



## The Great Exhibition of 1851

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### Part 3: Primary Documents Activities: The British Point of View

Materials & Resources:

- Reading passage
  - Illustrations
1. Read the introductory paragraph, and take a look at the [photo gallery](#).
  2. Read [\*\*the quotation from the Official Descriptive and illustrated Catalog of the Great Exhibition 1851\*\*](#) that describes American industry from the British point of view.
    - a. *Optional: This quote is from a book in the public record, which is available on Google Books. If you want to help them with research skills, you may want to invite your students to find the quote in its context on their own, or try [here](#) for the full volume in Google Books, or [here for an image of the correct page](#).*
  3. Have students work in groups or individually to put this quotation into their own words.
  4. Answer the [\*\*summary questions\*\*](#).



## The Great Exhibition of 1851

In 1851, England hosted The Crystal Palace Exhibition—a world’s fair designed to showcase the best of art, science, and industry at mid-century. The Robbins & Lawrence Company of Windsor, Vermont, sent a representative to display their rifles and to demonstrate their achievement of creating guns with interchangeable parts. For the demonstration, a group of rifles were dis-assembled, the parts were scrambled, and then the rifles were put back together. People who saw the demonstration were astounded, and Robbins & Lawrence won a prize for their rifles.

Take a look at the image gallery below to get a sense of what the exhibition was like.

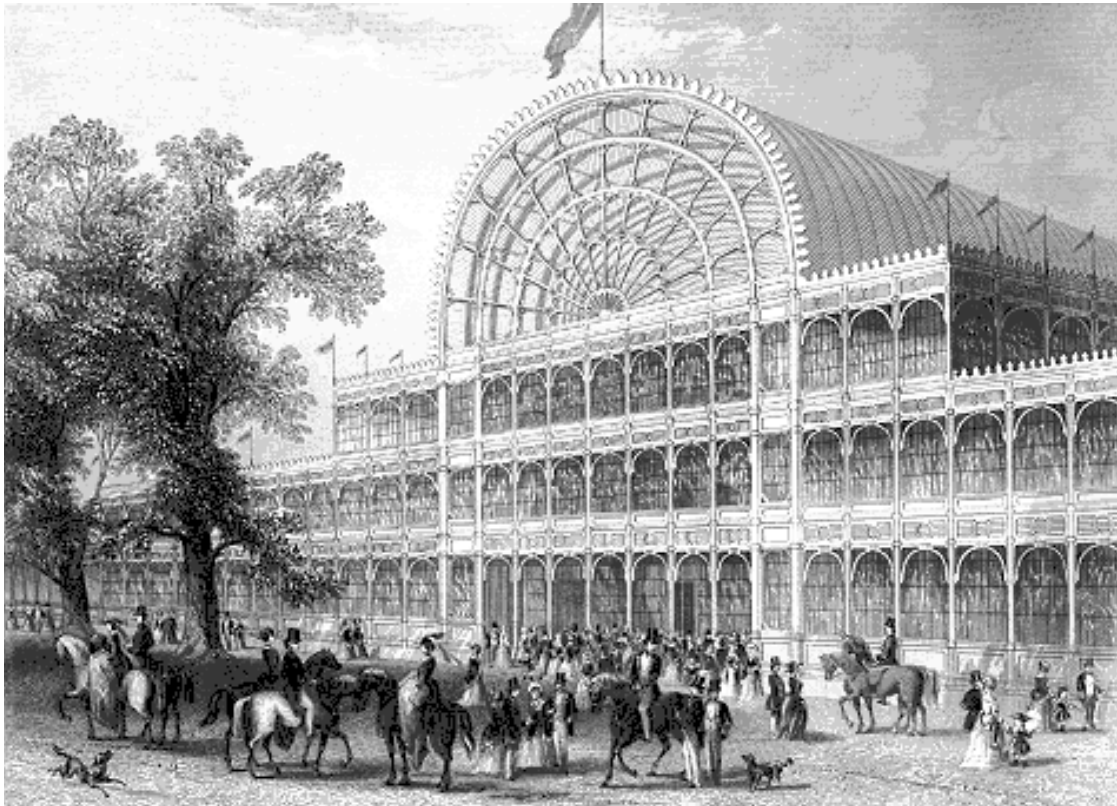
### ILLUSTRATIONS



*Figure 1 Queen Victoria Opens the Great Exhibition 1851*



## The Great Exhibition of 1851



*Engraving of the transept façade of the original Crystal Palace, Hyde Park, London, that housed the Great Exhibition of 1851, the first World's Fair*





## The Great Exhibition of 1851



*The Crystal Palace in Hyde Park*





## The Great Exhibition of 1851



Figure 2 The interior of the Crystal Palace in London during the Great Exhibition of 1851. McNeven, J., *The Foreign Department*, viewed towards the transept, coloured lithograph, 1851, Ackermann (printer), V&A.



## The Great Exhibition of 1851



Crowned medallion of Victoria & Albert below the Expo building , 3 lines curved above: "THE BUILDING AT LONDON, FOR THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION 1851





## The Great Exhibition of 1851



"THE MATERIALS ARE IRON AND GLASS; IT IS IN SHAPE A PARALLELOGRAM, 1848 FT LONG BY 408 FT BROAD, AND 66 FT HIGH; IT IS CROSSED MIDWAY BY A TRANSEPT 108 FT HIGH; ON THE NORTH SIDE IS AN ADDITIONAL 936 FT IN LENGTH BY 48 FT IN BREADTH; TOTAL AREA OF SPACE 855,360 CUBIC FT; OR NEARLY 21 ACRES; ESTIMATED VALUE £ 150,000."



## The Great Exhibition of 1851

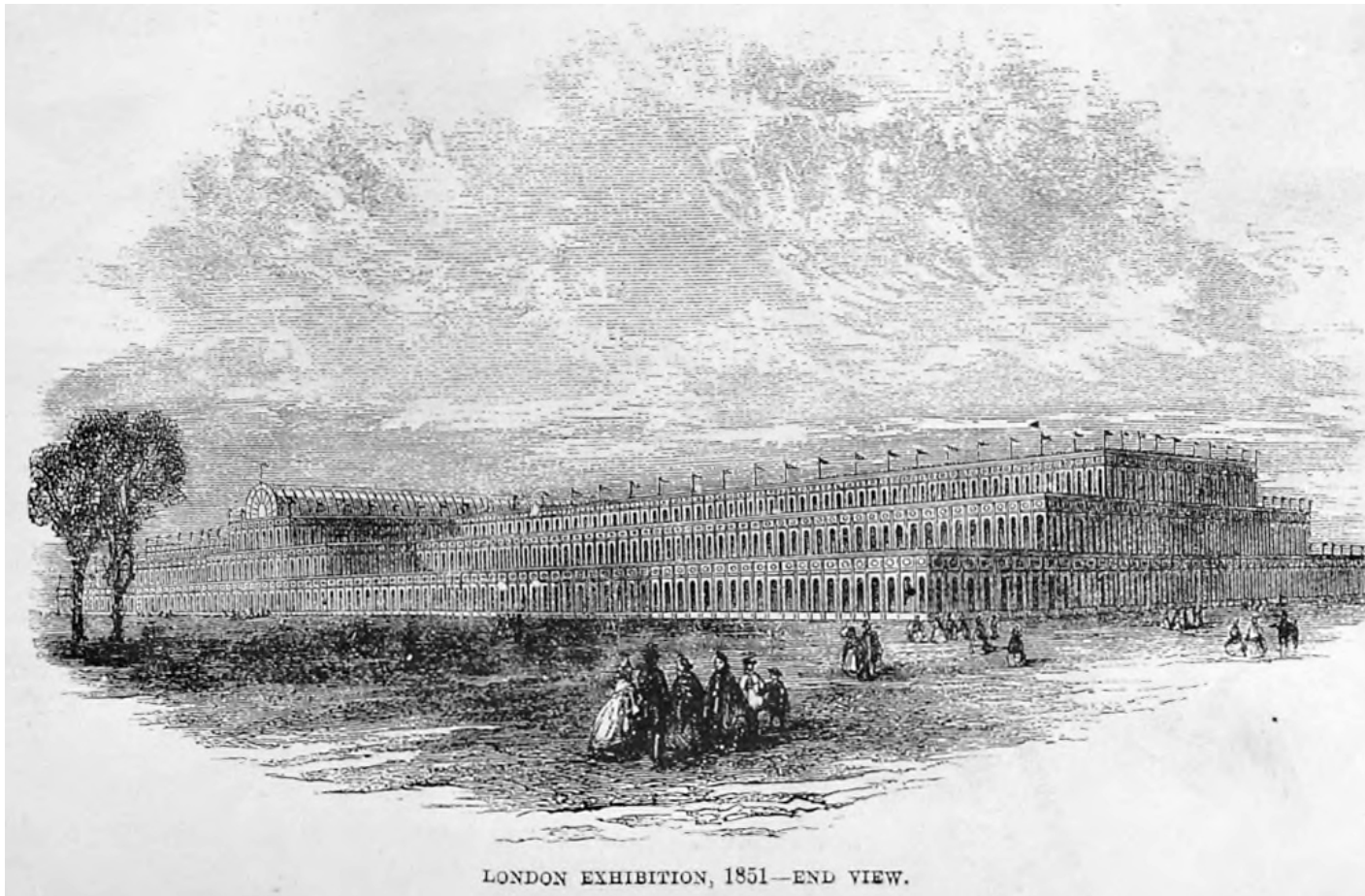
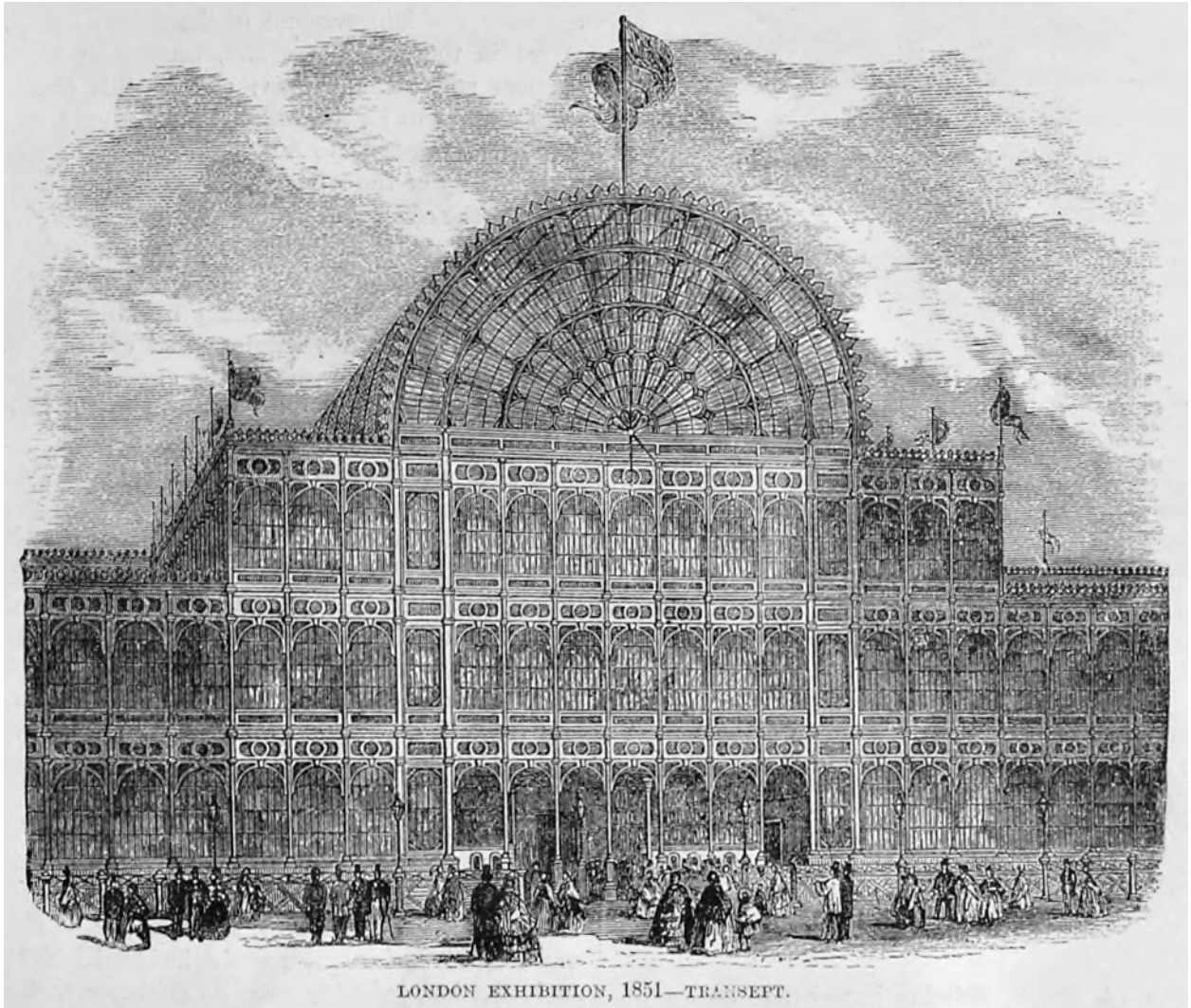


Figure 3 Crystal Palace, London Exhibition, 1851 (End View). From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876.





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LONDON EXHIBITION, 1851—TRANSEPT.

*Crystal Palace, London Exhibition, 1851 (Transept). From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition, 1876. Frank Leslie's Publishing House, New York, 1877. (<https://archive.org/details/frankleslieshis00lesl/>)*



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### PRIMARY SOURCE READING:

From the *Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of the Great Exhibition 1851* (London, 1841), 1431, quoted in Hindle and Lubar, *Engines of Change*, p. 256

American Democracy and Industry,  
from the British Point of View, 1841

*"The absence in the United States of those vast accumulations of wealth...and the general distribution of the means of procuring the more substantial conveniences of life, impart to the productions of American industry a character distinct from that of many other countries. The expenditure of months or years of labour upon a single article, not to increase its intrinsic value, but solely to augment its cost...is not common in the United States. **On the contrary, both manual and mechanical labour are applied with direct reference to increasing the number or quantity of articles suited to the wants of a whole people.**"*

### Summary & Prompt Questions

- What does the quotation suggest about the difference between American and British life (and attitudes toward wealth and ownership) in these two countries?
- This exhibition is considered the first "World's Fair." Have you heard of the World's Fair before and if so, what do you know about it?
- Extension: Shows, conventions, and exhibitions are still very common today (except in 2020). Apple, auto makers, and electronics manufacturers have a show, as do science fiction and comic book enthusiasts as well as Jane Austen fans. Pick a contemporary exhibition that you'd love to go to. What would you wear? What new ideas might you learn about?