chemistry as applied to Manufactures.

The Fourth (The Plastic Art),
Architecture, Antiquities
Sculpture. —

Now I find, that for all
these separate pursuits
we have a variety of Public
Societies in England, struggling
for existence, unconnected
with each other, unprovi-
ded with any suitable
locations:

The Geological Society, Bot-
anical Society, Linnæan
Society, Zoological Society,
Microscopical Society, Agri-
cultural Society &c.

Polytechnic Society, Society
of Civil Engineers &c.

The Society of Arts, Manu-
facture & Commerce (from
which the Exhibition has
sprung & which, after having
produced its flower will
have exhausted its vital
power, & cannot return
to what it was before.)

The Society of Architects of
Antiquaries, Archeological
&c. &c.

Could not these Societies
or most of them, containing
as they do all that this Coun-
try possesses of Talent & Expense
in these branches, be united

in these Institutions,
reserving to each its Indi-
viduality & its self-supporting
& self-managing Character
but bringing them under
a general System, & so
far asking them to reform
their Charters as to make
them more popular Insti-
tutions; — I mean thereby
Institutions placed in a
relation of reciprocal In-
fluence with public Opinion.

If these Societies were
to sell their present habi-
tations & property, & thereby
were freed from the heaviest
part of their expenses,
they would be enabled
materially to assist the
first establishment of their
new existence. —

In order to secure a cer-
tain uniformity of System
amongst them, they ought
in all matters of Interest
common to them, to be
governed by a Central Com-
mittee of their Chairmen.

To this central Body might
be added the Statistical
Society, in order to obtain

for the civilized World an accurate Collection of the Materials from which alone those general Laws can be abstracted, guided by which we can hope safely to progress in all branches of civilization. —

These institutions must be open & common to all Nations, & would soon spread their ramifications into all Countries. — As the surplus, with which they are to be founded, has been obtained from the Public, attracted & gratified by the sight of the works which the Exhibitors have at great expence, trouble, & risk to themselves sent to the Crystal Palace, it would be but a proper return, & I am afraid, the only one we could offer, to receive them as the first life Members of the Institution.

By a scheme like this we should insure, that the great Exhibition of 1851 should not become a transitory event of mere

temporary interest, but that its Objects would be perpetuated, that the different industrial pursuits of mankind, arts & sciences, should not again relapse into a state of comparative isolation from each other, in which their progress is necessarily retarded, & that the different Nations would remain in that immediate relation of mutual assistance by which these pursuits are incalculably advanced, & their good will towards each other permanently fortified. —

I may mention as a circumstance which may give additional importance to the consideration of such a scheme, that the locality I have mentioned is one, which has been recommended also as an eligible site for a new National Gallery, & that the purchase

of the whole, & the resale^① to the Govt of as much as might be required for the purpose, might cause a considerable saving to the Exchequer, & instead of absorbing it might furnish additional open space to the Metropolis, whilst it would assist the study of art in connexion with manufacture. —

I am perfectly aware, that this is but a very crude scheme requiring mature consideration & practical tests in its details, but I thought it my duty towards the Commission to lay it before them at as early a moment as possible, in order that the remaining weeks of the Exhibition might be employed in investigating it, or that we might be led by that investigation to the discovery of a more feasible plan. —

Osborne $\frac{10}{8}$ 1851. —

A.

Observations

on the

Application of the Surplus

of the

Exhibition of MDCCCLI [1851]

by His Royal Highness

The Prince Consort

Osborne, August 1851

Memorandum by the Prince Consort on the Appropriation of the Surplus of the Exhibition of 1851

It is estimated that after defraying the expenses of the Exhibition the Royal Commission will be left with a Surplus of from £150,000 to £200,000.

The question arises, what is to be done with this Surplus?

Schemes abound for its application and a great movement is being made to get it expended upon the purchase and maintenance of the Crystal Palace as a Winter Garden.

It becomes necessary for the Royal Commission to mature some plan for itself on a careful and conscientious consideration of its position, powers and duties, in order not to find itself at the end of its important labours driven into the execution of ill digested projects by the force of accidents or of popular agitation.

In order to arrive at a sound opinion on what is to be done, we must ask ourselves: What are the objects the Exhibition had in view? How far have these objects been realised? And how far can they be further promoted?

I take the objects to have been the promotion of every branch of human industry by means of the comparison of their processes and results as carried on and obtained by all the Nations of the Earth, and the promotion of kindly feelings of the Nations towards each other by the practical illustration of the advantages which may be derived from the labours and achievements of the others.

Only in a *close adherence to this governing idea*, and in a consistent carrying out of what has hitherto been done can we find a safe guide for future plans.

But even if this were not the case, it will be found that by former announcements to the public we have distinctly pledged ourselves to expend any surplus, which may accrue, towards the establishment of future Exhibitions or objects strictly in connexion with the present Exhibition.

The purchase of the Crystal Palace for the purpose of establishing a Winter Garden, or Museum of Antiquities, or a public Promenade, Ride, Lounging Place, etc, has, in my opinion, no connexion whatever with the objects of the Exhibition. Our connexion with the building has been an incidental one merely as a covering to our collection, and, therefore, even if we were not bound by legal contracts to remove the building on a specified day and the dictates of good faith did not induce us strictly to fulfil our moral engagements towards the public, should we be released from our legal engagements; I consider that we have not the power to divert any part of the surplus towards providing London, or even the English public with a Place of Recreation.

But should the public wish to maintain the building we ought not to stand in the way of the Government keeping it up to the 1st May, should they feel it is their duty to take such a course.

If I am asked what I would do with the surplus? I would propose the following scheme.

I am assured that from 25 to 30 acres of ground, nearby opposite the Crystal Palace on the other side of Kensington Road, called Kensington Gore (including Soyer's Symposium) are to be purchased at this moment for about £50,000. I would buy this land and place on it four Institutions corresponding to the four great sections of the Exhibition.

Raw Material.
Machinery.
Manufactures.
Plastic Art.

I would devote these Institutions to the furtherance of the industrial pursuits of all Nations in these four divisions.

If I examine what are the means by which improvement and progress can be obtained in any branch of human knowledge I find them to consist of four;

1. *Personal Study* from books.
2. Oral Communication of knowledge by those who possess it to those who wish to acquire it.
 1. Acquisition of knowledge by *ocular* observation, comparison and demonstration.
 1. Exchange of ideas by *personal discussion*.

Hence I would provide each of these Institutions with the means of forming:

1. A Library, and Rooms for Study.
2. Lecture Rooms.
3. An acre of glass covering for the purposes of Exhibition; and
4. Rooms for Conversation, Discussions and Commercial Meetings.

The surplus space might be laid out as gardens for public enjoyment, and so as to admit of the future erection of Public Monuments there, according to a well arranged plan. The centre might be applicable for a Public Conservatory if wished for.

The Institution for the Raw Material would be most usefully subdivided into Metallurgy, Metallurgical Chemistry, Animal and Vegetable Physiology, (Agricultural Chemistry?) and Microscopy.

That of Machinery would embrace the whole brand of Polytechnic Science with the subdivisions.

That of Manufactures would comprise a School of Design, and Chemistry as applied to manufactures.

The fourth, the Plastic Arts, Architecture, Antiquities, and Sculpture.

Now I find that for all these separate pursuits we have a variety of public societies in England, struggling for existence, unconnected with each other, unprovided with any suitable locations.

The Geological Society, Botanical Society, Linnean Society, Zoological Society, Microscopical Society, Agricultural Society, etc, etc,

Polytechnic Society, Society of Civil Engineers, etc, etc,

The Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, (from which the Exhibition has sprung).

The Society of Architects, of Antiquaries, Archeological, etc,

Could not these Societies, or most of them, containing as they do all that this country possesses of talent and experience in these branches, be united in these Institutions? reserving to each its individuality and its self-supporting and self-managing character, but bringing them under a general system, and *so far* asking them to reform their Charters as to make them more popular Institutions, I mean, thereby, Institutions placed in a relation of reciprocal influence with public opinion.

If these Societies were to sell their present habitation and property, and thereby were freed from the heaviest part of their expense they would be enabled materially to assist the first establishment of their new existence.

In order to secure a certain uniformity of the system among them, they might in all matters of interest common to them be governed by a Central Committee of their Chairmen. To this Central Body might be added the Statistical Society, in order to obtain for the civilized world an accurate collection of the material from which alone those general laws can be abstracted; guided by which we can hope safely to progress in all branches of civilization.

These Institutions must be open and common to all nations, and would soon spread their ramifications into all countries. As the surplus with which they are to be founded has been obtained from the public, attracted and gratified by the sight of the works which the *Exhibitors* have had at great expense, trouble and risk to themselves sent to the Crystal Palace, it would be but a proper return, and I am afraid the only one we could offer, to receive them as the first Life Members of the Institutions.

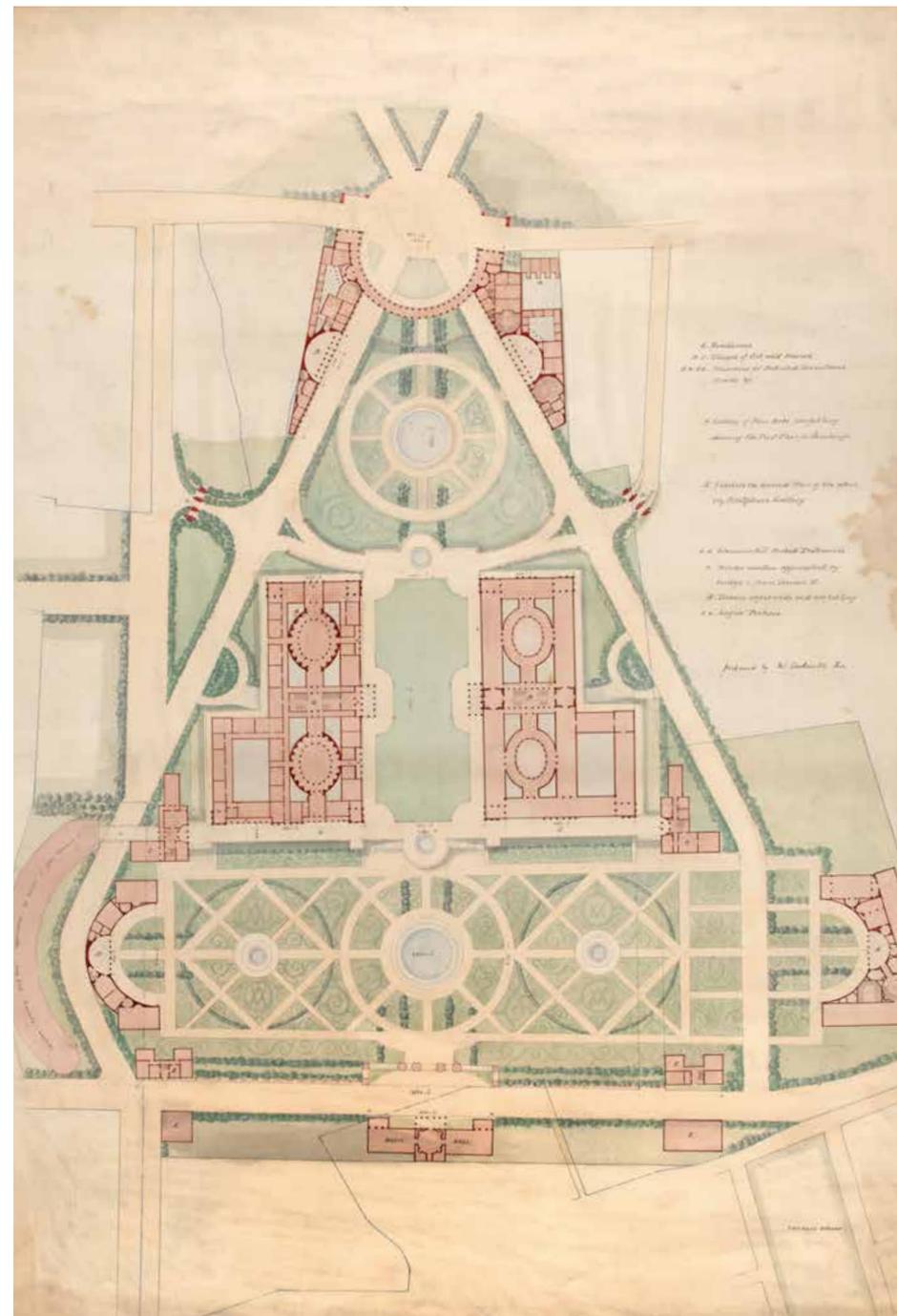
By a scheme like this we should ensure that the Great Exhibition of 1851 should not become a transitory event of mere temporary interest, but that its objects would be perpetuated, that the different industrial pursuits of mankind, Arts and Sciences should not again relapse into a state of comparative isolation from each other, in which their progress is necessarily retarded, and that the different nations would remain in that immediate relation of mutual assistance by which these pursuits are incalculably advanced and their good will towards each other permanently fortified.

I may mention as a circumstance which may give additional importance to the consideration of such a scheme, that the locality I have mentioned is one which has been recommended also as an eligible Site for the New National Gallery, and that the purchase of the whole and the resale to the Government of as much as might be required for this purpose might cause a considerable saving to the Exchequer, and instead of absorbing, it might furnish additional open space to the Metropolis, whilst it could assist the study of art in connexion with manufacture.

I am perfectly aware that this is but a very crude scheme requiring mature consideration and practical tests in its details, but I thought it my duty towards the Commission to lay it before them at as early a moment as possible, in order that the remaining weeks of the Exhibition might be employed in investigating it, or we, that might be led by that investigation, to the discovery of a more feasible plan.

Signed by Albert
Osborne, 10th August 1851

Prince Albert's Papers are available online at <https://albert.rct.uk/>



PLAN FOR LAYING OUT THE COMMISSION'S ESTATE BY C.R. COCKERELL C.1853

Moment and momentum: Prince Albert and the legacy of the Exhibition of 1851



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In a photographic print held in the Royal Collection, Prince Albert sits, well-dressed, serious, one leg crossed over the other as he gazes directly at the viewer. In studying this image, which would not seem out of place on the front cover of *Time Magazine*, it is all too easy to read into Albert many of the personal qualities often associated

with leaders of the spheres of business, culture, and politics. It was taken in 1854 by the photographer Roger Fenton, a founder member of The Photographic Society of London (subsequently the Royal Photographic Society) who would, only a few months later, go on to pioneer a new artistic documentary genre as a photographer of the Crimean War.

In 1851, Fenton was an artist whose career appeared to have foundered. His most recently exhibited work, shown at the Exhibition of the Royal Academy which commenced just a day after the opening of the Great Exhibition, had garnered what could, at best, be described as an ambivalent review. However, by the October of that year, Fenton had sought out and was receiving instruction from some of the most prominent photographers in France. He returned to Britain a leader of his art, carrying with him advances made by his French collaborators upon Henry Fox Talbot's calotype process. It is entirely possible that the igniting spark for Fenton's change of direction and fortune had been a visit to the Crystal Palace – it is notable, for instance, that he studied with Gustave le Gray, whose work had been received favourably at the Exhibition.

Amongst Albert's stated aims for the Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was the hope that it would reveal the contemporary state of invention and manufacturing endeavour, offering in turn 'a new starting point from which all nations [would] be able to direct their further exertions.' Through display, observation, and competition, it was to be a catalyst for the processes of knowledge exchange, international cooperation, and, at some deeper level, the improvement of the human condition. If the Exhibition was indeed the source of Fenton's inspiration

to pursue the then still experimental scientific art of photography, it serves as a neat example of these aspirations come to fruition - the neglected artist's rise to a royal photographer is both a pleasing story and a legacy in and of itself.

Yet, even as the Exhibition took place, the Crystal Palace elevating the arts of industry and the technique of the arts to the plane of wonderment and acting, perhaps, as a vast propagator for the germination of such future successes as Fenton's, Albert looked towards a lasting testament to and formal furtherance of its aims. The Memorandum to the Commissioners of the 10th of August 1851 is perhaps the earliest significant indication of Albert's vision for establishing that longer project. Its crisp dismissal of popular agitation for a pleasure garden, direct tone and precisely constructed ideas are characteristic of Albert and suggest that the document represented something already rather more than a 'very crude scheme' in his mind. Albert's meetings with the 'surplus committee' became a regular occurrence and Queen Victoria noted his thorough engagement with the project in her diaries: 'Albert's great mind is full of a vast scheme to which the surplus is to be applied ... which will be in strict accordance with the objects which the Exhibition had in view.'

This accordance is clear even in this early memorandum: Albert's crude scheme for

the Exhibition's surplus income was the creation of an international locus for the study of materials and technical processes and for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and expertise concerning them. Its special references to the importance of 'ocular observation' and to 'an acre of glass covering for the purposes of exhibition'

for each of four proposed institutions hint at the very immediate presence and influence of the Exhibition itself. Yet, as a vision, it far exceeds the Exhibition in scope. In providing not only the means for exhibition, discussion and business, but also libraries and new quarters for learned societies, Albert proposed, in

effect, a collaborative super-university founded on a shared aspiration of technical and artistic advancement. If the Exhibition represented 'a new starting point', then Albert's proposal might be likened to a call for an engine that would drive progress forward from that point.

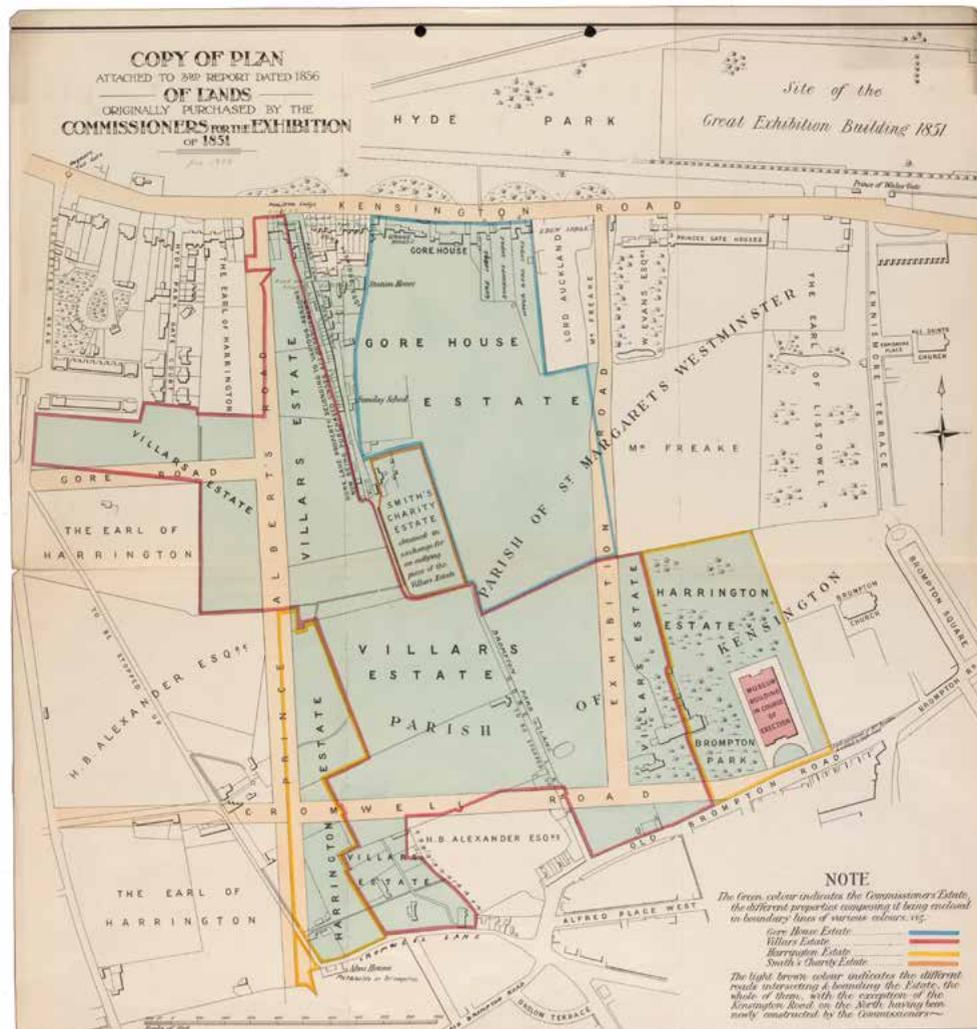
The work of the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 in creating one of the world's most important cultural and scientific centres has, to a remarkable extent, honoured that aspiration. The halls, museums, institutes, and colleges of 'Albertopolis', as well as the work of the Commission in supporting research and development, are indeed a driving force for and repository of cultural and industrial display, knowledge exchange, and advancement at a scale that could only have pleased Albert. Yet, like so many of the great reforming notions of the Nineteenth Century, Albert's vision was only partly completed, and little of that was seen within his lifetime: certainly, the institutes never existed quite as he might have envisaged, many of the learned societies of the time resisted uprooting their operations while some of those that once graced Kensington have since moved on, and no dedicated acres of glass were created in a lasting nod to the Crystal Palace.

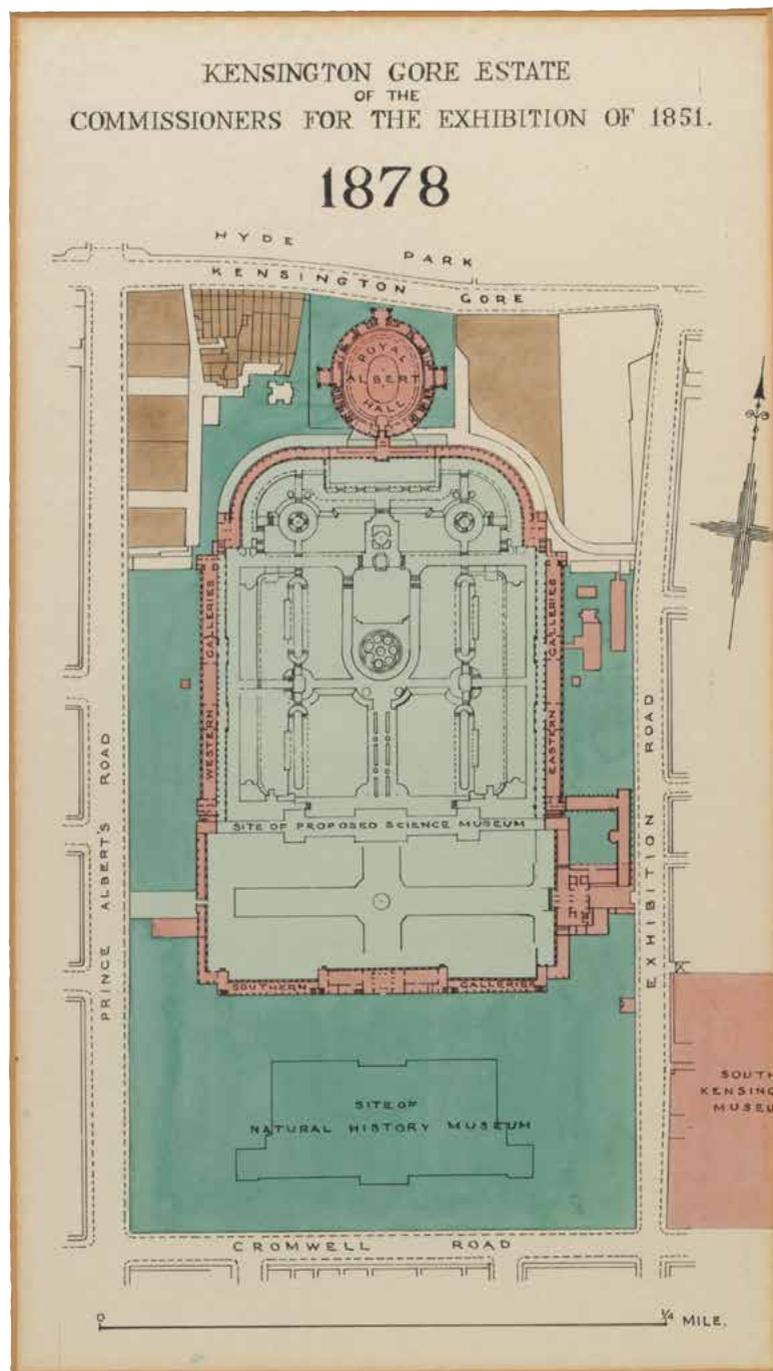
But what of the greater goods to which Albert turned his attention? – the mutual relationship between progress, international goodwill, the

improvement of the human condition, and the role of the arts, the sciences, industry, and education in these things? For Albert, a German interested in the unification of his homeland, the beneficiary of a good and rounded education both as a child and as a student at Bonn, an avid pursuer of progress, a committed philanthropist, a believer in the freedom of trade and the exchange of ideas, and an implacably moral thinker, these were no trivial matters.

In the Exhibition, at the time much regarded as the herald of an age of peace and collaboration, and its legacy, Albert saw an opportunity to strengthen the ties between nations. In the course of the preparations for and unfolding of the Exhibition, he liaised with correspondents across the continent and beyond, and even gave time to the notion of unveiling a model universal currency for display. In his memorandum, written at the height of the proceedings, and perhaps foreseeing transnationally-informed successes such as that of photography, he argued that progress was slowed by isolation and that both human endeavour and human relations could be enhanced by sharing between people and nations the work and the fruits of progress.

And yet, as Albert looked into Fenton's camera in May 1854, well may he have looked serious. Far from the hoped-for age of peace, the soon-to-be





photographed Crimean War simmered, seeding tensions around Europe. Uprisings in India—in Albert’s view long governed in a manner unfit for its people and ‘not strictly moral’—were only a few years ahead, and Albert’s grandson, the future Kaiser Wilhelm II, would be born shortly afterwards. A new age of industrial warfare was chasing fast on the heels of Albert’s own short life, ready with its bleak evidence of the ambivalence, the amorality of technological change.

Considering these facts, and as we continue further into the Twenty-first Century, we can perhaps see better to the heart of Albert’s vision and to the heart of the work of its custodians. These might best be described in a question: How might the legacy of the Exhibition, physically, fiscally, and institutionally, continue to be used to address questions about the natural world, to enhance the lives of its inhabitants, to build

connections and trade between people and nations, to promote the united value of the arts, the sciences, technology, education and industry in achieving these aims, and yet be governed with a spirit of fairness, openness, and optimism?

In an age of pervasive technology, rising populism and isolationism, exponential growth of corporate influence, unprecedented challenges such as climate change, and an ever more significant disconnection between the richest and the poorest, these questions and the work that Albert’s ‘crude scheme’ initiated are now, arguably, at their most important.

Dr. Andrew Cusworth,
1851 Research Fellow,
Prince Albert Digitisation Project



**Royal Commission
for the Exhibition of 1851**

453 Sherfield Building
Imperial College,
London SW7 2AZ

Tel: +44 (0)20 7594 8790

Fax: +44 (0)20 7594 8794

royalcom1851@imperial.ac.uk

 @Royalcom1851

www.royalcommission1851.org