VISUALISING THE LOWER THAMES: MODERNITY, EMPIRE AND NATURALISM
c. 1880-1901

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.
Abstract

This dissertation analyses the visual representations of the Lower Thames in the years between about 1880 and 1901 to understand the ways in which they reconstructed and projected modern life in London in and through visual forms. Focusing on works which were accessible in the broad middle-class sphere through exhibitions and publications, it sets out to show how non-modernist works of art articulated capitalist modernity in powerful terms. In translating a working port into representations such as exhibition pictures and newspaper illustrations, artists exploited the naturalist aesthetic. They highlighted the dirty, modern, chaotic and even dangerous river, while playing with the distance between that depicted working-class site and the middle-class audience of their work. Examining their subject and means of representation, the dissertation shows how the late Victorian representations of the Port of London illuminated the values of technology, labour, capital and the Empire.
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Introduction

This dissertation analyses representations of the River Thames to investigate the ways in which late Victorians articulated and projected modern life and modernity in the visual arts in the years between about 1880 and 1901. Focusing on the period in which the river formed not only the principal port of the British Empire at its height but also a significant subject of artistic representation, it sets out to show how the Lower Thames became a critical site of artistic response to the modern, capitalist world. Examining the imagery of this site of middle-class enterprise and working-class labour, the dissertation explores the role of capitalism, history and art history in the shaping and reading of the notion of modernity in late nineteenth-century London. Its central problem of modernity – in theme and means of representation – is thus approached both through the consideration of subject and its reception, each of which needs to be assessed in class terms, the better to explore how the artist constructed and disseminated his work within the shifting realm of artistic conventions and challenges.

While broadly chronological in structure, each chapter presents a case study in which key works are located within artistic, cultural and social contexts illustrative of contemporary London. In all, the dissertation traces the relationship between late Victorian art and modernity. In the process it hopes to propose a new interpretation of that relationship, and offer a detailed historical supplement to existing accounts of
the representation of the city and its river by illustrating some of the significant ways in which non-modernist works of art addressed turn-of-the-century issues in the British capital.

**Research Material**

Key material for this research can be defined in terms of geography, time, art and public: the Port of London, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and at the century’s turn, and in visual representations that were aimed at and appreciated by a broad middle-class culture.

In his well-known book *Victorian Cities* Asa Briggs titled his penultimate chapter on London, ‘London, the World City’.¹ The phrase appositely described the nature and outlook of the capital of Britain’s liberal trading empire. From its establishment as *Londinium*, a trading post and administrative headquarter of a far-flung province of the Roman Empire, through the development as a flourishing commercial city during the Middle Ages and as the powerhouse of Tudor, Stuart and Hanoverian England, which expanded as a global military and maritime power, London grew during the eighteenth century to an impressive metropolis of a nation-state that increasingly defined its interests through overseas expansion, and hub of developing global system of trade, finance and exploitation. In the nineteenth century this trading centre, standing at the lowest convenient bridging point of the Thames, became the ‘centre of the world’, the conception which was almost ubiquitous, being woven into

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popular understandings of London. In 1862 Routledge’s Popular Guide to London and its Suburbs wrote:

... no other city possesses the wealth, importance and abounding population which distinguish it. To London, as the true centre of the world, come ships from every climate, bearing the productions of nature, the results of labour and the fruits of commerce ... Its merchants are princes; the resolves of its financiers make and unmake empires and influence the destiny of nations.²

During the nineteenth century the British Empire became the world’s largest empire, controlling most of the key maritime trade routes and, by the early twentieth century, it governed one fifth of the world’s population and covered almost a quarter of the total land area of the earth. As its capital and premier port, London was a pre-eminent global city. However, the last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the rise of industrial capitalism in such other nations as Germany and the United States, which encroached on British industry. Britain was no longer the only industrial economy or ‘the workshop of the world’; and the world economy was more pluralist than before and rapidly globalised in the 1890s in particular.³ Yet in turn this reinforced the role of London as the financier to the world as well as the centrality of Britain in the global economy in two ways, as Eric Hobsbawm points out: the continued and increased dependence of the world economy on the City of London’s financial and trading services, and Britain’s overwhelming dominance of the

international capital market and merchant shipping. In a world whose trade balance was re-established by Britain alone (by importing manufactured goods from its rivals, its own exports to the dependent world, but chiefly by its massive income from London’s international business services and enormous overseas investments) London was an undisputed centre. In 1909 one third of Britain’s foreign trade, whose volume tripled between 1870 and 1914, passed through the Port of London, the largest in the world; and the total net tonnage of the vessels entering the Port exceeded that of any other port either in Britain or in Europe by some fifty per cent.

This centre of the capitalist world was indeed also the biggest city in the world. Its whirlwind growth during the nineteenth century has been described in many ways, but the way Roy Porter put it made the nature of ‘the super-city de luxe’ explicit: ‘driven by market forces and without central command, London ‘just grewed, without central command’. The city of course created squads of middle-class jobs in banking, investment, insurance and shipping, which in turn required workers in construction, railways and transportation and in trades, retail and other services. Migration of people into the capital for work and economic advantage was such that thirty-five per cent of all Londoners had their origins elsewhere at the end of the nineteenth century (forty per cent in the mid century); the proportion of people of England and Wales who lived in London doubled during the course of the nineteenth

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4 Ibid., pp. 39-42, 51. London’s commercial and financial services alone earned enough to make up for the deficit in Britain’s balance of commodity trade. In 1914, Hobsbawm writes, Britain alone had 44 per cent of the world’s overseas investments; and the British steamer fleet alone was 12 per cent larger than all the merchant fleets of all the other European states put together.

5 Britain was also the world’s largest importer of such primary exports as cane sugar, tea, wheat and meat. In 1880, the Port of London received 8,000,000 tons of goods, up from 800,000 in about 1800.

6 This was despite the fact that the Port of London’s share of Britain’s foreign trade fell; its absolute value increased.

century, from one in every ten to one in every five. Its population grew from 1 million in 1800, standing at 2.5 million at the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851, to some 6.5 million in the year of Queen Victoria’s death in 1901, making the British capital the largest city the world had ever seen.\(^8\) London was, as the economist and social reformer Sidney Webb wrote in 1891, ‘more than a city’, ‘a whole kingdom in itself … forms at once the largest manufacturing town and the greatest port, the chief literary and scientific centre as well as the commercial, banking, shipping and insurance emporium of the world’.\(^9\) It acted and was viewed as an epicentre of the modern world, the symbolic status of which was confirmed even by the universal adoption of the Greenwich Meridian and Mean Time in 1884.

The vast growth and scale and the nature of London as a hub (rather than an end destination) were presented with endlessly eye-opening spectacles and the sense of movement. The former became one of the foremost features in written impressions of the city. Comments such as ‘immensity was the great fact’ and ‘the monster grows and grows for ever’ by Henry James could be multiplied indefinitely.\(^10\) They conveyed the sense that London’s growth was out of control, inexorable, inapprehensible and even fearsome, and its drive was irreversible. This drive Fyodor Dostoevsky identified with the forces of capitalism. Writing on his visit to ‘the vast town’ in 1862, the author wrote: ‘that apparent disorder that is in actuality the highest degree of bourgeois order’\(^11\). The spectacle of this ‘disorder’ formed a

\(^8\) In the year 1900 London’s population was 6,480,000, New York’s 4,242,000 and Paris’s 3,330,000.
\(^10\) James, *English Hours*, p. 3.
\(^11\) F. Dostoevsky, quoted in M. Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, London and New York 2010, p. 88. London’s unprecedented scale was also discussed in relation to its impact upon the life of inhabitants and their social relationships and political influence, particularly in
characteristic image of the heart of the Empire, concentrating on the City of London and the Port of London. What Dostoevsky seems to have meant by this word is the apparently hectic and unstructured dynamism of the metropolis – a characteristic of modernity in his view which incorporated economic prosperity.

This had previously captured even the imagination of the eminent critic of capitalism Friedrich Engels. In one of the most vivid written impressions of London from the mid century, the industrialist, social scientist and political theorist expressed the awe with which he viewed the sight of the colossal city and the constant flows of trade in its port. He wrote in his book, The Condition of the Working Class in England:

A town, such as London, where a man may wander for hours together without reaching the beginning of the end, without meeting the slightest hint which could lead to the inference that there is open country within reach, is a strange thing. This colossal centralisation … has raised London to the commercial capital of the world, created the giant docks and assembled the thousand vessels that continually cover the Thames. I know nothing more imposing than the view which the Thames offers during the ascent from the sea to London Bridge. The masses of buildings, the wharves on both sides, especially from Woolwich upwards, the countless ships along both shores, crowding ever closer and closer together, until, at last, only a narrow passage remains in the middle of the river, a passage through which hundreds of steamers shoot by one another; all this is so vast, so impressive, that a man cannot collect himself, but is lost in the marvel of England’s greatness before he sets foot upon English soil.

the absence of a unified system of metropolitan government (until 1889 when the London County Council was formed).

12 Such images of the City were found in Ludgate Hill and St Paul’s by John O’Connor (1887; location unknown; a preparatory oil in the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery) and The Heart of the Empire by Niels Moorell Lund (1904; Guildhall Art Gallery).

The Port of London was indeed a sublime spectacle – of man-made wonder – and powerful visual symbol of Britain’s trading power impressing itself upon those entering the country through the Thames Estuary.

Towards the end of the century Emile Zola in an interview with the *Manchester Guardian* (1893) revealed his fascination with this river:

> The big city made an indelible impression on my mind. Its beauty is not in its monuments, but in its immensity; the colossal character of its quays and bridge [sic], to which ours are as toys. The Thames from London Bridge to Greenwich I can only compare to an immense moving street of ships, large and small, something suggestive of the Parisian mind of an aquatic Rue de Rivoli. The docks are stupendous buildings, but what impressed me most were the splendid arrangements for unloading vessels, which came close up the quays, and disembarked their cargoes into the shops as it were. One can understand the secret of London’s greatness after having seen these things. The Thames is, in fact, the heart or stomach, if you like, of London … On the whole, I came away from London with a profound admiration of its wealth, grandeur, immensity. Each bridge is a Cyclopean structure. We have nothing in France to equal such things, nothing to be compared to the port of London.  

Zola’s bodily metaphor for the giant city conveyed a sense in which London seemed as if it were a living organism, which never sleeps and ever grows, drawing in men, capital, goods and materials with magnetic power. His impression of port activities registered the nature of the capital as a hub of enormous and continuous movement and transaction, en route to another place. The river thus signified the distances which ships travelled and conveyed the unprecedented geographical extent to which Britain’s mercantile and imperial power reached around the globe.

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It is this stupendous river the Thames – from around London Bridge to the Estuary, with emphasis on the urban section between the Bridge and Greenwich – and its surrounding built landscape of east London that this dissertation considers in visual representations, made during the broad two decades between about 1880 and 1901. Britain during this period was marked among other things by fast imperial expansion, an economic depression, the rise of the organised labour movement and an emerging national awareness of the social state of the nation. This troubled moment of nineteenth century capitalism *par excellence* was superlatively manifested in the Port of London. In the East End, on both sides of the impressive docks, forming a coulisse of titanic machinery and ships were dark, overcrowded, disease- and crime-ridden slums. This was another world, in which the bottom layers of the capitalist classes under capitalism lived, in contrast to the not far distant world of the upper and middle classes, a stark polarity in the very heart of the greatest empire on earth. Expressed in popular and investigative accounts, newspapers, magazines, as well as engravings and paintings, to some of which we shall turn, life by the Lower Thames seemed to threaten the Empire itself, as Charles Masterman deplored in his critical account of Imperialism, *The Heart of the Empire*, published months after the death of the Queen.

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15 Historians have given the last quarter of the nineteenth century the title, ‘the age of high imperialism’, to emphasise the extent of the territory acquired in that period. Five million of the earth’s 51 million square kilometres of land came under the British rule in the years between 1860 and 1914. This of course went in line with the mentioned growth of London’s financial and commercial exports, making up for the loss of Britain’s undisputed industrial lead over the economies of Germany and the United States during the worldwide economic recession of 1873-96. See R. Floud and P. Johnson eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, 3 vols, Cambridge 2004, vol. 2: 1860-1939.

In considering this charged riverscape the dissertation focuses on representations which were presented to the dominant middle classes through major exhibitions and publications and reviewed in newspapers and magazines. This is to explore the ways in which art invented as well as negotiated its aims and modes to characterise or intervene in metropolitan debates about modern life. Paintings and drawings shown at particularly the Royal Academy and other exhibition venues in the West End, engravings after and photogravures of those works, which were in turn reproduced in dedicated art journals, as well as newspaper and magazine illustrations, are analysed in relation to a range of literary media, including exhibition reviews, texts which accompanied printed works, art historical literature, cultural and social criticism, and other writings on London and the Thames in periodicals and books. This will involve close analyses of works by painters such as W. L. Wyllie and George Vicat Cole and also illustrations by graphic artists such as Henri Lanos. In so doing, the dissertation concentrates on artists relatively neglected by recent art history, and not forming part of the modernist canon, in order to offer a new interpretation of contemporary imagery of London.

This focus on images which were accessible in the broad middle-class public sphere is not forced but had been predetermined, given the dissertation’s concentration on this particular area. The Lower Thames was, as we shall see, represented almost solely in works by non-avant-garde artists during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Research on non-modernist art of the Thames can provide a particular perspective on the studies of Victorian art and of the representation of London’s river. It allows us to reconsider the extent to and the ways in which Victorians
explored modernity in the visual arts in their own, rather than adopted, terms; and it
directs our attention to an array of materials from the period outside the avant-garde
canon. We will find in this dissertation a significant and diverse range of works,
which together challenge the widespread association of Victorian art as founded
chiefly on reactionary attitudes to the modern world and focused on moral, didactic
or escapist concerns. The imagery discussed here explored aspects of landscape and
life in contemporary London in conspicuous terms: the Lower, rather than the Upper,
Thames; east, rather than west, London; the inclusion of a wider segment of the
metropolitan population than that covered by avant-garde coteries. Critiques, doubts
or enthusiasm about the changing world in these works were made apparent and in
very public ways, but did not go so far as to preach. All these will point to another
image of the modern Thames that both opposed fantasies of the past as in the work of
the Pre-Raphaelites and distinguished itself from views of London by such formalists
as James McNeill Whistler and Claude Monet.

**Modernity, Britain and Naturalism**

To trace the relationship between art and modernity in the late nineteenth century
through the analysis of the imagery of the Lower Thames requires the premise that
the very notion and significance of modernity differed from place to place, as well as
the understanding of historical specificities which pre-conditioned modern life in
Britain and the ways in which modernity was manifested in its culture.
Histories of nineteenth-century art have extensively explored the art that engaged with ideas and issues of modernity. This is not surprising since the era was marked by rapid and intense change in social, political, technological and cultural realms, affecting the structural and spiritual aspects of individual and collective lives. ‘Modern’ in general means current, of the present, as opposed to the past, and embracing innovation and new ideas; ‘modernity’ is literally defined as the quality or condition of being modern; newness of character or style.\(^\text{17}\) In the context of historical circumstances since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and as theorised in copious scholarship, however, these terms also came to relate to conditions of perpetual change, ephemeral – as opposed to permanent – qualities, the sense of plurality, contradictions and uncertainty.\(^\text{18}\) Nineteenth-century modernity in particular was characterised by the development of the dynamic new landscape of industry and technologies (steam engines, railroads, factories, electric lighting and telegraphy to name a few) and the expansion of cities and means of communication, relentlessly transforming the ways in which public and private lives were conceived and conducted. At the same time, as Marshall Berman pointed out in his influential account of modernity – which he defined as the body of experience of ‘the maelstrom of modern life’, or using Marx’s phrase, ‘all that is solid melts into air’ – the nineteenth-century public was distinguished in that it in a sense lived in two worlds simultaneously since it remembered what it was like to live in a pre-modern


world, materially and spiritually.\textsuperscript{19} Such dramatic and comprehensive transformations and a dichotomy of experience of the modern world are viewed in parallel with the development of what is widely called modern art.\textsuperscript{20}

In this light, the task of historians of modern art is to explain it in relation to conditions of modernity in specific historical circumstances in various ways. A problem which has arisen in the course of historicising and theorising the art of the nineteenth century (and the twentieth century) is a confusion between ‘modern’ and ‘modernist’, ‘modern art’ and ‘modernism’, which is apparent in discourses on the visual arts as well as in the public mind. One of the reasons for this ambiguity is their cross-use in political and social philosophies and theories, which are often hugely influential outside their disciplinary boundaries and reiterated by art writers.\textsuperscript{21} Another critical reason is that the nineteenth century indeed saw for the first time ‘the articulation and development of a theory and practice of modernism’;\textsuperscript{22} and, of course, artistic modernism with its proclaimed uncertainty, paradoxes and challenge to the accepted nature of representation and ways of painting has continued to be the subject of heated scholarly debates. The works of Edouard Manet and the impressionists have now been firmly assigned to the idea of beginnings of modernism; and its terms have been studied at length in connection to Parisian life under the Second Empire.\textsuperscript{23} Meanwhile Haussmann’s Paris came to be viewed as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Berman, \textit{All That is Solid}, p. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{20} This has of course been the subject of complex and extensive debate. See, for example, the proceedings of the Vancouver Conference of 1981, B. Buchloh, S. Guilbaut and D. Solkin eds., \textit{Modernism and Modernity}, Halifax 2004.
\item \textsuperscript{21} One of the most influential examples was Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s \textit{The Dialectic of the Enlightenment} (1947).
\item \textsuperscript{22} S. Guilbaut, ‘The Relevance of Modernism’ in \textit{Modernism and Modernity}, pp. xi-xvii.
\item \textsuperscript{23} T. J. Clark, \textit{The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers}, Princeton 1999.
\end{itemize}
‘Capital of Modernity’, as David Harvey famously titled his 2003 book, and Manet’s modernist painting has become an archetype of modern art.\textsuperscript{24} Put another way, this insistence on Paris as the capital of modernity and French modernism as a prototype of modern art paralleled certain crude assumptions about how modernity was and could be aptly conceived, in urban and artistic contexts, in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Britain had however developed particular political and cultural patterns of response to the capitalist world by the middle of the nineteenth century, affecting the ways in which modernity manifested itself. Those patterns have been identified and analysed in relation to both specific historical circumstances in Britain and developments in its visual arts, most recently in the work of Julian Stallabrass. Founded on Martin Wiener’s well-known study of English resistance to industry and commerce from the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth century as well as the writings of such Marxist academics as Perry Anderson and Raymond Williams, the art historian relates the absence of what he calls ‘radical and self-conscious avant-gardes’ – and what might parallel the above mentioned French modernism – in British art until the twentieth century with ‘the incomplete character of the bourgeois revolution’ in Britain.\textsuperscript{25} He demonstrates that the bourgeois revolution in the country where industrialisation was ‘an indigenous process (rather than imported in an already developed form)’ was ‘necessarily more closely tailored to existing social structures’ and argues that anti-

modernist attitudes in British art from the late nineteenth to twentieth century was part of a wider phenomenon in its political and cultural life – the capitalists’ pursuit of various means to ennoblement, leaving royalty and aristocracy in place; their cultural subordination to the aristocratic values of land and tradition and the lifestyles of landed gentlemen; and participation in ‘an essentially aristocratic nostalgia for the past’, rather than constructing ideological alternatives, which would be manifestly expressive of industrial capitalism.

In one of the most urbanised, industrialised and technologically advanced nations, it was to be the past, not the present, that was more often explored in many intellectual and artistic minds and endeavours – whether they professed conservatism or radicalism. Among those who looked back longingly to a pre-industrial era were, of course, John Ruskin and William Morris, whose ideal visions of society were set against the hated present, identified with capitalism, mechanisation and the city, and in the past of medieval labour and pastoral tranquillity. Their romantic aesthetic played to the establishment of deep English myths. In the visual arts, Pre-Raphaelitism and the Arts and Crafts Movement were influential examples that pointed to this kind of response to the capitalist world of Victorian Britain. The imbalance between the modernity of daily life and a relative lack of art which

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27 Wiener, English Culture, p. 127.
explored it was keenly observed in the writing of the art critic Frederick Wedmore, appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* in early 1883:29

... the art that has the chance of living is generally the art that is inspired by the life of its own day...Luca della Robbia represented what he saw and what he enjoyed... Too many of our own exponents of contemporary life express contemporary life without artistic power. In England, high taste and artistic sensibility, and the power to draw, and the power to colour, are too much ranged on the side of those who hold that modern life holds no themes for Art... In the main it is true that the adaptability of modern life to the purposes of art has not been fairly tried in England. Against it there has been the force of tradition in a country of tradition; ...30

and in an article in the *Spectator* in 1884:

“Conquest” by Mr. Blair Leighton ... Again, to *paint well* is necessary; but to paint well is necessary as a means, not an end... [costume pieces], as in “Conquest,” are attractive enough to an artist, but they are, at the best, anachronisms at the present time. What we want is a fine treatment of the facts of to-day; and there is just as much poetry now for those who care to see it, as in the times of tourney and wandering minstrels. The world alters its clothes, but little else. A good specimen of this present-day poetry is to be found in the two pictures by Mr. W. L. Wyllie of “Heave Away” and “The Close of a Winter’s Day... We do not know when we have seen a work which was so dreary in its beauty or so beautiful in its dreariness.”31

These writings in major literary and political magazines point to their consciousness of regressive, anti-modern tendencies in the visual arts in Britain, and also to efforts to define ways in which British art might relate to contemporary life in the 1880s.

29 Frederick Wedmore was chief art critic for the *Standard*. He also wrote for the *Spectator*, *Nineteenth Century*, *Academy*, *Examiner*, *Art Journal* and the *Studio* and authored books, including *Studies in English Art* (1876-80), *Turner and Ruskin* (1900) and *Whistler and Others* (1906).
31 *Spectator*, 31 May 1884, p. 712.
These attempts were in turn to reveal specific notions of modern art, which distinguished itself from the French modernism and naturalism of the period as well as from the increasingly influential Aestheticist conception of autonomous art. Whilst conveying enthusiasm for modernity, the late Victorian conception of modern art eschewed avant-gardism.

The concept of naturalism is a good point of reference in clarifying late Victorian ideas of modern art from two points of view: of the role of art in society and the relationship between art and nature. The terms ‘naturalism’ and ‘naturalistic’ have been used in relation to the art of many periods to characterise works that depict actual rather than imaginary, mythological or religious subject matter. Naturalism claimed to depend on the direct observation of nature, in ‘contrast to others that are more stylised or idealised or dependent on stereotypes’.32 Such emphasis on the empirical and the external world of the day, as opposed to the stereotypical, divine or antiquated, could be found earlier in the examples of Roman art, including wall paintings at Pompeii and portrait painting and sculpture from the late Republic onwards, the depiction of people who appeared earthly in Renaissance painting and sculpture (Wedmore’s example being Luca della Robbia) and the work of Caravaggio, which focused on the details of nature. It was, however, the Dutch painting of the seventeenth century that not only explored most extensively aspects of the visible world in the forms of townscapes, interiors, still-lifes and landscapes for the first time (hence unsurprisingly studied later by the nineteenth century

naturalist painters with enthusiasm), but also would be seen by late Victorians as a model for naturalism, as a means by which art could express the modernity of the world.

While advances in landscape painting were largely common to the industrialising nations of the nineteenth century, in developing the art that explored the modern world the British clung to specific values influenced by the Enlightenment thought: fidelity to nature; and art as a moral and intellectual force. The notions of art’s grounding in nature and its didactic role in society were manifested acutely in the art and career of the self-addressed ‘naturalist’, John Constable (1776-1837). His ‘natural painture’ was consciously based in empiricism, in which nature was a source of value in itself. His ambition to be a ‘serious’ artist was interlinked with the notion of an artist whose role was ‘of cardinal importance in any society which aspired to civilisation’. How these two, supplemented by the subsequent theories of John Ruskin, influenced the British conception of modern art to the late nineteenth century can be elucidated through the examination of art criticism of the time. The following is an excerpt from Wedmore’s subsequent article, ‘Genre in the Summer Exhibitions’, in the Fortnightly Review:

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34 The crucial importance of nature in Constable’s vision and practice of landscape art meant that he worked assiduously from the motif, sketching in oil directly from nature, from different viewpoints, deepening his understanding of the natural phenomena. The painter indeed once described painting in his fourth lecture to the Royal Institution in 1836 as ‘a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures were but the experiments’. John Thorne’s investigation of Constable’s series of studies of the sky from Hampstead Heath from the early 1820s is interesting in this regard. The meteorologist points out that the series, annotated with the date and time, wind speed and direction, the weather conditions before and after the sketch, ‘match almost perfectly the contemporary weather records’. J. E. Thorne, John Constable’s Skies: a Fusion of Art and Science, Birmingham 1999, p. 200.
Art does not become historical by labelling its figures princes, by … electing to deal with the themes of 250 years since instead of those of to-day… The theatric revival of the past which has been pleasing to academical tastes can only be ignored by “that severe To-morrow” which will ask us what it was that we had of our own in our art of 1883, and will pronounce that our historical, our worthiest, nay, often our most imaginative painting dealt with the themes of Mr. Fildes’s “Village Wedding”, Mr. Gregory’s “Piccadilly: Drawing-Room Day”, and Mr. Wyllie’s “Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide”… accepts the Present, not through any insensibility or indifference to the beauty and refinement of which in art the Past has so frequently been deemed the exclusive storehouse, but rather through that just union of artistic knowledge and feeling with a sensitiveness to the facts and aspects of life which enables the strong man to do that which the weak man declares to be impossible—to bring the common and everyday life within the domain of art.36

The critic explicitly argues for naturalist subject matter: ‘accepts the Present’;37 ‘inspired by the life of its own day’.38 But like many other contemporary critics, he insists at the same time that art treat subject with feelings of ‘beauty and refinement’ and through ‘imagination’; by this Wedmore meant that even the most commonplace events of life should be idealised to an extent – or at least ‘dignified’.39 Ugliness, in the view of many late Victorian critics, should be made attractive – or refined to provide moral values. In the basis of this argument were the theories of the Enlightenment and claims of Ruskin and his late Victorian followers, in which art must serve a didactic end as well as pleasing the eye, since it had the power to influence both through its content and through the style or sentiment in which it was

37 Ibid.
38 Wedmore, ‘Impressionists’, p. 75.
While the ways in which the artists such as Wyllie and other British contemporaries fulfilled such a consensus at the time is one of the key questions dealt in the present dissertation, some examples which challenged it may be considered here in late Victorian critical terms. One of the notable cases was the Impressionists.

Modern life has spoken to them [the Impressionists]. They have heard something, at least, of that which it has got to say. But they have heard but partially… ; but they have one deficiency in common … – they are without appreciation of the finer forms of nature in human life… In the revolt from an art of petty prettiness, ugliness has not become attractive to him [Monet] … Turner touched it [the adaptability of modern life to the purposes of Art] thirty years ago in ‘Rain, Steam and Speed’. Turner saw that Man’s work with Nature has to be accepted, and, sooner or later, the mill chimney and the railway bridge brought it into the picture as frankly as ever was the Grecian temple or the Roman aqueduct. But the modernité of Monet – what he has in common with his brother Impressionists – is his method of actual painting, rather than his way of looking at his theme… Chiefly, then, against Degas and Renoir – and, of course, against Monet – is to be urged that blind or wilful indifference to the finer forms of humanity … hardly once in their work is there any chance indication of a noble or dignified sentiment, of any appreciation of moral force or moral beauty – physical beauty, in all that it has at least of most delicate and exalted, have been abandoned to begin with.41

The naturalism of the Impressionists was, in the view of Wedmore, unsatisfactory because of its lack of moral dimensions and its technical (and avant-garde) ambitions;42 having abandoned altogether the value of art in society, they chose to

42 The critic praised Edgar Degas for his naturalist subject matter, if not treatment: ‘the work-a-day existence, often of very unromantic people … common and familiar things’. *Ibid.*
indulge in their own method of painting, rather than dealing with subjects in ways that might suggest ‘a noble or dignified sentiment’ or indicate ‘the finer forms of humanity’. Their art, to Wedmore, offered nothing but ‘petty prettiness’ or ‘physical beauty’.

The French conception of naturalism evidently differed from that of the British. In late nineteenth century France the term naturalism came to denote two things in particular. One characteristic that distinguished from the British was the claim to record the visible world with scientific accuracy, espoused in France by Emile Zola in texts such as *Le Roman Experimental* (1880). The other was the treatment of everyday subjects, from which no subject should be ruled out. Jules-Antoine Castagnary’s frequently quoted characterisation of naturalism in his Salon review of 1863 encapsulates these: ‘naturalist … art is the expression of life under all phases and on all levels, and that its sole aim is to reproduce nature by carrying it to its maximum power and intensity: it is truth balanced with science’.43 Often labelled as ‘Zolaesque’ and seen as ‘excessive’ in late Victorian Britain, French naturalism was represented at the other end of the spectrum by the work of Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-84), in particular. It had considerable influence in the art world of contemporary Britain, generating such followers as George Clausen (1852-1944) and Stanhope Forbes (1857-1947), who concentrated on the rural subject matter, and sparking off heated debate about the ends and means of naturalism – and art in

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In its review of Clausen’s *Labourers after Dinner*, shown at the Royal Academy of 1884, *The Times* considered the painting ‘an amazing bit of realism’ and went on to pose ‘the importunate question whether this, after all, is what art was meant for’. And, for many late Victorian art critics, the naturalism of Clausen, Forbes and Bastien-Lepage was not what art was intended for. George Moore, for instance, saw their ‘desire to compete with nature, to be nature’ as ‘the disease from which art has suffered most in the last twenty years’. Moore called Clausen’s work as ‘meaningless’, ‘blank realism’, which was nothing but ‘the sordid and the mean in both execution and vision’; he found absolutely ‘no valid reason for the portrayal of so much ugliness’. Similarly, Walter Sickert in his 1891 essay, ‘Modern Realism in Painting’, contributing to André Theuriet’s memoir of Bastien-Lepage, wrote of the theory and practice of the Frenchman’s and his followers’ ‘photo-realism in painting’ as ‘a radical misconception of the nature and function of art’; and claimed that obscuring that fact would only be ‘the modern gigantic conspiracy of toleration’.

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45 *The Times*, 12 May 1884.


48 W. Sickert, ‘Modern Realism in Painting’ in A. Theuriet et al., *Jules Bastien-Lepage and his Art. A memoir*, London 1892, pp. 111-27. In an essay contributed to the same volume George Clausen wrote in defence of Bastien-Lepage’s work, ‘I feel convinced that realism was not the end with Bastien-
He cried out, ‘we are to speak of Bastien-Lepage as a master, what terms are left for Keene and Millet …?’ Sickert considered that the naturalism of such artists as Charles Keene (1823-91) and Jean-François Millet (1814-75), which in his view was vastly different from that of Bastien-Lepage, who had been ‘at his best a workmanlike and photographic copyist’. As Dugald Sutherland MacColl insisted, ‘the optical instrument of a Zola, fiercely applied to fact, saw the fact, be it love, money, a mine, or a steam engine, steadily swell into a monster and an ogre’. MacColl’s remark – like The Times’s review of Clausen’s Labourers after Dinner – took the typically British view that the representation of actuality was significant, but that it needed some engagement with social values and should not be over-exaggerated.

These British writers fundamentally contested Castagnary’s and Zola’s claim that scientific accuracy or the rigorous reproduction of nature was the singular aim of art. Although crudely put by Moore, there was truth in his statement, ‘the mission of art was not truth, but beauty’, in the minds of many late Victorian critics. Without ‘a noble gesture’ or divorced from ‘beauty, grace, mystery, and suggestion’, wrote Moore, art [perhaps that of Bastien-Lepage, Clausen and Forbes] became a

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49 Sickert, ‘Modern Realism’, p. 143.
50 Ibid. Moore similarly considered Clausen’s work as ‘little more than the vices of photography magnified’. Modern Painting, p. 117.
51 D. S. MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, Glasgow 1902, p. 25.
52 Robert Louis Stevenson, in his article contributed to the Magazine of Art during the editorship of W. E. Henry, also wrote: ‘the immediate danger of the realist is to sacrifice the beauty and significance of the whole to local dexterity, or, in the insane pursuit of completion, to immolate his readers under facts’. ‘A Note on Realism’, Magazine of Art, 1884, pp. 24-8.
53 Moore, Modern Painting, p. 119.
‘terrible’ thing. Whether writing from a conservative or progressive stance, noted art critics were nearly unanimous in their requirement of ‘beauty’, ‘dignity’ or ‘poetry’ in art (at least until the controversy around Degas’s L’Absinthe in 1893 began largely to direct their attention to formal qualities over content). They believed that – through comprehension and ‘imagination’ – modern life, be it ‘commonplace’, ‘grime’, ‘prosaic’ or ‘repellent’, should be suggested in art in a way that might encourage the viewer to look at it in another, uncommon, way. In the words of Philip Gilbert Hamerton, ‘the qualities of clearness and accuracy were not enough’; ‘semi-poetical kind of description’ was necessary. In the chapter, ‘Unity as a Result of Imagination’, in his Imagination in Landscape Painting (1887) the writer elaborated his point:

Unimaginative artists may, of course, illustrate human labours as frequently and abundantly as their more gifted brethren; but in their hand these labours will remain prosaic by the absence of real dignity.

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54 Ibid., p. 117-8.
56 Another critic noted, ‘the painter nowadays is not a poet’, in the Illustrated London News, 5 May 1883. Some of these critics were well aware of their own or the Englishman’s moral aesthetic; for example, MacColl and Moore related it to puritanism. MacColl, Nineteenth Century Art, pp. 109-110; Moore, Modern Painting, p. 135.
57 As Gerald Needham points out, such conception of naturalism in Britain had been already found in William Wordsworth’s celebrated text, Preface to the third edition of Lyrical Ballads: ‘The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to chuse [sic] incidents and situations from common life, and relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: ... Poetry is the image of man and nature’. W. Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, London 1802, p. vii; Needham, ‘Naturalism’.
58 P. G. Hamerton, Landscape, London 1885, p. 44.
The sympathy of great artist, being imaginative, ennobles prosaic details. This is the beneficent power of the Imagination – in the highest sense a most useful power – to reveal the essential dignity, or at least the possible dignity of the common things and works that seem vulgar to the spirit of gentility.\(^\text{60}\)

‘To reveal the dignity’ of everyday life was the function of naturalism and the aim of art in Britain.\(^\text{64}\) In the view of many late Victorian writers, beauty could be found everywhere; the matter depended on the way of seeing the visible world and the ability to transform and ‘poeticise’ humble life in paint.\(^\text{62}\) Hamerton and others even related such a way of looking with ‘healthy tastes’, which could reveal ‘a new world of beauty and interest’.\(^\text{63}\) For MacColl, beauty was indeed ‘only to be won from the thing present to the eye; from the new, unpainted, neglected world of our time, and especially from its reality stripped of pretension, really off parade’.\(^\text{64}\) In the view of Wedmore, Turner had already painted the modern world [of the mill chimney and the railway bridge] in such a way that distinguished him from Monet or Bastien-Lepage.\(^\text{65}\)

Some looked to seventeenth century Holland for such a model for ‘present-day poetry’\(^\text{66}\) and made comparisons with its art when paintings which they considered as successful or unsuccessful examples of naturalism were found. Moore referred to the

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\(^{60}\) Hamerton, *Imagination*, p. 52.
\(^{61}\) John Stokes examined the language of the New Criticism of the 1890s, in which treatment ‘revealed’ or ‘dignified’ subject. ‘“It’s the Treatment Not the Subject”: First Principles of the New Art Criticism’ in *In the Nineties*, Hemel Hempstead 1989, pp. 34-52.
\(^{62}\) Moore, *Modern Painting*, pp. 119-20: ‘things ugly in themselves become beautiful by association; … redeem and make artistically interesting the ugliest face… create beautiful pictures among the meanest brick buildings that ever were run up by the jerry-builder’.
\(^{63}\) Hamerton, *Landscape*, p. 291.
\(^{65}\) Wedmore, ‘Impressionists’, p. 77.
\(^{66}\) *Spectator*, 31 May 1884, p. 712.
Dutchmen’s ‘poeticising’ of ‘the meanest and most commonplace incidents of everyday life’ as the basics of their art (and ‘admirable lessons’ which Clausen neglected for his ‘abject realism’). In his book *Nineteenth Century Art* (1902), MacColl too referred to the Dutch painting of the seventeenth century as ‘the school in which the contentment and pleasure of vision was most generally pursued’; and drew a perceptive analogy between its ‘illustration of contemporary appearances and events’ and the nineteenth century advances in landscape painting in terms of the demands of the new bourgeois societies. However, the critic deliberately pointed out that modern life had provided the Dutch with ‘material to study with intent pleasure’ and wrote, ‘it is unlikely that any Dutch seventeenth century painter thought of himself as a “realist” with any sense of protest or theoretical limiting of art’, thus establishing a difference from the uncompromising characteristics of Zolaesque naturalism.

The work of Wyllie in the 1880s, in particular, was frequently reviewed as having treated naturalist subject matter in the ways which ‘revealed’ the beauty of modern London – as will be studied in Chapter 1 – thus satisfying the dominant consensus of the function and value of art in late Victorian Britain, combining description with nobler values. *The Times*’s review of the exhibition of his drawings of the Lower Thames at the Fine Art Society in 1884 encapsulated how Wyllie’s had achieved this:

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67 Moore, *Modern Painting*, p. 120.
70 As the *Spectator* put it, Wyllie’s work was ‘so dreary in its beauty or so beautiful in its dreariness’. 31 May 1884, p. 712.
an excellent draughtsman ... has a complete mastery of the brush, and a thorough knowledge of the ships and the water which it is his delight to paint... the picturesqueness of this lower part of the stream, the beauty which is to be found in ships and wharves, and even in the clouds of smoke that roll from the funnels of steamers, is not allowed any longer to be ignored; and Mr. Wyllie ... having discovered these artistic qualities, determined to bring them to the public mind. What Cuyp and his fellows found in the broad waters of the Maas ... now discovering in the lower Thames; ... in the crowd of moving things that animate its surface, the very richest material that could be sought for by a painter who desires to seize and perpetuate the actual world in which he lives. As a contribution to this work these drawings of Mr. Wyllie are remarkable... to show to the world of London what elements of beauty are still to be found side by side with the ugliness and the squalor of the great city.71

Works such as Wyllie’s were crucial in contemporary art, in the view of many British critics, not only for their modern subjects but also for the ways in which those were dealt with. Paintings such as Wyllie's were produced largely according to the dominant ideology of late Victorian England in which art had affective properties and was thus capable of contributing to the collective mental, even moral, condition of the society in which it was executed. Art was not to concentrate on ‘physical beauty’ as in Wedmore’s assessment of Monet’s work. Neither was it ‘selfishly occupied with her own perfection only’ and sought no other audience than ‘the Artist alone’, as Whistler declared in his Ten O’Clock Lecture of 1885.72 English art was to sustain a vital relation with life. How it did – how the imagery of the Lower Thames

71 The Times, 25 February 1884. The Athenaeum also wrote: ‘Mr. Wyllie is, of course, by no means the first – for even Turner was not that – to recognise the “paintable” characteristics of the muddy water and the mud itself of the Thames, to say nothing of the many-tinted sails and hulls that haunt the river... Mr. Wyllie paints in a straightforward way; his tastes rarely allow him to be pathetic, nor do his sympathies enable him to make subject out of materials, which, for those who choose to see it, abound in sentiment. Neither is he dull, still less of the Philistine temper which hides its ignorance in sneers. He looks at nature in the mood of the best Dutchmen, and ... his most successful works might be ascribed to Van de Velde, Van der Capelle, or Cuyp’. 1 March 1884, p. 286.
related to modern life in late Victorian London; how it reconstructed and projected that life in and through visual forms by playing, engaging with or utilising its different aspects; what purposes and functions it might have had in that life – are central concerns of this research.

**Research Questions and Methods**

The problem of modernity in late Victorian representation of the Lower Thames will be unravelled in this dissertation through the examination of the role of geography, class, means of representation and dissemination, and reception. This may be exemplified by surveying two of the key works analysed in the dissertation. *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* (Fig. 1) by W. L. Wyllie and *The Pool of London* (Fig. 2) by George Vicat Cole share several attributes. Both depicted the working Thames specifically below London Bridge, looking towards the Royal Naval College and St Paul’s Cathedral respectively. Both were painted on a considerable scale and in the manners little affected by modernist or Aestheticist influences. They were presented in the annual summer exhibitions of the Royal Academy in the 1880s, and purchased from the Academy for the national collection of art. Visual terms of modernity were made explicit in their naturalist representations of the river’s and the riverside’s machinery, buildings, smoke, dirt, workers and hullabaloo.

Firstly, the significance of geography is twofold. The Thames east of London Bridge could be identified as counterparts of both the Upper Thames and the London river west of the Bridge. The lower river contrasted with the rural upstream in terms of the
level of modernisation, economic, cultural and symbolic functions, as well as ecological status. The former, forming the Port of London, was principally commercial, heavily industrialised and employed a large working-class population. The latter on the other hand offered sites of upper- and middle-class leisure but also those unaffected by modernisation, which symbolised for some pre-industrial orders and even – for William Morris – a model for a socialist utopia, based on the medieval past. The contemporary artist’s conscious choice of the Lower, as opposed to Upper, Thames can be analysed in terms of his attitudes to capitalist modernity. We ask what political and professional motifs could lie behind these paintings of the mercantile river.

The painting of the Thames east, rather than west, of London Bridge is to be considered in artistic and cultural terms. The visual representation of London’s river since the 1870s had focused on the latter for two main reasons. As we shall see, the north-western section of the urban riverbank around Westminster not only had a more polite appearance and architectural grandeur but also been newly refurbished by the construction of the Embankment. This was a landscape which tourist artists mainly painted. At another end of the capital in the west the American painter Whistler had settled to establish an avant-garde circle of artists, following his Aesthetic ideals of art and some of whom, for example Theodore Roussel and Joseph Pennell, were, like Whistler, foreign. Many of Whistler’s paintings of the river between Chelsea and Battersea from the 1870s were entitled ‘Nocturne’ to indicate they were essentially compositions of formal elements such as colour and to deny any relation with nature. For such mainstream artists as Cole and Wyllie to paint
another site on the city’s river in these art-world circumstances could be interpreted as a deliberate act to distinguish themselves as artists from both the Whistlerian avant-garde and mere tourist painters, and their work from superficial views of their capital. In so doing were they consciously positioning themselves in specific places in the contemporary visual arts?

Secondly, the presentation of works at the Academy’s annual exhibition of contemporary art (and in major illustrated newspapers in the case of graphic art) will be considered mainly in relation to its audience and to its distance from the subject of representation. The location of pictures of the Port of London at arguably still the country’s foremost and most prestigious regular art exhibition in the West End was a deliberate process of the transmission of a proletariat life to a bourgeois one under a capitalist system and of scenes of labour (production) to sites of leisure (consumption). What did this process involve? We question the target audience for the images of the Port, analysing ways in which the physical and social distance between their subject and their audience was created, rendered, viewed and interpreted. We also ask whether these might indicate any political stance or views about the current socio-economic system and imperialism.

Thirdly, the medium of large-scale oils and the styles in which the works were painted will be interpreted in terms of the artists’ intention for the presentation of their works and positioning them for a broad upper- and middle-class public in the shifting realm of the visual arts. The enormous canvases immediately drew attention on the crowded walls of the Burlington House; and the pictures of the nation’s most
significant river, running through the viewer’s city, were painted in what might still be considered as the national tradition or school of landscape painting by the majority of late Victorians – however weakened that notion had become, and regardless of burgeoning continental and Whistlerian influences – and they were, above all, legible. The grandiose images spoke to visitors to the Academy show (or to readers of the Graphic): about England’s mercantile enterprise, power, values, history and even art history in some cases. There many of them stood contemplating its greatness by looking at the busy, working Thames. The legibility of such paintings could have particular significance in late Victorian England where Whistler – with his absolute opposition between art and nature (adopted from Théophile Gautier’s and Charles Baudelaire’s notions of l’art pour l’art) – launched his public disdain for the tastes of the English public in art and its moral-aesthetic traditions. The naturalistic styles in which Cole’s and Wyllie’s works were painted contrasted sharply with the illegibility of Whistler’s Nocturnes in the eye of the public; and the large-scale and laboriously executed canvases seemed to represent serious art, when compared to the latter, which was even perceived as ‘manufacture’, not ‘art’, by Ruskin.73

Fourthly, a political dimension of the naturalism of these works, the legible treatment of everyday modern life, will be considered. Richard Thomson in his new book Art of the Actual examined the political and social capacity of naturalism in Third Republic France. Drawing parallels between the aesthetic and republican ideology,

he argued that naturalism could be used as a drive for a consensual collectivism, in
which all classes were of equal importance.\textsuperscript{74} Such an assessment of naturalism and
its ideological power could be applied in the very different context of late Victorian
Britain. For example, paintings such as \textit{Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing
Tide} and \textit{Workaday England} (Fig. 3) by Wyllie explicitly link labour with national
enterprise and wealth through the collective rhetoric of their titles and the heroic
representation of workers in the settings of the principal artery of British economy.
The role of working-class labour for the Empire – and a society deeply ridden by
both objective and subjective indices of social class\textsuperscript{75} – is made clear in these works.
This was about British imperialism, the capitalist enterprise into which other social
groups were brought (and which was distinct from the egalitarianism of republican
France). In his study of cultural imperialism John MacKenzie explained how the
dominance of imperial ideology in many aspects of late Victorian culture could
represent an interaction among the classes.\textsuperscript{76} While the British people at large were
largely uninterested in specific imperial principles and policies, they were
nonetheless fascinated by the Empire and the superior self-image it offered in respect
of the rest of the world. It provided major issues of the day into which different
social classes could be swept up and, with an imperial mentality extensively woven
into metropolitan culture and education, the Empire became a significant terrain of
pan-class nationalism. As we shall see in the contemporary readings of Wyllie’s and
Cole’s works, images of the Port of London could even assert the superiority of the

\textsuperscript{74} The art historian thus suggests that naturalism could be more than an aesthetic but a state of mind.

\textsuperscript{75} Jose Harris points out, quite apart from the stratifying impact of property distribution and large-
scale machine production, between 1870 and 1914 the organisation of work, schools, housing,
welfare, culture and recreation all conspired to compartmentalise British society on class line in

\textsuperscript{76} J. M. MacKenzie, ‘Empire and Metropolitan Cultures’ in A. Porter, \textit{The Oxford History of the
British race (no wonder they were acquired for the nation!). Naturalism could function as a powerful aesthetic, capable of bringing the working class to the middle-class imperial project.

Fifthly, the dissertation investigates the various ways in which the artists fulfilled a perceived obligation of modern art to be naturalistic, while simultaneously engaging with broader values. How did they go on to produce what contemporaries viewed as ‘present-day poetry’ – or to ‘bring the common and everyday life within the domain of art’ in Wedmore’s conception? What were the foci, elements and techniques of their work which gave the filthy, ugly and chaotic lower river ‘beauty’, ‘splendour’, ‘grandeur’, ‘power’ or ‘wonder’ – words we will find used by contemporaries? These questions will be addressed in terms of different aspects and symbols of modernity – architecture, technology and smoke in particular – which the images manipulated, highlighted or disguised; the perspective and design through which the pictures performed these manipulations by juxtaposing, magnifying or concealing; the varied levels of naturalism adopted (to be hailed, neglected or criticised by contemporaries at different moments in the late nineteenth century); and the art historical sources and traditions which the artists utilised and rejected to the advantage or disadvantage of their work.

Finally, through the case studies of artists working in different styles or traditions and media, the dissertation explores what they considered that obligation of modern art. To what extent did their works respond to Wedmore and many contemporary critics’ moral aesthetics? What were the ways in which artists exemplified,
negotiated or betrayed those notions of how art should relate to modern life? How did they see and interpret the changing world; and how were their views manifested in their works? These questions will be addressed not only through the analysis of images but also the examination of textual sources such as exhibition reviews and writings which accompanied illustrations. The artists and works examined here have been selected to exemplify different ways in which the visual arts in late Victorian Britain responded to capitalist modernity – support, critique or refusal – and its different aspects: technology, prosperity or pollution. Investigating these, the dissertation aims to formulate a new interpretation of the relationship between late Victorian art and modernity. At the same time it hopes to rescue some of the works that have been largely marginalised in the existing history of art from the storages of galleries and archives, and assist the discovery of works in private collections. An exhaustive attempt to inventory representations of the Thames has not been made in the present study.
Chapter 1

W. L. Wyllie’s Representation of the Thames in the 1880s: Naturalism and Imperialism

This chapter considers the work of William Lionel Wyllie (1851-1931), concentrating on the early 1880s, as a way of exploring the relationship of British art and modernity at the time. It examines his career in its critical phase in establishing the reputation of the artist who in 1907 was praised as ‘the pictorial interpreter of London’s waterway’. In analysing the ways in which Wyllie reconstructed the Thames in his exhibits, the chapter employs the term naturalism. While it characterises his work only partially, as we will find, the term offers an effective critical framework for the examination of his portrayals of the lower river from this period. They can be viewed as naturalist in terms of subject and means of representation, but the key issue here is how these insinuated the rhetoric of broader values to appeal to the majority of the late Victorian public and critics. To what extent did his paintings, apparently straightforward descriptions of the working river, suggest grander associations and values to their viewers?

Wyllie was one of the greatest marine painters of his generation, remembered for his naval pictures as well as scenes of the Thames. The work of Wyllie is well exemplified by the two works acquired for the nation by the Chantrey Bequest: *Toil,*

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Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide (1883) and The Battle of the Nile (1899). Now in the collection of Tate Britain, these paintings of a scene of the Thames shipping and of a major naval battle represent the key subjects of Wyllie’s oeuvre. Other major works by the artist in public collections include The Passing of a Great Queen (1901) and Blessing the Sea (1876) in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, Scene on the Lower Thames (1884), The Opening of Tower Bridge (1895) and Commerce and Sea Power (1898) in the Guildhall Art Gallery, and Our River (1882) in the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. The National Maritime Museum in Greenwich has the largest collection of Wyllie’s work: some thousand works, which remained with the artist and included drawings for the illustrated newspaper the Graphic, studies for publications, oils and etchings as well as finished works, were purchased by the Society of Nautical Research upon Wyllie’s death to form the Wyllie Collection of the Maritime Museum, which was established in 1937.\(^78\)

Wyllie was born a son of the painter William Morrison Wyllie (active 1852-1890) in London and brought up between the capital and the northern French coast at Boulogne and at Wimereux. At an early age Wyllie began sailing and \textit{plein air} drawing and painting on the coast, and in doing so acquired his taste for sea, ships and shipping. This artistic and nautical background of Wyllie’s would vastly influence his art and life. After training at Heatherley’s School of Art, he entered the

Royal Academy School in 1866 at the age of 15. Three years later the young artist won the Turner Gold Medal for Landscape with his *Dawn after a Storm* (private collection). ‘The rising young painter of clever sea studies’, in *The Times*’s words, would prove to become one of the most successful painters of sea, river and ships in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain.79 He worked for the *Graphic* from its inception in December 1869, for the White Star Line in the 1880s and later for the Royal Navy. While his output after the turn of the twentieth century, especially from 1907 when the artist moved to Portsmouth harbour (and was elected RA), was increasingly more naval, with battle scenes and depictions of royal engagements, it was in the 1880s that Wyllie first made his name with *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide*, the painting of the Port of London exhibited at the Royal Academy of 1883, and other views of the Thames, concentrating on its stream below London Bridge, including *Black Diamonds* (location unknown), which was shown at the Institute of Painters in Oil Colours in the following winter to a critical acclaim.80

Wyllie’s work from the 1880s forms a critical source of study of the representation of the late nineteenth-century Thames and, with it, contemporary attitudes to the river and the construction of a consensus about its artistic representation. As seen in the Introduction, the lower part of the urban stream, on which Wyllie focused for his representations of the Thames, was the Port of London. Not only had its upper part, between London Bridge and the Tower of London, and the adjoining City of London, been the historic and economic cores of the capital, but also the Port was at

79 *The Times*, 26 October 1869.
80 A watercolour drawing of *Black Diamonds* (Fig. 4) was exhibited at Wyllie’s one-man show at the Fine Art Society in 1884 and reproduced in G. Allen and W. L. Wyllie, *The Tidal Thames*, London, Paris and Melbourne 1892.
the peak of its wealth and global influence at the time Wyllie produced his works. In addition, the urban Thames had a unique physical atmosphere created by dense pollution in the distinct climate of London. His images revealed those vital aspects of imperial London and the constituents and characteristics of its modernity to the contemporary spectator more effectively than any other artistic representations of the Thames in the late nineteenth century. This, as we shall see, was recognised by his contemporaries. Art historically, Wyllie’s images of the Thames occupy a marginal place in recent debates on the representation of the Thames in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While such scholars as John House, William Vaughan and Caroline Arscott mention Wyllie’s work in their studies, it was only briefly introduced as a way of filling the gap between views by such painters as David Roberts and Henry Dawson, who worked in the topographical tradition, and by such formalists as James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), his followers and the Impressionists.\(^1\) Kenneth McConkey brought up Wyllie as an interpreter of the Thames as the industrial gateway of the Empire in his book *Memory and Desire: Painting in Britain and Ireland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.*\(^2\) In either case, however, Wyllie’s work on the Thames has not attracted a focused evaluation in terms of its articulation of the modernity of the London river, let alone its own modern qualities.


\(^2\) McConkey, *Memory and Desire*, p. 114.
This chapter examines the ways in which Wyllie engaged with contemporary life in London in his work and in which he constructed an aesthetic of the Thames. It questions the reasons why Wyllie chose the Lower Thames as subject of his work as well as what his particular choice meant historically and artistically; why Wyllie addressed above all issues of maritime trade, technology, labour and pollution in his representations; and how his images also articulated his support for Britain’s liberal trading empire, attracting the nationalist critical reception. Furthermore, the chapter considers the roles of Wyllie’s personal and professional backgrounds in the development of his art; the relation between his naturalism and the purpose of his representation of the Thames; the ways in which Wyllie’s work can be distinguished from the preceding and contemporary representations of the Thames; and the aspects and characteristics of Wyllie’s images which especially appealed to the contemporary public. In so doing, it explores the influence of his work on the Victorian imagination of the Thames and conception of modernity.

1.1 Wyllie’s Strategies and Practice

Wyllie’s remarkable success in the 1880s can be considered in terms of his strategies and practices in the context of the nineteenth-century artistic representation of the Thames. What made his work notable and successful among the late Victorian public, as seen in reviews of his exhibits? Here we consider the artistic and critical backgrounds in which the artist was working to formulate his own language of the Thames imagery, notably the dominant influence of the Dutch ideals of riverscape
painting in the artistic representation of the Thames. The section then examines how Wyllie went on about deliberately breaking away from them to construct his aesthetic of the lower river.\textsuperscript{83}

\textbf{Conventions}

One of the paintings shown at the Royal Academy’s winter exhibition of the Old Masters in 1884 is a good point of reference in exploring the artistic and critical contexts, in which Wyllie was working, as well as the dominant influence of the Dutch formulae for riverscape painting in the artistic representation of the Thames during the nineteenth century. \textit{The Pool of the Thames} (Fig. 5) by Augustus Wall Callcott (1779-1844), which had been first shown at the Academy in 1816, was reviewed in \textit{The Times} some 70 years later as the following:

\begin{quote}
Lord Lansdowne’s large “Pool of the Thames” by Sir A. W. Callcott – a beautiful view of the lower river, as it was some half-century ago, before coal-smoke had brought it to the state in which Mr. Wyllie loves to paint it.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

Three things can be noted here. The description of Callcott’s view as ‘beautiful’ shows how it still represented an ideal image of the river in Wyllie’s time. Secondly, late Victorians found the ecological state of the Thames contemptible. Finally, they indeed recognised Wyllie’s recent paintings of that river.

\textsuperscript{83} Despite the contrast between Wyllie’s and seventeenth-century Dutch painting in terms of style, the former’s everyday and marine subjects were seen in line with the latter by many contemporaries. Wyllie was thus compared with Aelbert Cuyp as well as the Van de Veldes. See \textit{The Times}, 25 February 1884; \textit{Athenaeum}, 1 March 1884, p. 286.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{The Times}, 7 January 1884.
Callcott’s large canvas presents a bright and harmonious image of maritime activity on luminous water set against a pale expanse of sky. This image of the Thames Victorians highly regarded was in fact an embodiment of the pictorial ideals of river scenes invented in the Dutch Golden Age. In balanced composition, high-key colour, clear tone and placid mood, The Pool of the Thames shows close affinities with The Maas at Dordrecht (Fig. 6) by Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691), whose work was widely admired and emulated in Regency England. Callcott’s Academy exhibit of the previous year, Passage and Luggage Boats (lost), is reminiscent of Cuyp’s Passage Boat (Fig. 7); Turner’s Dort or Dordrecht: the Dort Packet-Boat from Rotterdam Becalmed (1818; Yale Center for British Art) and Calm from Liber Studiorum (1812, No. 44) are also clear tributes to the Dutch master. The regard for Cuyp’s work was such that it would form a benchmark for the painting of the river at the time. Of The Pool of the Thames, which is supposed to have been ‘universally admired’ at the time of its first appearance at the Royal Academy, an Academician, Thomas Uwins, wrote to a friend, ‘his [Callcott’s] picture of the entrance to the port of London is quite as fine as anything Cuyp ever painted, or anything that has ever been done in this way, in any age or country’.

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85 Harley Preston described its colour as ‘blue and golden’ in London and the Thames, London: Somerset House 1977, no. 52. The Maas at Dordrecht was in a private collection in England throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was also exhibited at the British Institution in 1815.
88 J. Farrington, Diary, ed. J. Grieg (1922-8), 27 April 1816, quoted in Brown, Callcott, p. 78.
89 The Memoirs of Thomas Uwins (1858), p. 44, quoted in Preston, London and the Thames, no. 52.
Callcott’s successful representation of contemporary expectations of and critical criteria for riverscape painting paralleled an evident degree of exaggeration and idealisation, the quality which, more than any, Wyllie’s work would seem to defy in late Victorian eyes. Indeed, *The Pool of the Thames* only very generally characterised the river of the time. Not only are there few specific elements (buildings are slightly seen in the right-hand side), which distinguish the Pool circa 1816 from Cuyp’s Dutch river of the seventeenth century, but the ecological condition of the Thames is visibly exaggerated. While Callcott’s picture was noted particularly for ‘clearness (and beauty)’ at the time, the tidal Thames in London had in fact become so filthy that its tributaries had been covered and so formed part of the sewerage system already by the end of the eighteenth century. Also, the air pollution of the capital was notoriously intense to an extent which London itself was called ‘the big smoke’ or ‘the smoke’. The famously hazy sight of the Port of London was portrayed vividly in Lord Byron’s *Don Juan* (1819), in sharp contrast to Callcott’s luminous view:

A mighty mass of brick, and smoke, and shipping,  
Dirty and dusty, but as wide as eye  
...  
In sight, then lost amidst the forestry  
Of masts; a wilderness of steeples peeping  
...  

Furthermore, Callcott idealised the Pool’s atmosphere in accordance with Dutch riverscape. The level of placid mood in his representation was clearly unusual for the world’s busiest and largest port in history, and rather contrived to match the

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90 *Morning Chronicle*, 1 May 1816.  
seventeenth-century Maas. While this indicated Callcott’s disregard for nature and pursuit of the conventional ideals of harmonious river scenes, his oil sketch from 1815 told a different story. In its wide format the composition (Fig. 5-1) presented a bustle of the working river, including far more details of men on barges and riverbanks and of the surrounding built environment than the finished picture. Not only does the sketch elaborately represent the hurly-burly of the river life, but also, as Harley Preston notes, it displays ‘freshness, vigour and spontaneity’, which were most probably the results of painting on the spot, and distinguished from the stillness of the finished composition.\textsuperscript{94} The study, however, seemed to have been of no importance to Callcott himself, as it remained unexhibited and was found ‘put away in a lumber room all over dirt’ before it appeared in the 1845 sale.\textsuperscript{95} To the artist determined to paint the river based on Cuyp, observed nature, which would be a key word to describe Wyllie’s work, was of no particular interest.

The influence of the conventional conception of a bright, clear and harmonious riverscape typified by Callcott’s composition remained through the mid nineteenth century. The following cases exemplify it and show how, by relating to the pictorial ideals of the Dutch Golden Age, artists were also able to avoid or minimise such elements of the modern as smoke and its murky appearances in representing the Thames. \textit{Billingsgate Wharf} (1852; Fig. 8) by John Wilson Carmichael (1800-1868) in the collection of the Corporation of London could be effectively seen as a derivation of seventeenth-century shipping scenes by Cuyp or Jan van de Capelle (1626-1679). In the golden and light blue colours and the well-balanced tone and

\textsuperscript{94} Preston, \textit{London and the Thames}, no. 53.
\textsuperscript{95} Brown, \textit{Callcott}, p. 80.
composition, and without a trace of coal smoke in the environment it is difficult to recognise Carmichael’s warmly-lit river as belonging to industrialised and intensely polluted London. *Pool of London* (1851; Fig. 9) by Henry Dawson (1811-1878) in the Bank of England, on the other hand, shows the topography of the Pool more clearly with the buildings of the Billingsgate Market and the Custom House to the left of the canvas. While the image is filled mainly with the Thames sailing barges, hay barges and lighters, a couple of paddle steamers are found in the lower left of the canvas. Despite the traces of black smoke immediately above the steam vessels, however, Dawson also presents the river in a more or less clear-aired state in the impossibly luminous golden and bright blue hues, as seen in Cuyp’s *The Passage Boat* and Callcott’s *The Pool of the Thames*.

**Strategies**

Wyllie’s approach to the representation of the Thames was to break away from such pictorial conventions and ideals and to display its contemporary state in a daring and lively manner. Those qualities of *plein air* painting – ‘freshness, vigour and spontaneity’ – that were absent from Callcott’s finished painting could be found in Wyllie’s work, which depicted nature, revealing aspects of the polluted port – whether unpleasant or uplifting. In his expressive treatment Wyllie’s river was visibly tainted, restless and vigorous, everything that defied the persistent Dutch ideals.

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Wyllie’s first major oil representing the Thames and third work to be shown at the annual summer exhibition of the Academy was an early and striking example. London from the Monument (Fig. 10) of 1870, painted when the artist was only eighteen years old, embodied not only the beginning of Wyllie’s keen interest in the topography and atmosphere of his native city, but also such artistic methods as the aerial viewpoint and contre-jour, which were to highlight his naturalism and to develop further in his noted aesthetic of London’s river. The near-panoramic image looking to the southwest from the high viewpoint of the Monument shows the recently opened Cannon Street Railway Bridge and Station (1866) and the industrial landscape of the south bank beyond it, viewed against the light through the smoky haze. London from the Monument was indeed the most direct representation of ‘tumults of smoke’ over the Victorian capital, hitherto shown at such major exhibition venue as the Royal Academy.97 Wyllie’s use of contre-jour emphasised the polluted air and water, and his half-aerial view in such light in turn heightened the vastness, agitation, incessant change and movement, which characterised the image of contemporary London in numerous written descriptions. Critics certainly noted Wyllie’s audacious naturalism, which presented uncomfortable faces of the cityscape and life of their capital. In reviewing Wyllie’s painting, the Athenaeum wrote:

There is a vast amount of spirit and an excess of painting in Mr. Wyllie’s London from the Monument; yet the rendering of the tumults of the smoke, of the tarnished silver on the dirty river, and of the multitudinous housetops, is noteworthy as being unconventional, if not original.98

97 Athenaeum, 28 May 1870, p. 713.
98 Ibid.
The *Art Journal* reviewed the picture thus:

… the smoke of the metropolis as delineated with ample justice by W. L. Wyllie in his picture of *London from the Monument*. The city seems as a vast pandemonium. The picture is undoubtedly clever, and yet disagreeable.⁹⁹

A sense of shock of the new is discernible in these commentaries. Wyllie’s blatant rendering of dirty and chaotic London in an effective penumbra surprised those who were accustomed to the images which Callcott’s work typified and to the idea that only certain agreeable subjects were allowed in the domain of art.

The pollution and the dynamism of London’s urban landscape and qualities of *plein air* painting form good criteria of assessment of Wyllie’s aesthetic of the Thames. In addition to *London from the Monument*, in such works as *Our River* (Fig. 11) and *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* (Fig. 1), exhibited also at the Academy, in 1882 and 1883 respectively, that smoke-laden ‘state in which Mr. Wyllie loves to paint it [the Thames]’ is unmistakable in view.¹⁰⁰ These paintings and his etching of the latter (Fig. 1.3) are virtually full of smoke in various degrees of intensity, effects found in few exhibition pictures of the Thames from any period;¹⁰¹ and the force and movement of smoke therein is striking. Although more than half a century had passed since Callcott’s painting, Wyllie’s treatment of pollution in the Thames was unusually bold even from a later century standpoint, as reflected in the critical reception, to which this chapter will turn. Furthermore, figures are seen

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⁹⁹ *Art Journal*, 1870, p. 162.
¹⁰⁰ *The Times*, 7 January 1884.
¹⁰¹ The etching of *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* was commissioned by the dealer Robert Dunthorne and exhibited at the Royal Academy in the year after the painting.
making muscular efforts in his compositions, to which senses of momentum and actuality are added by the usage of diagonals. This contrasts with Cuyp’s and Callcott’s pictures of serenity, in which figures are typically organised in ordered planes rather than doing vigorous work.

It is noteworthy that the degree of naturalism in Wyllie’s aesthetic was very advanced in Britain at the time, as implied in the examined reviews of London from the Monument. While this was exceptional in British paintings of the city around 1870, the nearest portrayal of the polluted landscape of London and the Thames was found in the works of such visiting artists as Claude Monet (1840-1926) and Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878). Produced during the artists’ refuge in London from the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871 – preceded, as it happens, by Wyllie’s Monument picture, which they are unlikely to have known – Monet’s The Pool of London (Fig. 12) and Daubigny’s St Paul’s from the Surrey Side (Fig. 13) represent the Thames from familiar viewpoints, which frequently appeared in travel literature.\textsuperscript{102} Monet’s 1871 painting depicts the view of the Upper Pool looking upstream from a point at Tower Stairs. The Custom House to the right and, beyond, the Billingsgate Fish Market are seen alongside the tower of the church of St Magnus the Martyr, while London Bridge closes off the left background. Daubigny’s wide canvas shows St Paul’s Cathedral above the newly rebuilt Blackfriars Bridge (1869). Across the foreground a mass of coal barges are seen and to its right jetties on the south bank of the river. It is evident from their handling of the brush, usage of colour and representation of topography that French painters worked in very different

modes of pictorial representation. Their paintings easily deploy such dark tints as black and grey to loosely signify the murkiness of the river, fuming smoke and the foggy sky.

While these examples testify how French artists were attuned to paint the polluted cityscape, it is remarkable that the young Wyllie, having been educated solely in London, independently came up with an even grittier vision in his image of the Thames. Not only was his portrayal of smoke and the contaminated river in contre-jour even bolder than the paintings by Monet and Daubigny, but also Wyllie’s work was exceptional in its rendering of the sense of movement and restlessness: ‘pandemonium’ in the Art Journal’s metaphor. These qualities of dynamism in Wyllie’s images of the Thames with ships, goods, men, smoke and tide in motion enhanced the sense of the modern, and distinguished his work from earlier representations. Before a full analysis of how Wyllie represented the dynamic of the modern Thames using naturalist means, it is worth pointing out how his immediate contemporaries tended to depict the river with that sense of movement lacking, despite the increased speed of transports, transactions and life in the capital.

Such architectural and landscape artists as David Roberts (1796-1864) and Henry Dawson presented the Thames and its topography with crisp detail and precise drawing (as well as ambient light, which could be almost anywhere), as in The Houses of Parliament from Millbank (Fig. 14) and St Paul’s from the River Thames (Fig. 15); and yet their works formed rather misleading images of the mid to late 103 Art Journal, 1870, p. 162.
nineteenth-century river. Notably, the ships depicted are solely sailing barges, while such modern vessels as the paddle steamers and steam barges are unseen in these representations, although those were already prime means of river transport. It is difficult to feel the speed of life on London’s river, while the bright daylight and evening sunset illuminate idyllic moments on the river with minimal engagements with technology. Furthermore, the Thames is set against two of the most well-known buildings of London. As the architectural grandeur of St Paul’s Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament dominate, a static quality is added in the riverscape. Thames paintings treated in this way which chiefly emphasised the monumental character of the river recur in the later part of the century in such works as John Anderson’s Westminster Bridge, Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey Seen from the River (1872; Museum of London) and Frederick Winkfield’s Westminster Bridge and the Houses of Parliament from the River (1890; Museum of London).

While Roberts and Dawson more or less omitted the sense of movement and emphasised the opposing, static qualities by focusing on the old or monumental architecture in their works, a younger generation such as Henry Pether (active 1828-1865) and Atkinson Grimshaw (1836-1893) minimised the qualities of movement by depicting the Thames at night. Their choice of night-time allowed them to represent the river in repose, with little movement, and in doing so to minimise signs of the modern, including shipping and smoke. Pether’s night scenes along the Thames were also largely centred around such historic buildings as the Tower of London, Houses of Parliament, Somerset House and the Custom House. His photographic delineation of architecture and topography by the moonlight reflected on the water produced
some of the most restrained images of the London’s river such as *The Thames and Greenwich Hospital by Moonlight* (Fig. 16). Later in the century, Grimshaw also represented the Thames at night in typically tranquil settings. His 1884 painting, *The Thames by Moonlight by Southwark Bridge* (Fig. 17), represents the commercial river in repose, looking upstream towards St Paul’s. From his careful viewpoint at a landing stage west of Cannon Street Railway Bridge, Grimshaw could avoid ocean-going steamers, which were prevalent in the Thames at the time, and leave it only with outdated flat and sailing barges, in the moonlight set against such old and fixed structures as the dome of St Paul’s and spires of the City churches.

In marked contrast with these images by Roberts, Pether, Dawson and Grimshaw, Wyllie’s work visualises a dramatic sense of movement. His views of the working Thames are filled with actively moving ships of old and new kinds, men briskly towing barges, smoke fuming out of steam tugs, and vigorous tides of the water. The effects of Wyllie’s busy and moving river were frequently commented in reviews of his exhibited pictures. For instance, *The Times* in commenting on Wyllie’s *Coming up with the Flood* (untraced) of 1880 wrote: ‘the water pulsating with the stroke of the paddlewheels, the wash of which sets dancing the wherries moored off the jetties… with all its life and movement…’\(^{104}\) Similarly, the *Graphic* wrote on Wyllie’s 1885 Academy exhibit *Storm and Sunshine*: ‘Mr. W. L. Wyllie has succeeded in giving a vivid impression of a very transient natural effect… The appearance of movement in water and barges …’\(^{105}\) Also, critics noted in *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* (Fig. 1) Wyllie’s ability to render the

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\(^{104}\) *The Times*, 18 May 1880.

\(^{105}\) *Graphic*, 23 May 1885.
sense of motion, as well as the remarkable effects of his delineation of the light and atmosphere of the contaminated, working Thames. The Graphic wrote on the painting:

… one of the most powerful pictures in the exhibition…. It represents with great force and fidelity one of the reaches of the Thames below bridge by the light of early morning. A gleam of sunshine breaking through the cloud is vividly reflected from the surface of the water; heavily laden barges are floating up with the tide, while huge ships rising behind are dimly discerned through the fog-laden atmosphere… the effect is impressive, and in the main true.\textsuperscript{106}

Even more elaborately, the Athenaeum discussed Wyllie’s work as the following:

One of the most powerful pictures of the year is Mr. W. L. Wyllie’s “Storm, glitter, grime, and wealth on a flowing tide” (1493), which depicts the Pool in summer daylight so dimmed by smoke and filth that the glorious silver sheen on the Thames is tarnished and horrible. It is a magnificent illustration of grimy and shining tones and vivid tints disposed in harmonies of a subtle kind. The heaving, turbulent surface of the filthy water here reflects the tawny splendour of the sky and there gives back clouds of dirty vapours. Against the lustrous portion of the river’s surface are disposed the dark and grimy hulls of a tug and her train, certain lighters laden with coal. A dim and lurid penumbra surrounds the solid form of these dingy craft, and imparts to their images a verisimilitude which attests the painter’s knowledge of nature and his perfect command of the palette. Such fine adjustments are most effective, and their fortunate issue constitutes a triumph of skill.\textsuperscript{107}

These reviews noted the distinctive sense of movement in Wyllie’s rendering of barges ‘floating up with the tide’ and ‘the heaving, turbulent surface’ of the water. The Athenaeum, however, also analysed Wyllie’s striking portrayal of the Thames as the product of his knowledge of nature and skills as a painter. The powerful effects

\textsuperscript{106} Graphic, 2 June 1883.
\textsuperscript{107} Athenaeum, 16 June 1883, p. 769.
of his images were indeed the results of his skills in *plein air* painting and use of pictorial contrasts. In *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* sunlight is dimmed by smoke and fog; yet through the smoke-laden clouds and vapour the sun has broken to throw a glitter on the churned surface of the dirty water, which in return reflects the grey, overcast sky. Light highlights grime and smoke; and the penumbra of fogginess accentuates such commercial and dynamic elements of the river as moving barges, colliers, great steamships and working men, looming large through the fog and filthy air. Wyllie’s compelling aesthetic highlighted all the filth and the agitation of the late nineteenth-century Lower Thames.

**Practice**

The outstanding sense of life with its vivid visual effects in Wyllie’s representation of the Thames had several contributing factors: the strong use of contrasting tonal values of relative lightness and darkness, the skilful *plein air* painting which was linked to his experience of sailing and working on the Thames, and Wyllie’s skills with perspective combined with his ability to paint while on the water, thus giving an immediacy to his observation.

First of all, the sense of values in his paintings such as *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* and *Our River* was instrumental in enhancing the realism of space, movement and vigour. This role of values becomes clearer when we view the etching of the former (Fig. 1-3), in which the colour and texture of paint are absent and it is only light and dark that structure his drawing. The employment of strong values enabled Wyllie to render such contrasting elements as grime and glitter
in a play of air, light, and tides with ‘force and fidelity’.

The Magazine of Art critic in noting the strong contrasts of value in Wyllie’s art once pointed out that the sense of values was ‘so weak in the art of too many of his English contemporaries’. This comment could relate especially to representations of the Thames by such artists as Walter Greaves (1846-1930) and Paul Maitland (1863-1909), whose works were influenced by Whistler. Their paintings such as The Thames (Fig. 18) and Chelsea Embankment (Fig. 19) are discernibly close-valued and composed of flat lines and surfaces – in contrast to Wyllie’s images. As a result Greaves’s and Maitland’s pictures remain some of the most still views of the London river, whereas Wyllie’s are possibly the most dynamic images of the Thames in the history of art. Additionally, it might be noted that strong values were used in the late nineteenth century also by such marine painters as Henry Moore (1831-1895) and Charles Napier Hemy (1841-1917), as well as such English landscape painters as Keeley Halswelle (1832-1891), who chiefly studied the rural Upper Thames. Halswelle’s representation of the Thames, Tug and Timber-Barge (Fig. 20), exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1880, showcases the use of strong values to define the sense of the barge in tow and the wild weather; this is in a similar way to which Wyllie portrayed the surface of the moving river and the floating barges.

The prominent sense of movement in Wyllie’s representations of the Thames, while technically facilitated by the illustration of values, was a product of his long experience and study of the river and his faith in plein air practice. The artist’s early practice of drawing and painting on the French coast, combined with his keen

108 Graphic, 2 June 1883.
observation of nature and its atmosphere, continued to develop and were manifested in his rendering of tides, mists, sunsets, streams, winds and ships. The open-air effect of river and sky, the general freshness of his images — like ‘instantaneous photographs of nature’ according to The Times in 1881 — as contrasted with studio pictures, distinguished Wyllie’s work among his contemporaries, while his close observation and knowledge of nature in different conditions and of ships and shipping were widely noted in the critical reception.\textsuperscript{110} The Illustrated London News rated his ‘observant eye’ and ‘the habitually close and careful observation’ as distinguishing factors of Wyllie’s work;\textsuperscript{111} and the Magazine of Art viewed that his art was attained chiefly by ‘an unremitting study of nature’.\textsuperscript{112} Such critics as those of The Times and the Magazine of Art also assessed his work as ‘impressionist’ and ‘impressionistic’ respectively, by which they pointed to Wyllie’s emphasis on the freshness or snapshot-like effect of the overall image.\textsuperscript{113}

Those effects of Wyllie’s plein air painting and signs of his knowledge of nature and its atmosphere were particularly strong in his representations of the Thames, for which there were background reasons. Not only had the artist been a sailor all his life, but also after he married in 1879 Wyllie and his wife lived in the Medway Estuary and the artist worked from his yacht Ladybird. Whilst producing a flood of paintings and sketches, he observed and learned by heart the lower Thames as well as developing great skills of drawing and painting on board. Such experience as a sailor artist residing in the Thames Estuary would be manifested in his

\textsuperscript{110} The Times, 6 June 1881.
\textsuperscript{111} Illustrated London News, 12 May 1883.
\textsuperscript{112} Barnett, ‘By River and Sea’, p. 310.
\textsuperscript{113} The Times, 6 June 1881; Barnett, ‘By River and Sea’, p. 312.
representations of the river: firstly, Wyllie’s work represented the Thames at sites or from viewpoints rarely depicted or taken by other artists, since he was able to steer his yacht into different spots in the stream as he wished. This also meant that Wyllie witnessed and could capture the Thames in various lights, meteorological conditions and times of the day as his technical skills allowed. Thirdly, Wyllie’s skills in drawing and painting the river on the move was simply outstanding among contemporaries, who had neither his practical advantages nor his training.

Due to these particularities of his life and work, Wyllie’s representation of the Thames seemed to the contemporary spectator not only novel but also occasionally puzzling since some of his images presented aspects of the river which had been hitherto unseen in exhibition pictures. So much so it led critics to give contradictory analyses of the sites or times of the day his paintings represented. When *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* (Fig. 1) caused a sensation at the Royal Academy in 1883, critics produced an abundant amount of writing on the painting (in fact, it was the most successful landscape or marine picture that year, attracting the most notice). This body of criticism included various interpretations of the depicted site and the time of the day or year and the light or direction of wind in which his view was taken. Wyllie’s scene of the Pool with sunlight breaking through the masses of smog perplexed critics as four of them assumed four different times of the day. The *Athenaeum* regarded Wyllie’s view of the Pool as in ‘summer daylight’, while the *Graphic* saw ‘the light of early morning’ in the scene.¹¹⁴ For the *Illustrated London News* critic the glitter on Wyllie’s river was the reflection of ‘a meridian

¹¹⁴ *Athenaeum*, 16 June 1883, p. 769; *Graphic*, 2 June 1883.
sun’; however, it was ‘the descending sun’ making a path upon the water in the eyes of a reviewer for The Times. Even though the viewers could not always agree whether the sun was ascending or descending in Wyllie’s representations, they thrilled at seeing his views of the Thames because the atmosphere rendered appeared so naturalistic and vivid that they wanted to guess what Wyllie’s images might represent. The excitement might also be explained in part by the fact that a majority of spectators would not have seen the lower river in the different lights and meteorological conditions Wyllie represented, if at all (even if it was the principal artery of their country and empire).

Wyllie’s typical perspective at the level of a boat, combined with his aptitude of drawing and painting on board, was crucial to the effects of his representations. Most of the still views of the Thames, including Daubigny’s view of St Paul’s (Fig. 13), Roberts’s The Houses of Parliament from Millbank (Fig. 14), Dawson’s St Paul’s from the Thames (Fig. 15), and Grimshaw’s The Thames by Moonlight by Southwark Bridge (Fig. 17) had been taken from fixed viewpoints at a jetty east of Waterloo Bridge and opposite Strand, Millbank below Lambeth Bridge, Hibernia Wharf, and a landing stage in Southwark. Now let us consider Wyllie’s Our River (Fig. 11), Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide (Fig. 1), and London Bridge (Fig. 21), etching for the painting exhibited at the 1896 Academy (location unknown). The artist’s perspectives are in the middle rather than the banks of the river; and at the same time his foreground planes are filled with running barges and steam tugs, which remind the spectator that Wyllie’s viewpoints were on the deck of another boat. In a

115 Illustrated London News, 12 May 1883.
116 The Times, 16 May 1883.
117 London Bridge was reproduced in the Art Annual, 1907, p. 25.
drawing of the painting *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* composition in the Maritime Museum (Fig. 1-2) – which might either have been a preparatory drawing or, perhaps more likely, a drawing after the painting – Wyllie’s confident and simplified marks promote the idea of the artist working rapidly on the spot. Wyllie’s various studies of the Thames craft such as *Barges on the river with a bridge in the background* (Maritime Museum PAE4927) also show that he took advantage of having viewpoints unacquired by most other artists in the representation of the working, moving river. Wyllie’s viewpoint and its effects for the viewer being plunged into the midst of the activity and having a near experience of being on the river was extensively noted by contemporary critics, who attributed them as the most original and essential qualities of his work. H. V. Barnett, writing for the *Magazine of Art*, was typical when he wrote, ‘to glance at his pictures is to feel yourself on the sea or on the river’. 118 The critic also emphasised the novelty of Wyllie’s viewpoint by quoting Rossetti (probably the fellow critic William Michael), who according to Barnett said, ‘his view of things was new’. 119 The *Athenaeum* regarded Wyllie’s ‘power of drawing Nature on the move’ as one of the most distinguishing factors of Wyllie’s art.120

1.2 Wyllie’s Naturalism

Wyllie’s daring representations of the Thames which highlighted the modern regardless of the conventional ideals of riverscape painting owed significantly to the artist’s perspective from which he selected certain sites on the Thames to represent.

119 Ibid., p. 312.
This showed the depth and range of Wyllie’s knowledge of the river of his native city and, more importantly, his intent at constructing a particular aesthetic of the Thames, while distinguishing his work from most other contemporary representations of the river.

First of all, it was already in his particular choice of the Thames east of London Bridge instead of its western reaches that manifested Wyllie’s deliberate attempt at naturalist work. As examined in the Introduction the artistic representations of the urban Thames were largely concentrated on the river upstream of London Bridge. Reasons for this phenomenon were clear not only in terms of the conventional ideals of river scenes but also the contemporary states of those two parts of the London river. In the previous section we have seen how the lower river was contaminated and crowded with shipping. It was here the feverish loading and unloading of goods and materials of international commerce took place; the raw appearances of the physical working-class labour filled the view. Large ocean-going steamships which had become prevalent in the Port of London since the middle of the century ever intensified the level of pollution, bathing the area in smoke and blackening its surroundings. Moreover, the commercial riverfront of the eastern reaches through Billingsgate, St Katharine Docks, Wapping, Limehouse, Rotherhithe and Deptford was lined with such purpose-built structures as wharves and warehouses, which lacked architectural splendour. In the eyes of many contemporaries the eastern reaches of the Thames seemed ‘ugly’, ‘dismal’ or ‘mean’;¹²¹ Henry James for instance described its built landscape as ‘sordid’ looking and ‘utterly

The Lower Thames presented all the contaminated and crude faces of industrialisation and modernisation.

On the other hand, the Thames west of London Bridge, around Westminster, Whitehall and the Strand, displayed the prosperous and polished exteriors of the imperial metropolis. Particularly, the construction of the Victoria Embankment significantly improved the landscape of the north bank of the western stream. The Embankment, built under the direction of Joseph Bazalgette of the Metropolitan Board of Works to be completed in 1870, was widely celebrated and welcomed for its successful provision of a sewage system, the tunnel for the Metropolitan District Railway and the new roads relieving the congestion of the Strand and Fleet Street, as well as public gardens. Moreover, it formed a handsome stretch of the riverside, extending from Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars Bridge. Victorians regarded the structure as ‘a work of extraordinary magnitude and solidity’; and that it formed a ‘majestic and impressive’ façade ‘worthy’ of the metropolis; and enhanced the built landscape of the capital to an extent which allowed London to finally claim ‘architectural beauty’. Completed to incorporate such architecturally significant structures as the new Houses of Parliament and Somerset House, the north bank of the Thames west of London Bridge presented a grand landscape of the wealthiest city in the world.

122 H. James, English Hours, London 1960, p. 3. The essay first appeared in Lippincott’s Magazine in November 1877, and was reprinted in Portraits of Places (1883) and in English Hours (1905).
125 Ibid., p. 109.
126 Art Journal, 1871, p. 21.
Such a refurbishment of the capital drew both British topographical and continental modernist painters to the western reaches to represent the Thames. *The Embankment from Somerset House* by John O’Connor (1830-1889) in the Museum of London (1874; Fig. 22) presented an elevated image of the capital in the manner of Canaletto.\(^{127}\) Seen from the gardens of Somerset House, it displays the sweep of the new embankment along the Thames with the Queen’s Guard en route for the Tower of London as well as the newly rebuilt Blackfriars Bridge (1869), with St Paul’s Cathedral and Cannon Street Railway Station in the background. The painting celebrates the modernity of industry, engineering and metropolitan administration, as well as architectural grandeur (even smoke from factory chimneys, a steam train and boats elaborate the bright cityscape, while a mother, a baby and a child can safely play on the clean terrace of Somerset House). It was this impressive urbanism and architecture of the northern bank which impressed foreign visitors such as Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro (1830-1903). For his painting *The Thames below Westminster* (1871; Fig. 23), Monet positioned himself on or by the Embankment, near Whitehall, to depict silhouettes of the new Houses of Parliament and the recently completed Westminster Bridge (1862) in contrast with the jetty in the foreground casting shadows on the river. Monet’s interest in the modern is evident in this work: in the highlighted right-hand side of the canvas the new foliage of the trees on the Embankment and pedestrians enjoying the advanced civic infrastructure of the capital are visible, and the cityscape is represented in its fresh and vibrant outlook. The still incomplete St Thomas’s Hospital, paddle steamers and men

\(^{127}\) O’Connor’s composition could be seen as a modern version of Canaletto’s *The Thames from Somerset House Terrace towards the City* (c. 1750-51; Royal Collection 400504). The Victorian painter has taken not only nearly the same vantage point as Canaletto’s to frame his panoramic view but also used similarly bright tones and crisp details.
working on a wooden structure in the river add a sense of movement and progress. Pissarro, on the other hand, delineated more well-known structures of London in his wide canvas *Charing Cross Bridge, London* (1890; Fig. 24).\(^{128}\) The view is taken from Waterloo Bridge, showing a series of the symbolic buildings including the Houses of Parliament, with Westminster Hall and Abbey, Whitehall Court and Cleopatra’s Needle (erected in 1878), behind which the Embankment Gardens with a line of neatly planted trees are visible. As in Monet’s painting, the city is seen in its freshened shape and Londoners are enjoying the benefit of modern transportation.

What is notable in these representations of the western reaches of the urban Thames is their foci on well-known structures and emphasis on the sanitised aspects of the cityscape, showing the benefits of modernisation while omitting its downsides. For example, while Pissarro’s *Charing Cross Bridge, London* depicts paddle steamers, the painting excludes their smoke in its brightly coloured, harmonious image of the cityscape. *View of the Thames: Charing Cross Bridge* (Fig. 25) by Alfred Sisley (1839-99) is similar in this matter.\(^{129}\) His painting of London’s riverscape shows the iron lattice girders of the railway bridge (re-opened in 1864) with the dome of St Paul’s in the background, seen from a jetty on the river’s south bank opposite Whitehall. While Sisley shows paddle steamers as well as clouds of smoke fuming out of them in the mid-ground, the artist presents smoke in white, as if the environmental pollutants were clean and harmless. It is possible, from the examination of these representations, to see why such topographical painters as

\(^{128}\) This was one of the six works in the two representations of the Thames Pissarro began in London during his stay in the summer of 1890. The other image of the river was *Battersea Bridge, Chelsea*. See *Pissarro: Critical Catalogue of Paintings*, vol. 3, Paris 2005, pp. 580-85.

\(^{129}\) The painting, currently on loan at the National Gallery, was the only scene of the river the artist executed during the summer of 1874 when he produced several canvases near Hampton Court.
O’Connor and the French Impressionists would have represented the Thames in its western reaches for their characteristically pleasant, rather superficial and postcard-like images of the modern Thames. We can see, on the other hand, how Wyllie’s naturalist aesthetic of filth and smoke, and the ordinary – raw sides of the modern – suited his chosen subject the dirty commercial downriver.

A second point about Wyllie’s naturalism relates to the artist’s disregard of the conventional symbols of the Thames and his replacement of well-known structures by the ordinary. This emphasis on the mundane distinguished his work visibly from the others while liberating his work from conventions of painting the Thames. The above representations by O’Connor and the Impressionists were typical among the majority of the nineteenth-century images of the Thames as well as preceding representations, in basing their composition around such landmarks as the Palace of Westminster and St Paul’s Cathedral. In fact, St Paul’s was such a staple element in views of London that it was considered as an object not to be left out in the painting of the capital. A critic for the Magazine of Art wrote in 1881:

> Certain scenes can only be expressed in connection with objects which are known to belong to them. Turner felt this so strongly that he held it to be impossible to paint Oxford without the Bodleian, and argued that, in painting London, it would be a fatal error to omit the introduction of St Paul’s.130

This landscape convention prevailed from the times of Canaletto and Turner up to the end of the nineteenth century, when such representations as Nightfall Down the Thames (Fig. 26) by Atkinson Grimshaw, The Pool of London (Fig. 2) by George

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Vicat Cole (1833-1893) and The Pool of London (Fig. 27) by W. J. Baker (active in the mid to late nineteenth century) were typically centred round St Paul’s.

Wyllie’s disregard of such conventions in painting the Thames was particularly notable in his major exhibits. Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide (Fig. 1), specifically avoided St Paul’s and instead positioned his view downstream towards Greenwich. His alternative inclusion of the two domes of the Royal Naval College in the background (Fig. 1-1) was faint enough to confuse a reviewer, who questioned if the depicted river might be ‘the Tyne, or some other northern stream’. While, for this particular painting, Wyllie might have wanted to emphasise his rhetorical message encapsulated in the title rather than the specific site itself, the artist seldom composed his major works around typical views. Our River (Fig. 11) is completely without any known structures, which makes it more or less impossible to identify the represented site, except that it is somewhere in the Lower Thames, judging from the depicted scene of shipping and the title. Another example is Showery Day. Greenwich Reach (Fig. 28), which presents a view of Greenwich on its industrial east side – instead of the magnificent royal site which was traditionally favoured, as Canaletto’s well-known painting Greenwich Hospital (c. 1752; NMM) exemplifies. In the evasion of expected symbols and the shift of typical viewpoints Wyllie broke away from pictorial convention and set his images apart from others’. He positioned himself as a different and perhaps ‘modern’ artist, triggering the contemporary spectator’s curiosity. He also, more importantly, proposed other ways of viewing the Thames.

131 The Times, 16 May 1883.
Such varied viewpoints from which Wyllie depicted the Thames were part of his strategies to construct his own naturalist aesthetic of the Thames, which displayed the squalor and toil of the modern, workaday Port of London. It is important to note here how such a conception of the river was vitally linked to his ability as a marine painter, examined in the previous section of this chapter. So when the artist titled his work as London Bridge (Fig. 21) and took his view from a distance in the middle of the river, while pushing the historic structure into the background of the composition, Wyllie had produced the image on board his yacht.

A final point about Wyllie’s naturalism is his focus on the scene of shipping. While the artist avoided the expected symbols of the Thames or merely indicated them in the background of his views of the lower river, Wyllie placed scenes of shipping in the foreground of his compositions. This is notable in his Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide (Fig. 1), in which the grand domes of the Royal Naval College are seen only indistinctly in the background while the view of shipping and human labour in particular, occupies the foreground prominently. Wyllie’s emphasis on shipping might be seen in relation to the composition of paintings of rivers by the seventeenth-century Dutch artists, as we have seen, as well as those by the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British marine painters. However, Wyllie’s adaptation of an element of marine painting was shrewd; and his naturalist approach distinguished his work from the predecessors’. In contrast to the formulaic role of maritime labourers in Cuyp’s ordered planes or to Scott’s and Cleveley the Elder’s

132 These include Samuel Scott, John Cleveley the Elder, John Thomas Serres, Thomas Luny and J. M. W. Turner.
focus on the splendour of ships in lieu of scenes of labour, in Wyllie’s images the working river, men and their vigorous craft are given a sense of actuality and momentum, highlighting the ordinary rather the grand, as exemplified in the works analysed in following sections.

1.3 Our River, 1882

Among Wyllie’s first exhibits representing the Lower Thames, Our River (Fig. 11) was one of the most notable in that it set the tone of his particular aesthetic of the river in public. The large painting was shown at the Royal Academy in 1882 along with his The Port of London, and was promptly bought by the South Australian Government for the newly established Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (1881). Although previously Wyllie had shown canvases of the lower reaches and Estuary of the Thames such as The Goodwins (1874), Coming up on the Flood (1880), Beckton Gasworks (1881) and The Rochester River (1881) at the Academy, it was with the two exhibits of 1882 that the artist came to be critically noted for his expert portrayals of shipping and pollution in the Lower Thames. Our River presents a view of the downriver at a site difficult to identify; the mere suggestion of the iron buoy and the slight bit of shoreline to the right of the image seems to match up with no known location in the lower river. It represents large sailing and steam vessels in the background and the buoy and barges in the mid- to foreground. The overall composition is intensely smoky and even steamy; yet the exquisite light of dawn or evening fills the canvas with light blue and orange tones. The painting encapsulated a number of things Wyllie’s work was to be remembered by in the years to come: a
mysterious site in the Lower Thames, masterly marine art and the romance of the contaminated, workaday modern river.

Contemporary critics noted the novelty of Wyllie’s subject and treatment of it. It was sometimes with a touch of curiosity over how his rather wonderful image of the river was achieved and its peculiarly real effect of atmosphere. The *Art Journal*, for example, wrote in its first mention on *Our River*, ‘a very clever study of the various smokes and steam which go to make up the atmosphere of the Lower Thames in November. Some barges are being towed up the middle of the river, and a lurid sun peeps through a break in the vapour below’,¹³³ and later claimed, ‘there are not many works in the collection [the 1882 summer exhibition] which equal them [*Our River* and *The Port of London*] in rendering an original subject in a masterly fashion’¹³⁴. The *Spectator*, writing on the other, now lost, painting, *The Port of London*, noted ‘beauty’ and ‘poetry’ of Wyllie’s work, which would recur in its reception in the 1880s: ‘one of the finest Thames pictures we have ever seen – full of beauty and truth, and dim, smoky poetry, such as befits the name’.¹³⁵

Such comments indicated a change in critical attitudes towards Wyllie’s work since the artist at the age of 18 showed his *London from the Monument* in 1870 when critics viewed his delineation of London’s smoke and its tarnished river as being ‘undoubtedly clever’, ‘noteworthy’, ‘unconventional’ and yet ‘disagreeable’.¹³⁶ Twelve years later Wyllie’s rendering of the murky river was viewed as possessing

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¹³³ *Art Journal*, 1882, p. 179.
¹³⁵ *Spectator*, 1 July 1882, p. 864.
¹³⁶ *Athenaeum*, 28 May 1870, p. 713; *Art Journal*, 1870, p. 162.
beauty and ‘a touch of poetry’.\textsuperscript{137} This shift in the reception of his work could be explained by the influence of various changes over the past decade in the visual arts as well as in the general perception of the city, which would have affected critical attitudes towards representations of the urban landscape: the rise of Whistler’s art and its impact in Britain; the increasing awareness of continental, especially French, art manifested by native artists and critics who had been educated there; expatriate artists working in Britain; the reshaping cityscape of London; and shifting attitudes to the urban environment. Changes in Wyllie’s manner in dealing with and presenting Thames subjects since the artist painted the urban river the last time were, however, more easily identifiable.

Around the time Wyllie exhibited \textit{London from the Monument} at the Royal Academy, the young artist painted at least another view of the Thames, \textit{A View of the Shot Tower from Waterloo Bridge} (1871; Fig. 29). It represents the industrial, metropolitan river in effective penumbras and \textit{contre-jour}, delineating the polluted capital and its river vividly, as in \textit{London from the Monument}. Notable differences between these works and \textit{Our River} of 1882 are in the compositions and titles (colours are difficult to compare because for the 1870 and 1871 paintings in private collections we have only black and white reproductions). The two earlier works depict scenes of the Thames from the distant viewpoints from which the artist observed the river, especially seen in comparison with \textit{Our River}. For the latter Wyllie positioned himself at the closest possible quarter to represent the workaday Thames: figures are seen more clearly than in silhouettes as in \textit{A View of the Shot

\textsuperscript{137} The Times, 6 June 1881.
Tower from Waterloo Bridge, and their dynamic movements and presence are evident here. It is discernible that the artist was at the same level as the bargees, and this in turn provides the spectator with a close sense of participating in the depicted scene, thus enhancing the naturalism of the representation. Such reduced distance between the represented scene and the artist as well as the viewer in *Our River* could be analysed in parallel with the title of the painting.

Unlike the titles of the paintings from the 1870s, which indicate specific sites of representation, *Our River* is a rhetorical title with no direct reference to the site. ‘Our river’ could be any stream depending on the audience. While it is possible to presume that it is the Thames from the fact that it was a British artist who showed this work for the first time at the key exhibition venue of the British capital, and it is also apparent that the depicted part of the Thames is its lower reach below London Bridge from the forest of large ships, barges and thick layers of smoke, Wyllie’s title is noteworthy in that he makes the claim in the title as an assumption of clarity. The understanding of the shared knowledge that does not need to be spoken explicitly is implicit in ‘our river’. Wyllie’s assumptions included the following: first, that the people looking at the painting would acknowledge some ownership of the river, even if they could not recognise a specific location and if (as was likely) they were a different social class from the working men represented in the foreground. Second, that such an acknowledgement had a binding force, either metropolitan (London-centred) or national. By the means of his title, Wyllie was asking the public to buy in to an idea of national identity. Through such a collective rhetoric and the close-up
view of the working river, the artist called for the engagement of visitors of the Academy’s annual summer exhibition in his scene of the English Thames.

The title *Our River* was notable as being the first among his other rhetorical titles referring to the Lower Thames such as *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* (1883), *Black Diamonds* (1883) and *River of Gold* (1885). It is highly possible that, in beginning this sequence, Wyllie consciously appropriated the same title by another artist. In the previous year, a Royal Academician, George Dunlop Leslie (1835-1931), published a book entitled *Our River*.138 This book, illustrated with the artist’s own works and other images by fellow Royal Academicians including Briton Rivière (1840-1920), would have been very likely known to Wyllie, the ambitious young artist and future Academician. If we assume that he had known about Leslie’s book, Wyllie’s work could be interpreted on another level as the two representations of the Thames form a great contrast in their foci on and notions of the English Thames and the ways in which they envisaged the river.

Leslie’s *Our River* (1881) presented images of the rural Upper Thames of willowy banks and sedgy backwaters with special emphasis on Henley, the regatta and punting – the subject which would be explored in Jerome K. Jerome’s humorous account, *Three Men in a Boat* (1889) – without any suggestion that the river flows through London’s heart.139 The book focused entirely on the aspects of nature, picturesqueness and leisure of the Thames, which contrasted sharply with Wyllie’s representation of the urban, polluted and workaday river downstream. Though in

139 Aaron Watson made a critical point about Leslie’s complete disregard of the other, workaday side of the Thames in his article, ‘The Lower Thames I’, *Magazine of Art*, 1883, pp. 485-92.
outlook Leslie’s book was a personal memoir about his time on the Upper Thames, the volume conveyed and re-affirmed the widely loved traditional image of the rural Thames, which also had particular resonance for the critics of industrial modernity in the nineteenth century. For his love of its idyllic beauty, Leslie was not hesitant to express his regrets about the recent changes affecting what he called ‘the upper reaches of our noble river’. The author wrote in his preface to the book:

… I should not have undertaken such a work, had I not been lately much stirred by feelings of melancholy indignation at many changes which I have witnessed taking place on the river banks – changes which, though perhaps necessary and unavoidable, are nevertheless slowly but surely destroying the simplicity, the picturesqueness, and the natural beauty so highly prized by artistic river lovers… … other changes to be noticed that have not the plea of necessity in their favour, such as the sewage pollution, the steam-launch nuisance, the erection of ugly bridges and vulgar houses, &c., about which I felt it might not be altogether useless to write in terms of condemnation.

Leslie’s focus on the destructive and degenerating influences of change expressed his pessimism about modernisation; the old, natural and simple Thames and its barges were being ruined by increasingly large crowds and luxury steam launches. His nostalgic take was, however, itself based on a leisurely boat-trip from Putney to Oxford, creating a vision of a preserved river in a vacuum – for the leisured classes.

Wyllie, working at the site of working-class labour, focused on those very things that Leslie hated – filth, modern technology and ‘ugly’ architecture – but he saw as a necessary and unavoidable aspect of a modern, progressive world. His use of the

141 Ibid., p. viii. 
142 Indeed the Thames Valley went through profound changes during the nineteenth century with the coming of the railways in the 1840s. The easier and affordable access led to its development as London’s new playground and social scene. See R. R. Bolland, Victorians on the Thames, Tunbridge Wells 1994.
same title for his painting of the smoky lower river formed a challenge to Leslie’s focus on the established rural view of the English Thames. By calling the dirty, workaday river ‘our river’ the artist intended not only to tackle modernity, which the senior Academician turned away from in his representation, but also to assert different notions of and ways of viewing the national river. Wyllie’s approach to the subject was to display the vices as well as virtues of the contemporary Thames, in its most modernised, polluted, chaotic and complex tributaries. Wyllie’s *Our River* challenged the audience to look at another part of the English river and see what meanings that might have for themselves and the nation as a whole. The following review of Wyllie’s representations of the downriver by the *Magazine of Art* (1884) interpreted the Thames Wyllie depicted as the following:

The Thames Mr. Wyllie paints is the Thames as it is, with all its grime and much of its wonder, all its business and something of its pathos, and suggestions of its contrasts of hurry and rest, its minglings of dignity and degradation, its material embodiment of British supremacy and prosperity, and its enormous testimonies to the dark romance of these coal-and-iron times.143

This reading of Wyllie’s work relates its naturalism with capitalist Victorian Britain. His presentation of the national river not only articulated the contrasting aspects of modernity but also projected its role in the shaping of the current age, in which Britain was the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world, to the contemporary audience.

If Wyllie’s portrayal of the Lower Thames signified a defence of his own age and its capitalist modernity as opposed to Leslie’s escapism, meanings of Wyllie’s work become even clearer in a comparison with the contemporary critique of industrial capitalism by William Morris. The author, designer and socialist, whose progressive vision of an ideal society had shaped under the influence of *The Stones of Venice* by John Ruskin, its central chapter on ‘The Nature of Gothic’ (1853) in particular, criticised Victorian Britain in terms of ‘the predominant ugliness of modern life’, the labour conditions of the working class and the degeneracy of public taste.\textsuperscript{144} Morris’s criticism of the present was more than escapist however because it asserted the possibility of a better world. For him the Thames not only epitomised the misery and filth of capitalist society, but also embodied an ideal, Arcadian past, which he believed had existed and to which he looked to construct, in imagination, a paradisal world. In his *News from Nowhere* (1890) the tale of a journey up the Thames across time and place, the final destination ‘the old house by the Thames’ set in 2102 typified a revived rural England (having undergone the struggles of Morris’s day and a revolution in 1952), whose present was in harmony with its ancient past; and the house itself, built in a vernacular style out of local stone, symbolised for Morris a way of living, building and working in harmony with nature – clear of the drudgery of the working class and extreme urban poverty in Victorian Britain.\textsuperscript{145} His dream of an ideal past, an alternative future, was to criticise the present; and vice versa.

\textsuperscript{145} *News from Nowhere, or An Epoch of Rest*, which Morris called ‘A Utopian Romance’, was serialised in the Socialist League’s newspaper, the *Commonweal*, in 1890 and published in book form in Boston, 1890, and London, 1891.
In marked contrast to Morris’s idealist approach to the present (with its somewhat revolutionary, socialist implications), the purpose of Wyllie’s representation of the English river was to grasp and show the present so as to suggest different angles from which what Morris considered the filthy and vicious epoch might be viewed. Wyllie’s approach to the present was conciliatory or naïve in its lack of criticism, but ‘modern’ in its audacity of revealing such a conflicting age – wealthy and ferocious, developed and defiled – in art. Moreover, his ‘truthful representation of one of the grimmest aspects of modern life’, in a critic’s expression, came to envisage ‘beauty’, ‘picturesqueness’ in the contemporary critical reception.\(^{146}\) Even those who regarded Wyllie’s unseemly subject and images of the dirty Thames as a new ‘class of subjects’ and ‘peculiar class of painting’ acknowledged that Wyllie’s aesthetic rendered ‘a touch of poetry’.\(^{147}\) In reviewing his *Black Diamonds* of 1883 (Fig. 4), a scene of tier after tier of dumb barges laden with coal, *The Times* wrote that Wyllie had ‘seen the picturesqueness of the lower river and perceived that even coal smoke and coal barges may be treated at once imaginatively and with truth’.\(^{148}\) Other critics wrote that ‘poetic insight into commonplace and even repellent aspects’ was characteristic of Wyllie’s work;\(^{149}\) and compared his achievement to William Wordsworth’s sonnet on Westminster Bridge (1802) and Charles Dickens’s mid-century novels, which were created likewise through imaginations that had been ‘stirred by the traffic and the life of London’.\(^{150}\)

\(^{146}\) *Standard*, 17 December 1883. There were many critics who pointed out such ‘poetic’ or ‘imaginative’ qualities of Wyllie’s work. See the *Spectator*, 1 July 1882, p. 864; *The Times*, 17 December 1883.

\(^{147}\) *The Times*, 17 December 1883; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 December 1883. *The Times*, 6 June 1881.

\(^{148}\) *The Times*, 17 December 1883.

\(^{149}\) *Glasgow Herald*, 27 December 1883.

\(^{150}\) *Standard*, 17 December 1883. Wordsworth’s ‘Composed upon Westminster Bridge’ was first published in the collection, *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807). The parallel between Wyllie and Wordsworth and Dickens, instead of Wyllie’s late Victorian contemporaries such as George Gissing,
According to these reviews of Wyllie’s paintings, he was able to communicate that the modern was not necessarily horrible and ugly but could be beautiful when seen in different lights, in his representations of the Thames. Especially, in promoting the idea of national identity in his title *Our River* (Fig. 11), Wyllie seems to have made a deliberate attempt at a beautified and even mystified version of the murky English Thames. The large composition is filled with light blue and orange tones, the exquisite effects of sunlight of dawn or evening, and the delicate rendering of smoke and steam. H. V. Barnett’s article in the *Magazine of Art* of 1884 shows how Wyllie's image of the national river projected a ‘mysterious dream’, romanticising the Port of London:151

It presents, with much fidelity and feeling, a scene below bridge at early morning, such few but artists of Wyllie’s stamp, and the people of the river and the docks, ever see. The genuine London fog we all know, unfortunately; but the early morning fog of the Thames below bridge is to most of us a raw mysterious dream. Here it is, however, even as in life, with its copper-colours sun on the horizon, and ghostly calm and drift. In the foreground disorderly barges blundering out of dock; further off a tall ship gliding to her resting-place, her sailors on the yards furling the canvas for a spell in the greatest port in the world. One of the best things that Mr. Wyllie has done, this picture greatly enhanced his reputation. It takes a leading place in the collection of South Australian Institute, for which it was bought by the Government of New South Wales; and in the nature of things it must needs be popular with our colonial cousins, for whom it reproduces sights which many remember and traditions which all admire.152

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152 Ibid.
For the British contemporaries Wyllie’s misty spectacle of the modern stream captured a noble sight of their national river and great imperial port. It reminded them that the Lower Thames was ‘once grim and splendid’;¹⁵³ that it was hectic and polluted and yet it embodied the constructing forces and global influences of mercantile Britain.

There are noteworthy aspects in Our River as well as Black Diamonds which might have fulfilled late Victorian values and drawn such positive reviews: the rhetoric of collectivism in the title; viewpoints from which the viewer could acquire a sense of participation in the depicted scene; and a certain flirtation to indicate an approval of the on-going capitalist enterprise, through the usage of attractive colours and the metaphor of ‘diamonds’ for coal. Furthermore, the workers are neither subject to the mechanical drudgery Morris deplored nor in the terrible conditions which we will see in depictions of the East End in Chapter 2; they are portrayed as a dynamic force in the great imperial port, set in what seemed like ‘a raw mysterious dream’ in the eye of the Magazine of Art’s critic. Embodying enduring Victorian values such as work and trade that bound the Empire together, Our River presented an image to which the majority of British contemporaries would subscribe and national values worthy of being projected throughout the Empire.

1.4 Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide, 1883

Wyllie’s only exhibit at the Royal Academy of 1883 was a large painting of shipping in the Thames below London Bridge near the Isle of Dogs (Fig. 1). The canvas, which measured more than one metre by one and a half metres, presented a view of the tarnished river, on which a large variety of ships including steamers fouling the sky in the background, and men at work on a coal-laden barge and a tug boat in the foreground are seen. The painting was also accompanied by a distinctly long and expressive title, *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide*. The image encapsulated it through the display of the various aspects of the commercial river and the pictorial play of the contrasting elements and values. ‘Toil’ was prominent in the working men on the lighter and the tug in the foreground, in contrast with ‘wealth’, which was suggested throughout the canvas – the splendour of great ships in the background, coal in the lighter in the foreground, and the line of warehouses on the Isle of Dogs in the left-hand side of the picture. The sunlight had been dimmed by ‘grime’ and smoke from steamships; and yet through the clouds and vapour the sun broke to throw a ‘glitter’, forming lustrous silver sheen on the surface of the filthy water, which in turn reflected the overcast sky.

Wyllie’s splendid painting of the grimy Thames was the most prominent work in the landscape section of that annual summer exhibition and one of the most successful pictures of the year, causing a sensation among critics and the Academicians being purchased out of the Chantrey Fund for the nation (now in the collection of Tate Britain). It was hailed as ‘most impressive’, ‘one of the most powerful pictures of the
to the London river in a most comprehensive and thrilling manner, which displayed its varied aspects of shipping and atmosphere through contrasts. Given that the artist had been showing images of the Lower Thames and the Estuary since 1870s, *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* was prominent enough for a critic to conclude that it was a major contribution to ‘his series of the representations of the Thames pool’ – the kind of support that would encourage Wyllie to continue the sequence in the following years.\footnote{F. Fowle, ‘Summary of *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide*’, Tate Online 2000.}

Some of the characteristic features of the painting included the range of ships it represented and the viewpoint from which it depicted the Thames. Firstly, the variety of ships Wyllie’s work covered was notably large in comparison with other contemporary representations of the Thames. On the far left of the canvas a stumpie barge with a low mast and a two-masted ketch are seen; and behind them are the tall masts of a brig, which has been brought into dry dock. At the right-hand side of the picture a passenger steamer with two funnels, a full-rigged ship, and the steam ship – tallest at centre – are found. In the fore- to mid-ground, the steam tug and the lighters carrying the cargoes of coal and timber are prominent. Wyllie’s image formed a virtual gallery of ships of different functions and roles in the Port of London. The

\footnote{154 *Athenaeum*, 16 June 1883, p. 769.}
\footnote{155 *Illustrated London News*, 12 May 1883.}
large ocean-going steamers suggested the modernity of maritime technology and the
distances which they travelled, the extent of British trade and empire. Such smaller
vessels in the foreground were noteworthy in the sense that the artist could depict
working men on them, emphasising the aspect of human toil in shipping, and that
such boats were more or less new in artistic representations, which formerly
concentrated on the more decorative types of ships.\textsuperscript{157} Wyllie’s wide coverage of the
aspects of shipping in the Lower Thames not only reflected his keen nautical interest
and extensive experience of working on the river, but also revealed his principal
view of the Thames as an artery of the maritime trading empire.

Secondly, the vantage point from which Wyllie viewed and framed the Port of
London was distinct. We have examined earlier in section 2 in this chapter how
Wyllie avoided the well-known structures and focused on the mundane and aspects
of shipping in his portrayals of the modern, workaday Thames. \textit{Toil, Glitter, Grime
and Wealth on a Flowing Tide} looks towards Greenwich with the Isle of Dogs to the
left; it evaded expected symbols or sites in the artistic representations of the Thames
and, moreover, the way in which the depicted site was indicated was very elusive.
The painting specifies the direction of its view by the two domes of the Royal Naval
College in the exact centre of the horizon within the composition. One is seen behind
the rigging of the ship that is located next to the funnel of the tug in the foreground.
The other is easily discernible to the right of the same rigging (Fig. 1-1). The title is
not at all explicit about the site, and a majority of the contemporary audience did not
recognise it, judging from the critical reviews of the painting appeared in news,

\textsuperscript{157} E. H. H. Archibald notes Wyllie’s wide coverage of ships and aspects of the river as something of
an innovation, which set a fashion that other artists followed, in \textit{Dictionary of Sea Painters},
Woodbridge 2000, p. 204.
literary, and art periodicals including The Times, Athenaeum and the Magazine of Art. Though the artist’s attempt at composing his representation of the Thames differently from others and free from conventions was not recognised, Wyllie’s specific viewpoint for his ambitious exhibit was significant, when analysed in terms which relate to Wyllie’s background and work.

Wyllie was not only a marine painter whose nautical background formed his art, but also one whose artistic career closely engaged with the imperial project: he worked for such shipping companies as the Orient Line, Union Castle Line and White Star Line producing posters and ship portraits including that of the first armed merchant cruiser SS Teutonic (1889). The Royal Navy also commissioned Wyllie to represent several naval events including Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee (1897). Moreover, as his major works including Our River, the exhibition and publication The Tidal Thames (1884), and the book London to the Nore (1905) so forcefully showed, Wyllie acknowledged and portrayed the Thames as the national river and imperial port more than anything. In the context of such a background as Wyllie’s, the Baroque buildings in Greenwich in Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide could have potent meanings. The buildings designed by Christopher Wren and built together with Nicholas Hawksmoor on the ground of a former royal palace between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century were originally the premises of the Royal Naval Hospital. The joint monarchs William III and Mary II’s establishment of the Hospital for seamen after the Glorious Revolution in 1688 signified the nation’s promise of its own defence and naval expansion, and aimed to
promote England’s ‘Trade, Navigation and Naval Strength’.

Wren’s architecture symbolised some of the foundations and development of the maritime empire and, furthermore, its continuity. Since 1873, after the naval pensioners left the Hospital in exchange for an annuity, the Royal Naval College occupied the historic buildings with updated aims and educational objectives. The new College at Greenwich sought to provide naval officers with the highest possible scientific education as part of the scheme to reinforce the Navy in the mounting rivalry with the naval services of such countries as France, Russia, and the United States. The College signalled the modernity of the Royal Navy and the Empire’s determination to continue and prepare for its future. In placing the Naval College in the centre of the background of Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide, Wyllie would have seen the relation between the symbolism of the architecture and shipping in his image, and might have intended to convey an imperial link between them as well as the continuity of the maritime empire.

Another aspect of Greenwich and Wren’s and Hawksmoor’s buildings, which Wyllie would have been well aware of, relates to their art historical associations, in particular regard to Turner. Turner’s association with the site could have a potent meaning in Wyllie’s work given Wyllie’s knowledge and admiration of the master and his art. Wyllie admired Turner’s work greatly throughout his own artistic development as a landscape and marine painter, in which the predecessor’s

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159 The Admiralty minute published on 17 January 1873 said that the Board ‘desire, by the establishment of the College, to give to the executive officers of the Navy generally every possible advantage in respect of scientific education’. See The Times, 18 January 1873.
influences were clear. Furthermore, as a marine painter Wyllie would have considered himself continuing the tradition of British marine painting in which Turner’s contribution was considerable, and at the same time in competition with the master so as to represent his own age in his work. Turner’s link to Greenwich had been known: his famed representation of the site, *London* (1809; Tate Britain), was the most renowned representation of the subject by a British artist and was widely reiterated and discussed. Also, his controversial piece *The Battle of Trafalgar, 21 October 1805* (1805) was hung at the Naval Gallery in the King William Building of Wren and Hawksmoor’s complex, which was established in 1823 as the first national gallery of art – preceding the National Gallery of 1824 – to commemorate achievements of the Royal Navy through the collection of paintings and sculptures. Wyllie would have been aware of such legacies of Turner in Greenwich. Later Wyllie’s biography of Turner (1905) would discuss and reproduce *London*, and eulogise *The Battle of Trafalgar, 21 October 1805*.160

To consider Wyllie’s work in this context of his conscious awareness of Turner and his legacy relating to Greenwich, a comparison could be drawn between *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* and Turner’s *London* (Fig. 69). While we might remind ourselves of the fact that both Turner and Wyllie were marine painters from London and they were common in viewing their native city in connection with the Navy and Britain’s maritime empire, it is useful to note differences in the viewpoints from which they represented their subjects, and in foci and symbolism. In representing London and its river Turner chose a distant point of view in Greenwich

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Park, framing his uncertain view of the agitated and polluted metropolis in the poise and grandeur of the royal park and its historic architecture. By contrast, Wyllie emphasised the vicious present in place of the virtuous past. His scene of shipping is taken at a closest possible quarter while the splendid domes of Greenwich are seen in the background. Wyllie’s illumination of the dirty, modern, working river is, however, noteworthy in its visible link to Greenwich; the prominent scene of shipping in the foreground is on the central axis drawn between the two domes of the Naval College. This could be interpreted as an indication of Wyllie’s recognition of the present in relation to the past Greenwich symbolised. The old Naval Hospital and current Naval College, even though indistinctly viewed, insisted the spectator to explore the painting, work out the location, and draw conclusions about the longevity of Britain’s maritime power from the grand Stuart past to the grimy Victorian present.

The fact that the scene of labour occupies the most prominent place in Wyllie’s composition of the Thames shipping with splendid vessels looking towards magnificent Greenwich could also imply Wyllie’s emphasis on the value of collective and continuous labour in the greatness and wealth of the Port of London and the maritime empire. Such reading would be in line with the title, *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide*, in which a capitalist – even a moral – link between ‘toil’ and ‘wealth’ is suggested. Indeed Wyllie’s highlighting of labour was visible and formed a key theme in many of his representations of the Lower Thames from the 1880s, including *Our River* (Fig. 11) and *The Highway of Nations* (Fig.
Such works as *Workaday England* (Fig. 3), shown at the Academy in 1886, also testify to Wyllie’s interest in men at work within views of commerce, shipping and industry. Looking across the busy Medway to the teeming Thames, Wyllie’s painting places a scene of manual labour prominently in the foreground, highlighting human toil, in a view which looks towards the mechanised world of steamers, shipbuilding yards, and factories, seen beyond the diagonal running from the bottom left to top right within the composition. Wyllie’s scene of the ‘golden’ time of afternoon was noted as much for its picturesqueness as for muscular industrial labour. This image signals an optimistic outlook on industrial capitalism and modernisation, seeing the new in a continuation of the old – just as Wyllie’s viewpoint for *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* articulated the idea of continuity.

Wyllie’s emphasis on labour in his representations of the Thames in the 1880s might also be situated within the contemporary contexts of such emerging socialist and other protest movements as the establishment of Fabian Society (1884) and Socialist League (1885), and of course London Dock Strike (1889), as well as critiques of industrial capitalism and modernity, including those by Ruskin and Morris. In viewing Wyllie’s palpable portrayals of the working-class labour in the light of these social and political contexts, one might argue that Wyllie attempted to bring out socialist ideals, challenging liberal market capitalism. It is however unlikely that Wyllie was resistant to capitalism and modernisation for several reasons. First of all, as mentioned earlier, Wyllie himself endorsed Britain’s liberal trading empire

161 The painting *The Highway of Nations* (location unknown) was exhibited at the Academy in the year Wyllie was elected ARA, 1889.
162 *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 10 May 1886.
through the engagement with merchant shipping companies as well as the Navy; the artist was both a supporter of British capitalism and beneficiary of its economy. Secondly, Wyllie’s positive portrayals of the mechanised and polluted Thames as well as labour in such images as Workaday England (Fig. 3) suggest his sanguine attitudes towards modernisation and almost naïve belief in the capitalist system, with which the working man is in harmony. Thirdly, it is noteworthy that labour as well as the modernised Port of London, as depicted in Wyllie’s images, were read in the critical reception as factors contributing to the nation’s pre-eminence. As the Magazine of Art declared in its article devoted to Wyllie’s work in 1884:

The Thames Mr. Wyllie paints is … with all its grime and much of its wonder, all its business and something of its pathos, and suggestions of its contrasts of hurry and rest, its minglings of dignity and degradation, its material embodiment of British supremacy and prosperity, and its enormous testimonies to the dark romance of these coal-and-iron times.163

Here shipping and industrial and technological modernity in Wyllie’s Thames are romanticised to instil nationalist sentiments. In such respects the title Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide could be also analysed as the rhetoric of capitalism. The values of human ‘toil’ and ‘grime’ from pollution – the process of production – are merged with the benefits of capitalism, ‘glitter’ and ‘wealth’. These latter, the results of such process, are recognised as causes of Britain’s power and prosperity. While we cannot be sure whether the ways in which Wyllie’s representations of the workaday, modern Thames were viewed and interpreted at the time corresponded with the artist’s original intention, the fact that he continued to

exhibit similar titles throughout the late nineteenth century could suggest that he was in line with such critical readings of his work.

If Wyllie’s emphasis on labour in his representations of the Thames manifested his support for capitalist modernity, *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* (Fig. 1) would form an interesting contrast with *The Pool of London* (Fig. 2) by George Vicat Cole, exhibited five years later in 1888. The senior Royal Academician’s painting presented a view of the Thames looking upstream towards St Paul’s in a composition twice as large as Wyllie’s in scale (195 x 305.5 cm). Apart from the different viewpoints from which Cole and Wyllie represented the Port of London, visible differences are found in composition and the ways in which aspects of shipping are portrayed. Firstly, in Cole’s painting such conventional symbols of grandeur and historical markers as St Paul’s and the Tower of London occupy the near centre of the canvas, and they are further highlighted by a shaft of dramatic light, leaving the rest of the composition of shipping in darkness and nearly consumed by the billowing clouds of smoke and pollution. The Thames of the day appears to be in a near apocalypse, while the magnificent symbols of the past are illuminated. This contrasts visibly with Wyllie’s image, in which strong contrasts of value are played out throughout the dirty, working river, accentuating the sense of life in the scene. Secondly, the relation between the human and technological sides of shipping is treated very differently in the two works. While impressive large ships filled Wyllie’s splendid background, in the foreground the artist depicted figures on the lighters and the tug with a sense of animation and movement; and their dynamic working lives are visible enough for us to tell (Fig. 1-1). Figures are engaged in
various activities, rowing, steering the boat and moving from one barge to another. His representations of labour in his images of the Thames were, indeed, viewed always positively; as one critic put it, ‘the dignity of labour is recognised and realised’. On the other hand, despite its larger size in Cole’s *The Pool of London* the figures on the left-hand side and in the foreground are minuscule, especially seen on comparatively gigantic barges, and their faces are without features or expressions (Fig. 2-1). Reviews of the painting also focused on ships without mentioning the figures. Unlike Wyllie’s image in which human labour and maritime technology co-exist in a kind of harmony, in Cole’s painting it is as if men were overwhelmed by the mechanised world of shipping.

The near absorption of the lit centre of St Paul’s by billowing dark smoke, the proportional distortion in the relation between men and machinery, and the anonymity of labourers in Cole’s painting fit with Tim Barringer’s interpretation of Cole’s series, of which *The Pool of London* was part, as a representation of ‘a Ruskinian fall from grace’, ‘a dystopian corollary to William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* of 1891’. Cole’s series of 25 paintings of the Thames, commissioned by the art dealer William Agnew, ran from the source of the Thames at Seven Springs near Cheltenham, through the historic vistas of Oxford and a medieval idyll at Pangbourne, before it reached the London river. In his Upper Thames subjects Cole deliberately sought out picturesque costume and archaic agrarian practices, avoiding any hint of industry and modernity to present the river as a timeless arcadia; and in

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Oxford he focused on historic and mythical tropes, distancing from the modern and the metropolitan. Considering this background of Cole’s work and his admiration of Thomas Carlyle’s writings, Barringer’s reading of The Pool of London as ‘a hell’s brew of polluted industrial chaos’, having moved from the pristine world of nature though the glory days of English history, is highly plausible.\footnote{Ibid. According to Robert Chignell’s biography of Cole, the artist named Carlyle as his favourite prose author. The Life and Paintings of Vicat Cole, 3 vols, London 1896, vol. 1, p. 15.} Cole’s painting could embody a critique of modernity contrasting with Wyllie’s support for it.

\section*{1.5 The Tidal Thames, 1884}

Following Wyllie’s first major success with Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide at the Royal Academy, the Fine Art Society in New Bond Street held the artist’s first one-man show in February 1884.\footnote{It was held following Whistler’s one-man show at the venue. The Fine Art Society was to hold three more one-man exhibitions of Wyllie’s watercolours. Previously, it had commissioned Wyllie to produce two large paintings of the recent bombardment of Alexandria (1882) to show in 1883. One of the two, Well Done “Condor”: The Bombardment of Alexandria, is in the collection of the Maritime Museum (BHC0643).} The exhibition was a critical moment in Wyllie’s career in the sense that it affirmed his position as one of the most notable British artists of the day, and defined what his particular portrayals of the Lower Thames were about for the contemporary audience. While in the previous year Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide and Black Diamonds attracted a vast amount of public attention, critical assessments of his work remained largely focused on Wyllie’s painterly skills, keen observation and knowledge of nature and the powerful effects of his convincing representations of the tarnished, weltering river and smoke-laden atmosphere. The exhibition, entitled The Tidal Thames, along with the subsequently published book of the same title, illustrated
with reproductions of exhibited images, was to offer a framework by which critics could consider Wyllie’s views of the lower river in historical and art historical contexts. It also revealed how his artistic means such as *plein air* naturalism, perspective and design served to construct his particular aesthetic of the Thames.

Wyllie was clever and thorough not only in developing his artistic skills and subjects attuned to his background and personal interests but also in finding his niche in the field of the contemporary visual arts, which even challenged the widespread imagination of London and the Thames at the time. *The Tidal Thames* as an exhibition and publication project distinguished itself at its outset: its subject was not the idyllic Upper Thames a majority of the English upper- and middle-classes loved to admire, but the urban and seaward lower river. Furthermore, it approached the Thames from the sea towards the capital, opposite to all other similar endeavours, which began largely from the source of the river. Thus it began from ‘The North Foreland and the Open Mouth’, through ‘Sheppey and the Nore’ and ‘Gravesend and Tilbury’, to London Bridge. Previously, Turner had worked on a series of images representing the Thames on canvas, veneer and in watercolour in 1805, while living by the Thames at Isleworth, which ran from tributaries of the river to the sea.\(^{168}\)

William Westall and Samuel Owen’s bound volume of aquatints *Picturesque Tour of the River Thames* (1828) formed a historic and cultural tour from Thames Head to the sea with aristocratic, literary and architectural emphases. More recently, as we have seen, George Leslie’s *Our River* (1881) had focused solely on the picturesque and leisurely Upper Thames. Around the same time as Wyllie’s *The Tidal Thames*,

Keeley Halswelle’s watercolour drawings of the Upper Thames were being shown in the West End; the *Athenaeum* noted ‘a curious contrast’ to Wyllie’s exhibition.\(^{169}\) After *The Tidal Thames*, the art historian Walter Armstrong would publish *The Thames from its Source to the Sea* (1886-7) in two illustrated volumes, which displayed an academic bent with special interests in literature, art and architecture, as well as leisure.\(^ {170}\) Only a few years before Wyllie’s project, Cole’s mentioned series of large paintings, ‘The Thames from its source to the sea’ (1880), went even further back to the past than Westall and Owen’s work of 1828.\(^ {171}\) The first in the series, *The Source of the Thames*, exhibited in 1882, presented an image of ‘the pre-history of the river’ in Barringer’s expression.\(^ {172}\) Cole’s English feelings for the Thames were about the past and untamed nature.

Wyllie’s concept for his first one-man exhibition of 73 watercolour drawings and book *The Tidal Thames* differentiated from earlier and recent views of the Thames – of pristine nature, mythic, picturesque, aristocratic, leisurely, noble, and of grandeur – in all terms.\(^ {173}\) The text was written by the novelist and science writer Grant Allen (1848-99) and included 20 full-page photogravure plates and other illustrations after original drawings by Wyllie. The journey they described meant sailing against the course of the stream; it was from the nautical, rather than geographical, point of

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\(^{169}\) *Athenaeum*, 1 March 1884, p. 286.


\(^{172}\) Barringer, ‘Landscape Painting’, p. 29.

\(^{173}\) Allen and Wyllie, *Tidal Thames*. Although the specimen copy of the book was available to be viewed in the Fine Art Society at the time of the exhibition, it was eventually published by Cassell and Company eight years later.
view: that of ships voyaging home from different parts of the globe into the British capital. The author wrote:

In this way we meet the various single threads of the great converging stream first in their separate isolation as they come to us from the sea homewards – catching the different lines that run together from the German Ocean, and the Flemish harbours, and the English Channel – and to follow them up as they all draw closer and closer to one another, till they merge at last into one in the narrowing funnel-shaped course above the Nore and the Sea Reach, just below Gravesend.\textsuperscript{174}

The clearly unconventional approach to the Thames, from its Mouth upward to London, was deliberate from Wyllie’s stance, in competition with preceding as well as contemporary artists of his senior such as Cole and Leslie, both already Royal Academicians. Wyllie had just risen to fame in his early thirties and intended to do something decisively different; The Tidal Thames was to delineate the national river as a maritime highway and international commercial track, while playing with his speciality as a marine painter.

Allen’s text made it clear that their project was to represent commercial traffic, the merchant fleets that fuelled Britain’s powerful economy with trade from foreign and colonial ports. His preface to the original catalogue of the exhibition set up such a mercantile Thames and distinguished it from the dearly loved upper reaches of the English river. The author wrote:

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 10}
To the minds of most Englishmen, perhaps even of most Londoners, at least among those who live in the greater London “above bridge,” the mere name of the Thames brings up instinctively the mental picture, not of a vast commercial highway, but of a peaceful and placid rural river…

But there is a second and far other Thames, less outwardly attractive at first sight in its natural external lineaments than this placid rural stream, yet rich in many human elements of the most picturesque and vivid character—the tidal river that spreads its long reaches in monotonous, yet ever-varied succession, from the busy piers of London Bridge to the North Foreland and the open sea. And this is also, in more than one other sense, the very truest and most genuine Thames of all. This is the actual Thames of history and of commerce; the Tamesis on whose upper navigable stretches the Romans built the mercantile capital of their Britannic province; the Thames by whose mouth the traffic of the entire world pours to-day towards the wealthy metropolis of modern England. This is the Thames which has made London … which has made all commercial Britain …

Allen’s reference back to the Romans was not merely historical, it was an implicit comparison between Britain as a former colony of the Roman Empire and its present status as capital of a global imperium, which would be found in Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow said, ‘very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago … darkness was here yesterday’.

This project involved a great deal of persuasion to get the audience to re-consider the lower river, which the artist had already begun with his recent Academy exhibits such as *Our River* and *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide*. It proposed that the Lower Thames should constitute the idea of the ‘national’ river. It

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was polluted and not as attractive in terms of nature in the way the upstream was; however, when viewed in different lights, other kinds of beauty could be found therein. It was the very source of the nation’s prosperity, and thus worthy of notice.

In *The Tidal Thames* Wyllie was to reiterate and prove his points by presenting specific sites or scenes on the lower river in his noted naturalist aesthetic. Throughout the book Allen and Wyllie portrayed the historical, human, workaday, commercial and trading aspects of the Thames, all in contrast with the above mentioned representations of its upper reaches.

*The Tidal Thames* related notably to such themes as the nation’s past and its influence in the present Port of London, the globalism of British trade, the varied aspects of shipping including maritime technology and labour, British marine painting, as well as the relationship between the meteorological condition of England and its art. The author’s and the artist’s written and visual representations of the legacies and memories of the past, functional and human elements of shipping, and the natural and man-made landscapes of the lower river served multiple purposes. Much of this was educational for the general audience, who would have been largely unfamiliar with those specific aspects of the tidal river, and popular in the sense that some of the portrayals emphasised the collective identity of the British. *The Tidal Thames* however chiefly aimed at the provision and construction of a new perspective for viewing the contemporary Port of London, which would encourage the spectator to consider the river in symbolic and aesthetic lights. Their emphasis on its historical, mercantile, metropolitan and national importance worked as ways of making the otherwise dirty and mundane modern river interesting or even noble to
look at, and of evoking a different kind of beauty in the late Victorian conception, which possessed moral and economic values for the nation and interlinked with ideas about its maritime past, commerce, navigation and technology.

The theme of the past was essential in *The Tidal Thames* to delineate the mercantile river as the origin of London and source of its wealth. The journey through the course of the tidal river and its banks was to examine the history of London; it reminded readers of the extent of time to which the Port of London went back and of the significance of the river in the shaping of London and the current ascendancy of commercial Britain. Reference to the past was evident from the beginning of the book and recurred throughout the volume; Allen in his introduction discussing, as we have noted, the Roman building of London on the pool near the Tower Hill and St Paul’s and the development of England’s trade into the broad channel of the tidal Thames. In the chapter on Sheppey and the Nore the author wrote of the London Stones – the marks which for many centuries bounded the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor of London as “conservator of the river Thames” – standing at Yantlet Creek, between Leigh and Southend on the Essex coast, and near the ruins of Cockham Fort on the Medway.\(^{178}\) He pointed out that these old landmarks, on which said, “God Preserve the City of London, 1204”, were the proof of how Londoners recognised the importance of the river Thames throughout history as ‘the highway which gave their city all its national and commercial importance’; and that it was only in recent times that people had begun to overlook the once obvious fact that the very existence of London was due to the Thames.\(^{179}\)

\(^{178}\) *Ibid.*, p. 60

\(^{179}\) *Ibid.*
In his chapter on Gravesend and Tilbury, Allen contrasted the current condition of Gravesend with its past to suggest a clue as to why such a vital link of the Thames with London was less remembered in his own age. The author first reminded the reader of how the part of the river between Gravesend and London Bridge, known as the Long Ferry in the sixteenth century, used to be a place of pageants, pleasure and spectacle, and described elaborately the state processions of the Lord Mayor and Aldermen held to receive distinguished foreign guests on to the Port of London. He then pointed to the recent pollution of the Thames for the general failure to recognise the lower river as the key to London’s history and presence at the time. In contrast with the “Silver Thames” of Elizabethan years, quoting Edmund Spencer, Allen wrote:  

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The gradual pollution of the water, the growth of London fog, the universal dispersion of smoke, and the reign of industrial gloominess generally, all these picturesque realisations of the intimate connection between the City and the Thames have died out utterly, so that very few modern Londoners in this age of railways can ever realise adequately the genuine underlying dependence of the British capital upon the largest and longest tidal river in the whole of Europe.  

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Wyllie’s three representations of the area Off Gravesend, Gravesend Reach (Fig. 31), and The Lower Hope (Fig. 32) were indeed simply the distinctive images of vigorous shipping, full of murky smoke and impressive large vessels, including ocean-going steamers, merchantmen and sailing clippers, and bargee in the midst of the large ships. None appealed particularly in visually pleasing ways, but they signified the

180 Allen and Wyllie, Tidal Thames, p. 80
181 Ibid.
long-standing port in its current heyday. Grimy and monotonous as Gravesend looked in Wyllie’s images of shipping, Allen’s text reminded his readers of how the site was significant in terms of British commerce and history, on which London was founded as an imperial capital.

Throughout the book Allen and Wyllie constantly encouraged their audience to look beyond the surface of the desecrated and polluted Thames by looking afresh and, more notably, seeking aesthetic possibilities in its ships, steamers, lighthouses, buoys, beacons, quays and piers so as to view the Port of London in a new light. The verbal and visual representations of such objects and buildings in the volume informed the audience of the economic and system functions of the large-scale international port, attaching symbolic values for the nation and its powerful and wealth to the mundane elements on the dreary modern river. At the same time, both Allen and Wyllie made conscious efforts to capture visually pleasing elements and scenes on the tidal Thames in near lyrical descriptions and decorative compositions. The manifestations of aspects of the river which were often novel to the general public and which – while not necessarily picturesque – served to create the nation’s wealth would be worthy for Victorians to look at.

For example, in *The Shivering Sand Bell Buoy* (Fig. 33) Wyllie placed a handsome sail steamship viewed from below so that the viewer looks at it upward, which added structural grandeur and highlighted its impressive look. Several more steamships are visible on the horizon making their routes on the sea. At the same time, in the brightly-toned composition of sea traffic and flying gulls, the sand bell buoy is
impossible to miss in the foreground to the right, reminding us of its crucial role as a reference point on the tidal water. *East Oaze Gas Buoy* (Fig. 34), on the other hand, shows what attractive elements buoys can be visually, in addition to fulfilling vital functional roles. In what can be seen as a harmonious design, the black and white buoy – which is filled with compressed gas and burns steadily for a fortnight without refuelling – is prominently seen afloat off the centre of the image; the flock of seagulls in dark tints rhythmically fills the sky, balancing out the composition with white clouds. The contrast of colours and tones, combined with the strong sense of movement in floating buoys, flying gulls, and the sky and water, together form a buoyant composition.

Allen’s texts were especially illustrative of aesthetic qualities in discussing such beacons as light-vessels and lighthouses, and their spectacular visual effects in the tidal river, which would have been also unknown to the majority of his readers. The author wrote:

… As this is a very important turning-point in the open stream, the Maplin lighthouse throws a white ray across the trackless path to warn ships when to alter their course in either direction… we reach the Mouse light-vessel with green revolving lantern; and porting our helm we run away gaily down the Swin for the distant and looming Maplin light… in thick weather or on a dark night, what with the white lights of anchored ships and the red and green side lights of vessels under way moving all around you in every direction, and perhaps with tide setting right across your beam, it is small wonder if you … fail to perceive the same beautiful regularity in the buoys and beacons of real life …

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Allen showed not only how essential these maritime structures were in guiding with their lights international shipping in and out of the Port of London, but also that they created wonderful modern spectacles on the sea. Moreover, he described the Maplin lighthouse itself as ‘one of the most picturesque objects on the whole course of the Lower Thames’. In regard to the iron lattice structure, standing on the Essex bank of the estuary, the author highlighted the contrast of its artificial colour with the grey river.\(^{183}\)

A great red mass, raised aloft from the surface upon solid screw piles which are firmly planted in the bottom below … it forms as beautiful and interesting a scene as anything to be found between London and the North Foreland… vivid colour of these numerous beacons and light-ships has, of course, been dictated by purely utilitarian necessities, it is wonderful how magnificently it harmonises and contrasts with the various brown and grey or russet tinges of every other object in the generally dull surroundings among which they stand. For deep reds and chocolates especially, there is nothing on earth like a tidal river. Tints that would be almost impossible anywhere else in Nature are here not only allowable but also true. There is Oriental richness and vividness about the occasional objects of the Lower Thames which entirely redeems the estuary from the thoughtless charge of dullness and greyness that full grey eyes too often persist in bringing against it…\(^{184}\)

Here the author illustrated a sort of beauty, which had been created by practical needs and at the same time illuminated the otherwise dreary stream. By introducing such new ideas of beauty, Allen encouraged his audience to realise that the modern or the utilitarian need not mean ugly. He was articulating Wyllie’s naturalist aesthetic: open to the description of even the most banal in the everyday world, conscious of the value of modern artefacts. These delineations of the modern port,

\(^{183}\) The screw-pile lighthouse and iron lattice structure was built on the Maplin Sands in 1838.

\(^{184}\) Ibid., p. 33.
combining the functional with the aesthetic, could be interpreted in relation to the enchanting effects of technologies, which were prevalent in the turn of the century accounts of technological innovations.\textsuperscript{185}

\textit{Maplin Light and West Swin} (Fig. 35) represented another side of the tidal Thames. Allen related Wyllie’s view of the lighthouse in the Estuary with British marine painters and seamen, to evoke nationalistic feelings and collective identity. It depicted the solidly standing screw-pile lighthouse in rather an imposing manner in the image of the turbulent sea whose background was full of impressive large sailing and steam vessels.\textsuperscript{186} The lighthouse signified the only unmoving object in the perpetual flow of the tidal Thames; the author reminded the readers that everything else at sea, except lighthouses, was constantly moving, and that a marine painter’s job was always about dealing with things in motion. Allen took Henry Moore and Wyllie, whom he called ‘the genuine or seafaring marine painters’, to praise the courage, manliness and stoicism of British marine artists, and went on to write, ‘a hardy and uncomplaining race of mortals… Hardships that would daunt most ordinary landsmen are accepted by those touch souls with admirable stoicism’.\textsuperscript{187} The author’s patriotic pride in eulogising those marine painters led to a comparison with ‘a spurious imitation of real article’, ‘sand-dabbing kind’, who would ‘sit on the shore and paint the waves from a safe distance’.\textsuperscript{188} In making such remark, Allen seemed to refer implicitly to the contemporary foreign painters of the sea and the


\textsuperscript{186} The original exhibited watercolour (no. 20) was titled \textit{The Maplin Light} and accompanied by a descriptive phrase: ‘Shows a red light, visible in ten miles, and throws a ray of white light between the Shivering Sand and West Girder’.

\textsuperscript{187} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 35.
river, especially considering it was Britain that had an established tradition of marine painting since the seventeenth century.

Allen’s eulogising manner in addressing British marine painters was similarly used in discussing seamen. The author wrote of the solitary men in the small boats among the big steamers, heavy merchantmen and fast sailing clippers on the tidal Thames, as seen in Wyllie’s *Gravesend Reach* (Fig. 31) and *The Lower Hope* (Fig. 32):

... he pilots vessels up from Sea Reach to their final berths in the inner Port of London... these lonely men ... tossing about unconcerned in their small open boats by day and night ... far down into the stormy estuary ... the struggle for existence presses hard on all of us; and the mud-pilot is glad enough to risk his life on the open tidal mouth of the river ... Truly the British sailor is a very fearless and courageous person.189

The sense of pride and collectivism are evident in these portrayals of bargees and sailors. They invited the audience’s empathy with the British workers. If the tidal Thames were what had made modern London and Britain – as the book emphasised throughout and reviewers of Wyllie’s exhibition recognised – the reader would be brought together with the depicted seamen in shaping their mercantile nation.

In a manner akin to the above illustrations of British marine painters and seamen, national art was typically understood in relation to the general perception of the polluted Thames and London as well as to England’s own climate. Allen argued, in his chapter on the intensely smoky, industrial Gravesend, that English art was an art

of transforming the misty, grey capital and the dull, tawny river: ‘a sort of murky halo well befitting the great lurid grimey capital of our solid and squalid English civilisation’.\(^{190}\) Here the author praised the ability of English artists with unabashed pride, while reminding readers of the symbolic meaning of London’s dirt, mud and fog to stress their constructive role for the nation. Linking the English landscape tradition established by the previous generation of artists to the representation of the Thames, Allen was developing another aspect of the nation’s pride alongside the great English river:

\[\ldots\] it is no wonder that fog and smoke should have stamped their impress on the very warp and woof of English life and English art; that our landscapes should deal so often with misty effects and lazy lights and cloudy skied and stormy mornings by the murky sea; that our painters should \ldots\ put on the canvas the dim grey shaped that loom up indistinctly through the taint white haze upon the Thames Embankment. Thus, out of these strange and seemingly unpromising materials, English Art has built herself a beautiful and stately place; from these curious half-undeciphered hieroglyphics she has interpreted to us the actual world whose dusky panorama passes for every mistily before our very eyes\ldots\ She has given us a picture as impressive and beautiful in its way as any whose lineaments she could have caught upon the arid hills of Attica or under the cloudless skies of sunny Italy\ldots\n
\[\ldots\] Our scenery and pictures are cooler, moister, and more subdued; our outlines are softer, vaguer, more poetical\ldots\ it is largely to the distinctive tenderness and haziness of the English lights that we owe the peculiar qualities of a Constable, a Crome, a David Cox, or a Turner.\(^{191}\)

Allen and Wyllie’s *The Tidal Thames* illustrated the inextricable relation of imperialism and modernity. The nautical perspective of the described journey linked London with the Empire and the present with the past in a perpetual stream; their

Thames was that great ‘waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth’ – in *Heart of Darkness* – upon which [the lower reaches of the Thames] ‘nothing is easier for a man … than to evoke the spirit of the past’.\(^{192}\) This vision of the cargo-carrying Thames as running out across the ocean (and up into ‘the mystery of an unknown earth’\(^{193}\)) related to images of the sea and of Britain’s oceanic dominion. These were woven into the national consciousness. In addition, Allen’s and Wyllie’s naturalist attitudes and aesthetic emphasised the ‘picturesqueness’, ‘beauty’ and the ‘wonder’ of such modern equipment as buoys, gas-buoys and lighthouses. New technology was itself crucial to communication, commerce and imperial prosperity. Allen’s descriptions of British seamen and marine painters highlighted the sense of patriotism for the viewer in Wyllie’s dramatic images, which had been made from the level of a boat to provide the reader with that feeling of himself being ‘on the sea or on the river’.\(^{194}\) *The Tidal Thames* achieved what Wedmore and many late Victorian critics called for – to make poetry out of everyday modern life – by giving images of the nation’s maritime power in the minds of contemporaries lively visual forms.

\(^{193}\) Ibid., p. 7.
Chapter 2

Tower Bridge and Its Representation in the Visual Arts: Continuity, Technology, Wonder and Social Class

Tower Bridge is one of the most important structures built in late nineteenth-century London in terms of its commercial and symbolic roles as well as its impact on the metropolitan landscape. While its status as a landmark of the capital and a stream of images in different forms of representation led to its widespread perception as a tourist cliché, its unusual form and the intense attention it drew at the time of completion offer a good model for the examination of the ways in which late Victorians conceived the modern in an architectural form. Built next to the historic core of London to form a gateway to the capital during the heyday of the Empire, Tower Bridge was designed to fulfil a complex set of functional and symbolic requirements. This chapter takes Tower Bridge as a matrix of modernity for late nineteenth-century London. It analyses the architecture in the contexts of contemporary critical and cultural discourse, exploring the complex notion of modernity and metropolitan life that the representations of the building presented. Perhaps, surprisingly, images of this new bridge engage with issues of social class, suggesting not only industrious activity but also social fracture.
2.1 Tower Bridge: Critical and Symbolic Implications, 1886-1894

In his lecture on the design and construction of Tower Bridge for the Corporation of the City of London in 1894, the engineer of the bridge, John Wolfe Barry (1836-1918), stated:

> It is to be feared some purists will say that the lamp of truth has been sadly neglected in this combination of materials, and that the architects of classical and medieval times would not have sanctioned such an arrangement as a complex structure of steel surrounded by stone.\(^\text{196}\)

He concluded the talk by summarising the architecture,

> Tower Bridge is no ordinary bridge, and in no ordinary position. The structure and its machinery are full of the most elaborate and complicated work of all kinds […] Tower Bridge will be considered to be not unworthy of the Corporation of the greatest city of ancient or modern times.\(^\text{197}\)

These two remarks by Wolfe Barry outlined the key aspect of contemporary criticism on Tower Bridge, as he referred to Ruskin’s moral principle of architectural truth and encapsulated the contextual backgrounds of the project for the Corporation of the City of London. Indeed, Tower Bridge became the subject of intense criticism at the turn of the twentieth century. From the point of view of many late Victorian architects and critics, the structure ignored architectural ideals and principles to an extent where it was referred to as ‘so-called architecture’.\(^\text{198}\) Critical opinions on the bridge did not change in any notable way in the following decades, and today it seems unusual that such a landmark of London has attracted little scholarly attention in the field of architectural history. Since the official accounts of the building were

\(^{195}\) A version of this section has been published as a chapter in L. Cleaver and A. Lepine eds., *Gothic Legacies: Four Centuries of Tradition and Innovation in Art and Architecture*, Newcastle 2012.


\(^{198}\) *Builder*, 30 June 1894, p. 492.
published by the Corporation, and the architectural and technical analyses of the bridge were issued in such specialist periodicals as the *Builder*, *Building News* and the *Engineer* at the time of its opening in 1894, Tower Bridge has rarely been the subject of historical research.\(^{199}\) In 1970 the architect Theo Crosby published *The Necessary Monument*, where he emphasised the spatial and experiential impact of Tower Bridge on the surrounding areas, and the only other treatments of the building are typically of a descriptive rather than scholarly nature.\(^{200}\) It is also notable that *The Survey of London* by English Heritage has yet to publish an account of Tower Bridge.

The critical controversy over Tower Bridge in the 1890s, which prefigured the subsequent disregard of the building as a subject of architectural history, forms a good point of historical enquiry about the critical and cultural ideals of late Victorian Britain. This section examines why Tower Bridge was seen as such a problematic architectural edifice at the time, and questions why the bridge was built in its specific, controversial form and what was achieved by that form. It considers both the terms of criticism of the building and the historical, geographical and technological backgrounds of the project. It will provide an interpretation of the contentious structure of Tower Bridge, and address the critical and symbolic implications of the particular formation of this marvel of engineering encapsulated within a Gothic exterior.


The Gothic Revival style of Tower Bridge is considered for what it reveals about the contemporary ideas of the past and medieval legacies, as well as for its relationship to the conception of modern London. It is argued that while Tower Bridge defied the Gothic’s structural and visual potential for modern architecture, its use of Gothic elements engaged with the city’s ethos regarding technological progress and enduring aesthetics. That is, the Gothic Revival style was in this case a symbolic expression of the continuity of Thames-side, and an architectural aspiration towards the lasting prosperity of the City and Port of London. The Gothic in Tower Bridge served as a stylistic link to the past, which referred to the history of the City and the Thames. In late Victorian Britain, Tower Bridge represented a form of technological modernity, which defined itself partly in relation to the past.

As the capital of Britain’s maritime empire and a hub of international commerce, London was viewed and represented as the epicentre of the modern, capitalist world. These themes were played out in the city’s built environment, particularly through representations in public architecture, as seen in government buildings and monuments, trading halls, banking and insurance houses, and commercial premises. No other places conveyed the image of the capital as the centre of the liberal trading empire better than the City and Port of London. The City was the global financier and the Port formed the main artery through which materials and goods arrived from and departed for the rest of the Empire. Tower Bridge was to be situated directly east of the City and in the Port of London.
Until Tower Bridge was completed in 1894, London Bridge had been the easternmost bridge along the Thames, connecting the City (also known as the Square Mile) with Southwark. It also marked the starting point of the Pool of London, the section of the Port that adjoins the City, between London Bridge and the Tower of London. This meant that a vast amount of metropolitan traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian, crossed London Bridge. In addition, the Bridge also united the northeast of London with the southeast. This region included 37 metropolitan districts, which equated to approximately one-third of the entire London population. London Bridge evidently had the most traffic of any bridge in the capital, and throughout the 1860s and 1870s the bridge became increasingly incapable of dealing with the rapidly growing traffic flow. The need for a new bridge east of London Bridge was a subject that was continually being brought to the attention of the Corporation of London and the Metropolitan Board of Works. Between 1874 and 1885, some thirty petitions and presentations from public bodies were brought before the Common Council urging the Corporation to undertake the construction of a new bridge. Tower Bridge was thus initiated to relieve this traffic between the East End and southeast London, whilst facilitating the commercial development of east London and the communication between the two sides of the Thames below London Bridge.

The plan for the new bridge was presented with two critical issues. First, the bridge was to be built downstream of London Bridge, within the Pool, and could not impede shipping. It would have to allow large steam vessels access to the port facilities in the Upper Pool: the wharves and warehouses adjacent to and facing the Custom House,

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201 Welch, *History of the Tower Bridge*, p. 147.
such as Hay’s Wharf and Billingsgate (more than a half of London’s trade was still handled in the Upper Pool, while docks downstream of the Tower of London dealt with the rest). Second, the structure would be positioned adjacent to one of the nation’s most important medieval heritage sites, the Tower of London. It was thus required that the bridge be in some kind of stylistic harmony with the adjoining Tower. These two functional and aesthetic conditions of the project proved difficult to reconcile in a structure, and provided the architect and the engineer of the bridge with dilemmas around matters of form and function, architectural expression and engineering work.

In 1876, the Corporation of London established the Special Bridge (or Subway Committee) to find a solution to the Thames crossing problem, and opened the public design competition for the new bridge, for which over fifty proposals were submitted. The possible solutions listed in a report by the Committee included a low-level bridge, which forked into two carriageways near the centre of the river, a moveable bridge of six piers equipped with rollers and driving machinery, a high-level crossing with hydraulic lifts with a spiral ascent to raise the traffic, and a subway or arcade that would stretch beneath the river. The City of London Architect, Horace Jones (1819-1887), and the Engineer of the Metropolitan Board of Works and architect of the Thames Embankment, Joseph Bazalgette (1819-1891), were most influential in the process of the assessment and proposal of designs for the new bridge. While Jones argued that a low-level bridge, capable of opening and

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203 Dennis, Cities, p. 12.
205 Ibid., p. 4.
closing to let river traffic pass through, would be most economical and practical, Bazalgette proposed a high-level bridge with a clearance of 65 feet above the water level.

Bazalgette’s design for a single-span steel arch bridge, which was more modern and simple in style when compared to Jones’s proposal, was criticised for having access problems. Its restricted height would have blocked a large proportion of the river traffic, which included ships with masts varying in size from 40 feet to 95 feet.\(^{206}\) Jones’s design of a low-level bridge was eventually selected and established the principle for the final structure (Fig. 36). The Committee’s reasons for the selection of his design included its functional efficiency for both land and river traffic, the economy of its building costs (estimated at £750,000 compared with £2,000,000 for a high-level bridge) as well as compensation for property (less than a high-level bridge, which required long approach roads on each side of the river), and the architectural merit for the possible ‘picturesque effect’ in the cityscape.\(^{207}\) The vertical structure of the opening bridge, however, and its imposing quality, particularly through its visible stylistic connections to the adjoining Tower, distinguished it from Bazalgette’s straightforward design.

Jones’s opening bridge worked on the bascule principle: that is, a centre span bridged by two hinged platforms, raised by steam or hydraulic power. The fixed parts of the superstructure were suspended, and the chains were supported by lofty towers on each pier and by lower towers on each abutment. Upon the appointment of John

\(^{206}\) Ibid., p. 2.
\(^{207}\) Ibid.
Wolfe Barry (1836-1918) as engineer for the bridge, the design was revised before it was approved by Parliament and authorised by the Court of Common Council in 1885 (Fig. 37). The original arched form of construction across the span was dropped and substituted with a straight span, enabling the bascules to open completely. This would allow the entire 200-foot span to be clear for shipping. The height of the bridge’s underside, with the bascules raised, was 125 feet, 30 feet higher than the tallest ship using the Pool at that time. Following Jones’s death in 1887, Wolfe Barry added further changes, enhancing the functional quality of the structure.

In his 1878 design, which established the basic principle for the final structure, Horace Jones intended that the towers should be of brickwork in a feudal style and that the bridge should be raised and lowered by chains somewhat like ‘the drawbridge of a Crusader’s castle (Fig. 36). This design visibly echoed the early Gothic Tower of London, rather as Thomas Telford’s Conway Suspension Bridge (opened in 1826) did with the late thirteenth-century Conway Castle in Wales. After it became clear that towers made entirely of masonry would not be able to sustain the weight of the planned bascule bridge, it was decided that they should be supported by a steel framework – yet surrounded by masonry, so as to retain the intended architectural continuity with the Tower and to ‘hide the constructive features of the building’. The original aim of stylistic continuity with the Tower remained accordingly to conceal the construction in Gothic Revival clothing. This structural disguise through its Gothic pretence became a source of critical controversy. Consideration of some of the major architectural theories around the time reveals not

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208 Clarkson, ‘History of Tower Bridge’, p. 3.
210 Ibid., p. 206.
only the critical problem of its structure but also its anti-modern approach to the architectural expression of new materials and technology.

While their views of architecture differed in their foci and sources, John Ruskin, A. W. N. Pugin (1812-52) and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-79) based their theories upon the analysis of medieval architecture and similarly pointed out the importance of revealing structure in a building. Ruskin in the chapter ‘The Lamp of Truth’ in his *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), to which Wolfe Barry referred in his lecture, emphasised the truthful suggestion of structure and saw ‘the suggestion of a mode of structure or support, other than the true one’ as an architectural and structural deceit.²¹¹ Pugin argued that Gothic architecture was not a style but a principle, and that architecture ought to reveal its structure and function in the interest of honesty. While Ruskin and Pugin remained conservative in their rejection of the use of industrial materials, their strictures on structure were in parallel with Viollet-le-Duc’s rationalist view.

In his treatise of modern architecture and engineering *Entretiens* Eugène Viollet-le-Duc developed the value of structural truth in the expression of Gothic architecture for application in modern buildings.²¹² Seeing Gothic forms as both skeletal and diagrammatic, the architect and theorist asserted that ‘architecture was nothing else than a functioning form commanded by the construction itself’, emphasising the importance of construction and structure to architectural expression.²¹³ Unlike

²¹³ Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, quoted in Crook, *Dilemma*, p. 86.
Ruskin or Pugin, Viollet-le-Duc was a defender of his own age, of engineering, and of new materials and techniques, and encouraged the use of the new industrial materials. His application of iron to the skeletal framework of Gothic architecture illustrated the structural potential of medieval Gothic for modern architecture; structure itself was self-explanatory and iron was stretched into light and visible forms in the way stone had been in a Gothic cathedral.\textsuperscript{214} Viollet-le-Duc’s realisation of the visual potential of Gothic form and its material applications pertained to the task of the nineteenth-century engineer, who was required to use the cheaper and more practical, industrially produced materials as well as production methods and, using less material to build larger structures, to create forms that would be light and show off their lightness.\textsuperscript{215}

Viollet-le-Duc’s critique of medieval architecture was about more than the structural principles of Gothic architecture. The broader significance of his theory lay in its relevance to the current age. The author pointed out the modernity of the thirteenth-century church builders, who he saw as daring in their structural combinations, which ‘exceeded the limits of material appliances at their disposal’; and he suggested that the nineteenth-century architect could make better use of industrial resources and appliances the current age furnished.\textsuperscript{216} In this respect, Tower Bridge represented the hesitant attitudes towards new materials and the expression of those materials in architecture. In the late 1880s and early 1890s when Tower Bridge was built, iron construction was still in vogue. As steel was only just beginning to be used for

\textsuperscript{214} See Fig. 18 in Viollet-le-Duc, Lectures, vol. 2, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{216} Viollet-le-Duc, Lectures, vol. 1, p. 282.
buildings, the steel-frame construction of Tower Bridge was very advanced at the time. The decision to enclose one of the structural triumphs of the new age of steel in masonry outraged contemporary critics, whose views were in line with Viollet-le-Duc’s.

By the mid-nineteenth century, some remarkable exposed iron structures, particularly of the new building types such as exhibition halls, tunnels and railway stations, had been constructed in Britain. Since such materials as iron and steel were functionally self-sufficient, the covering of structure became unnecessary and modern buildings exposed their metal structures in convinced and demonstrative manners. Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace (1850-1851) was entirely made of cast iron and glass, the engineering forms were visible in the train sheds of St Pancras Station (1863-1865), and Thomas Deane and Benjamin Woodward used iron for its delicate medieval-style framework supporting a glass roof of the Oxford University Museum (1854-1860). In the later part of the century, such engineering structures as the Forth Bridge (1883-1890), the Eiffel Tower (1887-1889) and Brooklyn Bridge (1870-1883) transparently revealed their metal construction in their forms. The contrast of the Eiffel Tower with Tower Bridge is notable. The former, constructed only in iron, is considered to have set the direction for new forms. Tower Bridge concealed its cutting-edge steelwork in Gothic Revival masonry, forming the antithesis of the daring transparency of the former.
Critics severely pointed out the structural deceit of Tower Bridge, pronouncing it a ‘sham’, and viewed the building as an architectural failure whilst being an engineering triumph.\(^{217}\) The *Builder* responded furiously and criticised the structure for its dishonest expression and the enormous expense for unnecessary masonry.\(^{218}\) It claimed that the bridge should have been built simply as the naked steelwork and let the construction reveal what it really was, contrasting Tower Bridge with the Forth Bridge.\(^{219}\) The editor of the *Builder*, H. H. Statham, went on to produce a detailed analysis of what he called the ‘mistake’ of Tower Bridge in his book *Modern Architecture*, condemning the fictional effect of the arrangement of the steel structure made to support the suspension chains of the bridge, concealed by masonry.\(^{220}\) For its elaborate Gothic Revival exterior, Tower Bridge spectacularly defied the principles of Gothic architecture and ignored its potential for modern architecture, as realised in the nineteenth-century theories, and in doing so resulted in being viewed as anti-modern.

One of the clues as to the insistence upon stylistic associations with the latter was given in the 1870s, when various options for the river crossing were considered. According to Wolfe Barry, one of the initial concerns raised regarding an opening bridge was that it might ‘ruin the picturesqueness of the Tower of London by hideous girder erections’.\(^{221}\) After the bridge was constructed, the public would call its towers ‘picturesque’ and they saw it ‘in admirable keeping with the neighbouring Tower’.\(^{222}\)

\(^{217}\) *Builder*, 30 June 1894, pp. 491-2; *Building News*, 27 July 1894, p. 126.
\(^{218}\) *Builder*, 30 June 1894, p. 492 and 14 July 1894, p. 22.
\(^{219}\) *Builder*, 30 June 1894, p. 492.
\(^{221}\) Wolfe Barry, ‘Description of the Tower Bridge’, p. 203.
\(^{222}\) *Daily News*, 19 June 1886.
Such a distinction between picturesque and hideous not only signified the historicist outlook of popular tastes in architecture at that time, but also the ambiguous attitudes towards industrial technology. This was in parallel with a recent decrease in exposed metal construction. As the bold, early Victorian usage of industrial materials in architectural expression had been associated with cheap utilitarian construction, many late Victorian buildings concealed their metal frames. The contrast between the visible iron train shed of St Pancras Station (1863-1865) and the Gothic Revival brickwork of the Midland Grand Hotel (1869-1872) showcased this architectural transition.

Construction using manufactured materials also seemed insubstantial in accustomed eyes. The uncertainty surrounding metal structures was reinforced by the disaster at Tay Bridge (1870-1878), the iron-girder structure in Scotland in 1879. The collapse of 13 spans of the world’s longest bridge, with the loss of 75 lives, was fresh in people’s minds when Tower Bridge was being discussed in Parliament. Following this disaster, the Board of Trade updated its requirements relating to wind pressure for future structures. Tower Bridge was thus reinforced, despite its comparatively protected position. Technically, the use of external masonry was not needed to improve its structural integrity. The stone exterior did, however, engirdle the steelwork to project a sense of stability and permanence for the public, which doubted the durability of exposed metal construction. The masonry on such a massive and vertical scale could even imply the aesthetic of monuments, of the

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223 Exposed iron was also discovered to be a major fire risk in the 1870s, and the building regulations were modified, insisting that iron structures be clad in a fire-resisting material.

desire of surviving the potential tests of time, which steelwork was unable to communicate at the time.\textsuperscript{225}

In addition to its role as a veil of modern engineering and a symbol of the psychological aesthetics of continuity, the Gothic masonry of Tower Bridge also conveyed the pride of the Corporation of London, the wealth and history of which went back to the Middle Ages. Tower Bridge had been initiated and completed by the Corporation at a cost of nearly one million pounds sterling, a considerable sum at the time, and the entire expense of maintenance and operation of the bridge was also funded by the Corporation. Though the Corporation also owned and maintained Southwark Bridge, Blackfriars Bridge and London Bridge, Tower Bridge was a special case of its investment in the sense that the Bridge was technically located outside the boundary of the City. A bridge immediately east of the City could however form a symbolic gateway to London’s global financial hub, particularly since it was to be used by both land and river traffic accessing the Upper Pool (within the City’s limits). The elaborate masonry of costly granite and Portland stone seemed extravagant to some, yet it presented the City’s face in an impressive manner to those entering the capital. The massive main towers formed a monumental entrance to London; the stone archways constituting the abutments formed gateways

to each side of the Thames, and at the top of these were added the City of London’s coat of arms, declaring its authority and achievement.

The symbolic aspect of Tower Bridge as a gateway was explored explicitly in its visual imagery around the time of its opening. Images such as The Opening of the Tower Bridge: the Royal Procession on the Bridge, published in the Graphic (Fig. 38) on 7 July 1894, and William Wyllie’s painting exhibited at the Royal Academy in the following year (Fig. 39) depicted Tower Bridge as the grand entrance to the capital. The former shows a procession on the bridge, and the latter the Royal Navy’s HMS Landrail passing through it. Both works display the bridge as a gateway rather than a functional crossing and, furthermore, reveal the complex combination of the steel structure with the Gothic masonry. Henri Lanos’s and J. Nash’s illustration for the Graphic incorporates the thrusting perspective created by the bridge’s steel girders. They employ these dramatic diagonals to communicate a robust sense of modernity, and these lines also lead the eye to the Gothic tower and archway near centre of the background. The stonework appears firmly grounded to support the suspension chains of the bridge (in fact, as noted, it only concealed the steelwork, which actually supported the chains). On the other hand, Wyllie’s representation shows the entire superstructure with its bascules raised fully to let ships through as well as the Gothic towers, magnificently painted.

These images visualised the ways in which innovative engineering work incorporated the elements of Gothic architecture to convey an aesthetic link to the medieval past of the City and of the Tower. The use of the Gothic Revival style lent
the bridge a visual authority that complemented the skyline and substantiated the
significance of the Thames. In the eye of the majority of the late Victorian public,
such aesthetics projected not only the pre-eminence and wealth of their capital but
also aspirations for the continued greatness of the City and the Port. The popular
reaction to the bridge was enthusiastic, as it was voiced all over the news media
including such periodicals as the Daily News, Pall Mall Gazette, Punch and The
Times.226 In a quite different position from the critical controversy over the masonry
cladding, the papers hailed the building as the superb achievement of the current age,
partly because it embraced the past through the application of the Gothic style to
symbolise the continuity of London’s prosperity. The Daily News for example made
a deliberate reference to ‘ungracious’ critics, and congratulated on the ‘magnificent’
embodiment of the City’s wealth and suggestion of its buoyant future in Tower
Bridge.227

We have to thank Mr. Wolfe Barry for adding to the increasing
number of proofs we now have in London that the work of the engineer need not necessarily be ugly. It is true that some utilitarians
have scoffed at the masonry of his towers, which are said to be
deceitful to the eye, being only a shell covering a structure of steel.
Well, in this case we are thankful for a sham, if sham it is… we
commend it to the attention of other engineers. There is perhaps a
disposition to magnify the Corporation over this great London
improvement, and to make much of the Bridge House Estate which
gives us such a magnificent work at a cost not directly felt by the
present age… In congratulating the City on its own enterprise, we
offer them the gratitude of expecting further favours to come. This,
we hope, is not the last bridge connecting North and South London
…228

226 See the Daily News, 19 June 1886, 14 March 1894, 30 June 1894, 2 July 1894 and 7 July 1894;
Punch, 19 May 1894 and 7 July 1894; The Times, 29 Jun 1894, 2 July 1894 and 5 July 1894.
227 Daily News, 2 July 1894.
228 Ibid.
Responses to the creation of Tower Bridge resulted in a revival and celebration of the Thames. As the key to and source of London’s wealth, the nation’s strength and the public’s pride, the Thames was adorned with buildings and bridges that represented wealth and power. The part of the river around London Bridge, the City and the Tower particularly reminded late Victorians of London’s history from the Middle Ages onwards. The opening of the bridge encouraged them to reminisce over displays of royal pomp, memories of monarchs, imperial expansion and naval prowess, as recorded in newspapers and other publications as well as in visual images.\(^{229}\) The Times’s editorial upon the opening of Tower Bridge, for instance, considered the river as a symbol of English civilisation and called it ‘the noble river which all true Englishmen love with a proud affection as the chiefest glory of their ancient capital’.\(^{230}\)

Such views of the river in its historical context were also facilitated by the elevated viewpoint, which the bridge itself provided. When the arched form of construction across the span was dropped and replaced by a straight span, the straightened high-level of the superstructure also incorporated footways for pedestrians. The upper footbridge, 140 feet above the water, provided new perspectives for pedestrians and encouraged civic participation. The experience of viewing the Thames and London from this newly raised viewpoint enthused the public even before the opening of the

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\(^{229}\) The Daily News (30 June 1894) in particular published lengthy articles, one of which said, ‘All that part of the Thames is ennobled by its historical associations... the feeling borne in upon the minds of most persons to-day who happen to think at all about the historical associations of that part of the river which is spanned by the Tower Bridge will be a feeling of honourable national pride in the story of our past days as well as of our present. The Tower Bridge itself is a work of which we must all feel proud’. See also P. Norman, ‘The City, the Tower, and the River’ in Welch, History of the Tower Bridge, pp. 221-50.

\(^{230}\) The Times, 2 July 1894.
bridge through discussions and illustrations in the news media. H. W. Brewer’s illustration for the *Graphic, View from the Tower Bridge Looking West* (Fig. 40), for example, outlined the series of such structures as London Bridge, Southwark and St Paul’s Cathedrals, Cannon Street Station, the Monument, the Custom House and the Tower Wharf in the mist and smoke. As the panoramic image formed a visual palimpsest of constructions of the past and the present, many late Victorians considered Tower Bridge as their addition to the ancient river.

### 2.2 Henri Lanos’s Images of Tower Bridge

‘Mahomet’s feeling in his suspended coffin’:²³¹ the Sense of the Sublime

The amount of press attention Tower Bridge acquired in the 1890s was considerable. New constructions received extensive press coverage in the second half of the nineteenth century to an extent unseen today. When compared with other major building projects in the capital in recent years such as the Law Courts (opened 1882) and the Imperial Institute (opened 1893), Tower Bridge received exceptional notice. One of the top national news stories during the early to mid 1890s, it generated a large quantity of visual representations, technical analyses and commentaries. Particularly the large-format and illustrated weekly papers, designed to appeal to the middle-class readership, such as the *Illustrated London News* and the *Graphic*, published a number of images of the building alongside detailed reports and analyses. While its photographs, published in the *Illustrated London News*, were

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²³¹ *Graphic*, 20 February 1892.
largely of documentary character as seen in (Fig. 41), representations in engraving, reproduced in the *Graphic*, were some of the most striking contemporary images of Tower Bridge.\textsuperscript{232} The newspaper, established to compete with the *Illustrated London News* by the artist and social reformer William Luson Thomas in 1869, indeed had an aim of using images in a more vivid and striking way than the rather staid manner of the latter’s imagery; and employed some of the most important Victorian artists including Luke Fildes, Hubert von Herkomer, Frank Holl, John Everett Millais, and later W. L. Wyllie and Frank Brangwyn.

Among those full-page illustrations of Tower Bridge, those by the French painter and illustrator Henri Lanos (date unknown), who worked for the *Graphic* in the 1890s, were notable.\textsuperscript{233} His perilous views during the construction of the bridge were taken from its high towers as well as approach from the road, emphasising its great height and size. His images articulated the significance of industrial technology and engineering in the public realm of late Victorian Britain, whilst magnifying what such a major modern development as Tower Bridge involved in terms of industrial, technological and human resources through the extraordinary perspectives. They also contrived to suggest both the long history and long-established identity of the Thames and its modern present.

\textsuperscript{232} The world’s first illustrated weekly newspaper the *Illustrated London News* was established by Herbert Ingram, Liberal politician, in 1842. It had made increasing use of photographs since about 1890.

\textsuperscript{233} Henri Lanos illustrated the works of several authors, particularly Julia Daudet, Hector Malot, Guy de Maupassant, Emile Zola, and including H. G. Wells’s *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899). He also worked for a number of reviews including *La Caricature* and *L’Illustration*. See *Benezit Dictionary of Artists*, Paris 2006, vol. 8, p. 436.
The first of those, *The Present State of the Tower Bridge – A View from the Tower Pier, Surrey Side* (Fig. 42), was published on 20 February 1892, accompanied by an article giving particulars of construction and structure as well as the writer’s impression of it from the artist’s high viewpoint for readers. Lanos’s image had been taken from the Southwark side of the Thames up on the tower pier, from which the north tower of the bridge is shown with different natural and industrially produced materials, engineering parts and machines; and it showed workmen in the foreground. The article proposed readers to view the construction site as a ‘wonder’ of modern engineering closely in the following:

… The approaches to the bridge are laid with lines of rails; there is a litter of stones, iron and steel girders, piles of bolts – all the bewildering marine-store look which a large engineering “job” always bears… astounding facts and figures. Thus some 31,000,000 bricks, 70,500 cubic yards of concrete, 19,500 tons of cement, 235,000 cubic feet of granite and other stone, and 15,000 tons of iron and steel are to be used in construction. Attached to the bridge will also be two steam pumping engines of hydraulic machinery, each 360 horse-power, eight large hydraulic engines, and six accumulators, and four hydraulic lifts for passengers… Arrived at the bridge level of the first tower, the trouble begins. The stage above has to be reached by a long gang-way, which seems absurdly perpendicular… As you go climbing, climbing, ever climbing, … Higher still, and you notice that you can look down on the buttons at the top of ship’s masts, … and that you have overtopped the roofs of the warehouses close by and even the Tower itself. It perhaps strikes you that you can realise Mahomet’s feeling in his suspended coffin, … there is absolutely nothing between him and the river except some 150 feet of atmosphere. Look down, if you can, at the river. The water is brown and murky looking. A child’s toy steamer with a string of toy barges behind it goes streaming up the river. They are full-sized Thames barges… passengers will be taken up to it by means of powerful lifts. Here they will be on a roadway 135 ft. above high water mark, and able to look down on the mast-caps of the vessels passing below… The iron grooves shown in M. Lanos’ picture are part of the arrangement by which this will be effected.234

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234 *Graphic*, 20 February 1892.
This verbal and Lanos’s visual representations of the sight of construction highlight the senses of complexity, scale, altitude and danger, which in turn incorporate elements of wonder and sensation. The eye-opening quantities of materials and parts for the building and the great power generated by machines contained in the bridge are detailed to help readers gauge the range of technology and industry involved in what might have appeared only broadly extraordinary to passers-by, while the provision of facts in detail adds the sense of modernity in the writing. The image not only illustrates the great and complex construction; Lanos’s perspective and representation also provide the viewer with an effective sense of the height of the structure and its proportion in relation to the surrounding cityscape and shipping. In the soaring north tower a muddle of apparatus, girders and braziers are visible, adding the qualities of precariousness as well as progress and movement. The metal flange being moved by a crane from the top of the north tower is shown flying in the air, well above Thomas Telford’s St Katharine Docks (opened 1828) and the Tower of London. From the viewpoint of builders in the foreground one overtops all those great buildings, and looks down upon toy-sized barges, steamers and masted ships on the river.

The greater significance of the man-made verticals than the horizontal of the (natural) river in Lanos’s composition, which is also emphasised by the vertical format of the image, suggests man’s triumph over nature. It also conveys the sense of power of growth as well as the sense of narrative. The vast north tower of the future Tower Bridge and the scene of construction from the summit of its south tower
dominate in *The Present State of the Tower Bridge*, leaving the river a relatively small proportion. The modern dominates nature as well as the historical; the Tower which is seen in the background to the left. Furthermore, the vertical structure of the north tower appears as if pushing further into the sky, which could be interpreted in the same vein as man’s ambition to conquer nature. The artist articulated the overriding idea of modernity not only through his composition, using such strong lines as verticals (and diagonals in his next images), but also through the depiction of details and the indicative treatment of tone (such key parts as the new building in progress, constructors, and steamships are dark; and everything else fades into lightness). The sense that man triumphs over nature is matched in the text by the statistics (the materials man uses to conquer nature) and the behaviour (boys not frightened by heights).

Lanos’s emphasis on the sheer scale and peril of the construction through the use of a staggering perspective was discernible also in his next representation of Tower Bridge, published in the following June. *The Tower Bridge: the Progress of the Work* (Fig. 43) shows the fabrication of the bridge with builders at work on the gigantic structure. Looking up to the top of one of the restraining girders from the ground level, this image shows long ladders, on which workers are climbing, narrowing up into the height and the dangerous-looking masses of machines and building parts, and men working amongst them. Even though such major engineering works as railways and embankments in the nineteenth century were represented in newspaper illustration as well as in painting, this kind of a bold perspective was rare in British representations of building works. By contrast, images which appeared in the
Illustrated London News, such as *The Railway Works at Blackfriars and Opening
Towards Ludgate Hill* (Fig. 44) and *Section of the Thames Embankment, Showing the
Subway, the Lower Level Sewer, the Metropolitan Railway and the Pneumatic
Railway* (Fig. 45), for example, simply documented the complexity and scale of
buildings; they are taken from a safe distance, offering no sense of the actuality of
being at perilous sites of construction. Comparisons with such painting as Wyllie’s
early work *The Rebuilding of Blackfriars Bridge* (Fig. 46) further support the case
that Lanos’s representation of new buildings communicates the distinctly robust
sense of scale and risk.\(^{235}\)

Lanos had, indeed, previously produced a very similar work to *The Tower Bridge:
the Progress of the Work* in Paris before the Exposition Universelle of 1889. His
watercolour *L’Exposition Universelle de 1889: Les Travaux de la Tour Eiffel* (Fig.
47) represents the Eiffel Tower with its iron girders in all directions and two men
clambering up a ladder before the completion of the structure. This picture is notably
close in the sort of subject and composition to his *Graphic* illustration (although the
latter represents builders at work, and the scene from the ground level rather than
from the middle of the tower). Lanos might have been employed to represent a key
new building in the British capital as an experienced artist of such modern structures.

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\(^{235}\) The vivid representation of staggering structures or hazardous constructions was to be found in
British art in the following decade: *The Great Gantry, Charing Cross Station: view from a platform
showing scaffolding* (1906; British Museum) and *The British Museum Reading Room, May 1907
(1907; Tate Britain) by Muirhead Bone (1876-1953), and *The Monument* (1912; Guildhall Art
Gallery) by Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956) are exemplary.
The task would require the artist’s ability to draw at great heights and in the middle of construction sites comfortably.²³⁶

Lanos’s radical composition from an elevated or immediate viewpoint powerfully visualised experiences of being at a high, newly available altitude and of witnessing the labour of innovative building on the spot. Representations such as *The Completion of the Tower Bridge: Putting the Finishing Touches* (Fig. 48) and *The Eve of Completion: Clearing Away Scaffolding* (Fig. 49), the latter of which illustrated the cover of *Supplement to the Graphic. The Tower Bridge: Its Construction and Constructors* (30 June 1894), are even more striking examples of his composition from high altitudes, capturing the sense of modernity that hovers between elevation and anxiety. In the latter a substantial section is a void, which heightens the frightening sense that anything small seen on the river is a long way down. In addition to his staggering perspective from which ships’ masts and great buildings were looked down upon as in *The Present State of the Tower Bridge* (Fig. 42), Lanos now placed workers on the summit of the north tower of the bridge and on a girder crossing between the two high-level footways, shown in the foreground of his later images of 1894 (Fig. 48 and Fig. 49). Sensations of sheer altitude and danger – for the viewer – are reinforced by the use of sharp perspectival diagonals and verticals with the centre span raised for the passage of ships. The artist further contrasted the gigantic, fixed structure elaborated with Gothic details with ‘toy’

²³⁶ The artist’s other work for the *Graphic* (10 August 1895), *Travelling in Mid-Air at Earl’s Court: View of the Great Wheel in Motion* also projects similar characteristics of modernity through his perilous perspective.
steamers and barges streaming through the opened bridge, to add the qualities of scale, movement and risk.\textsuperscript{237}

The sense of modernity that Lanos encapsulated in his spectacular portrayals of Tower Bridge could be seen in line with public reaction to new technologies in late nineteenth-century Britain. As Bernhard Rieger’s study of technological innovation and public ambivalence in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century shows, new technologies came to be hailed as stupefying ‘modern wonders’ in media, testifying to both the enthusiasm and the anxiety that the appearance of innovations generated.\textsuperscript{238} The historian notes, in particular, how the sheer size of such transport technologies as ships, airships and aeroplanes in the early twentieth century were described using such expressions as ‘giants’, ‘monsters’ or ‘colossuses’, indicating a mixture of emotions ranging from enthusiasm to uncertainty and fear.\textsuperscript{239} The contemporary reception of Tower Bridge epitomised such a phenomenon even earlier, displaying the combination of astonishment, admiration, reverence and terror with which Edmund Burke characterised the sublime.\textsuperscript{240} Lanos’s close-up views convey this sense of the sublime whilst giving the spectator a sense of physical presence.\textsuperscript{241} What is portrayed in his images is frightening, as is powerfully suggested to the middle-class reader of the \textit{Graphic} who can see it from the safe distance of the drawing.

\textsuperscript{237} \textit{Graphic}, 20 February 1892.
\textsuperscript{238} B. Rieger, \textit{Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890-1945}, Cambridge 2005.
\textsuperscript{239} Rieger, ‘ “Modern Wonders” ’.
\textsuperscript{240} See E. Burke, \textit{A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful}, ed. D. Womersley, London 2004, p. 101. The \textit{Daily News} (30 June 1894) for instance used the metaphor of the Seven Wonders of the World, asking, ‘What would be the Hanging Gardens of Babylon when compared with it [Tower Bridge]?’.
\textsuperscript{241} Close-up – as with Wyllie’s views from the deck of his yacht – is a naturalist trick, which adds the sense of actuality.
Such invocations of Tower Bridge in progress in the previous *Graphic* article on 20 February 1892 as ‘Mahomet’s feeling in his suspended coffin’ and ‘he [foreman] would be far better engaged in saying his prayers, for there is absolutely nothing between him and the river except some 150 feet of atmosphere’ convey those experiences of unprecedented dimensions and proportions of innovative artefacts. Similarly, the following *Graphic* article on 4 June 1892 uses such expressions as ‘Brobdingnagian’, ‘giant’, ‘monster’, ‘mysteries’ and ‘mighty’ to signify the degree of amazement at and mystery of scale, complexity and power of engineering, with which contemporaries watched the new building.\(^{242}\)

… For weeks past it has been a favourite occupation alike of the professional idler and of the business man crossing London Bridge to the City to gaze at the new bridge a little lower down the stream, and watch the building out of the high-level footway. Seen from the older bridge, it seemed impossible that the projecting pieces from each tower should stand the strain of their own weight as they hung out like giant shelves or brackets, awaiting some monster statuette or Brobdingnagian piece of pottery. But they kept, day by day, stretching outwards, and, finally, they met, were riveted together, and became a pathway, on which the workmen now, and millions of Londoners by-and-by, will pass from shore to shore… The approaches are still in a seemingly chaotic state – littered with girders and other mysteries in metal, and carrying a line of rails… Men are now busy building the “lifting girders,” as they are termed by the engineers. These are mighty steel frameworks which will bear the roadway across the central span… There will be sufficient space between the high-level footway and high-water mark to clear the cap of the tallest mast that was ever stepped in a ship’s deck.\(^{243}\)

\(^{242}\) *Graphic*, 4 June 1892.

This can also be seen in relation with Philip Fisher’s link of modern architecture, vertical structures in particular, to the experience of wonder since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The author pointed to the skyscraper as the most obvious example of architecture intended to produce the experience of wonder and argued that the first genuinely vertical building type in history was set in relation to the sky rather than the earth, surrendering at last the heavy mass, broadest in its base, that was the very essence of a building up to the late nineteenth century. While Tower Bridge is no skyscraper, it is in a sense a more striking vertical structure as it stands upon the water, with less obvious attachment to the earth. Lanos’s images such as *The Present State of the Tower Bridge* (Fig. 42), *The Completion of the Tower Bridge* (Fig. 48) and *The Eve of Completion* (Fig. 49) are conspicuous explorations of the vertical and of experiences of wonder.

**Workers in Lanos’s Representation**

One of the notable features in all the images of Tower Bridge by Lanos examined here – *The Present State of the Tower Bridge* (Fig. 42), *The Tower Bridge: the Progress of the Work* (Fig. 43), *The Completion of the Tower Bridge* (Fig. 48) and *The Eve of Completion* (Fig. 49) – is the worker. These views of workers at the perilous construction site of London’s massive and complex engineering structure from the late nineteenth century can be considered in the art historical as well as contemporary social contexts.

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244 P. Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*, Cambridge and London 1998, p. 3. The author mentions towers and lighthouses as the only exceptions in an exploration of the horizontal in previous buildings.
In comparison with such scenes of construction as Whistler’s *Westminster Bridge in Progress* (Fig. 50) and Wyllie’s *The Rebuilding of Blackfriars Bridge* (Fig. 46), we note how prominent workers are in Lanos’s representations. For Whistler, even in this early print, it could be argued that the actuality of construction was not the main concern; it was beginning to be the objects whose forms offered potential for his formalist aesthetic that interested him.\(^{245}\) As Arthur Severn put it, ‘it was the piles … that took his fancy, not the bridge’.\(^{246}\) In *Westminster Bridge in Progress* there is no workman present but an observer, who directs our attention to the scaffolding. By contrast, Lanos takes an active interest in the course of construction and the navvies, and his placement of them in his images of Tower Bridge invite different interpretations.

First of all, the visible presence of workmen in his series of representations reminds the viewer of the role of labour in the creation of Tower Bridge. On the rapid physical change of mid-Victorian London, Linda Nead stated, ‘it seemed by enchantment rather than man-made’.\(^{247}\) In seeing the remarkable structure thrusting to the sky, contemporaries watched the rising building with awe as well as excitement, as captured in the *Graphic* article on 4 June 1892. The following article and Lanos’s work, however, drew the reader’s attention to the workmen on the construction site of this modern wonder.\(^{248}\)

\(^{245}\) Whistler’s lack of interest in the building is also explained in his perspective, from which the bridge diminishes into the background.


\(^{247}\) Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p. 29.

\(^{248}\) *Graphic*, 4 June 1892.
Passengers on the river hardly realise that the great structure is
growing under the hands of thousands of workmen, so quiet does the
scene appear from the steamer deck. On the bridge the aspect is
different, and, seen from the high towers on either side of the stream,
is busy enough.249

Lanos’s illustrations not only featured workers prominently, but also were sequential
and came in subsequent issues of the periodical, which told a narrative of progress.
The notable presence of labourers within the developing narrative of construction
implicated their indispensable role in the creation of the wonder of engineering for
the viewer.

In his celebrated painting Work of 1856-63 (Fig. 51) Ford Madox Brown placed
navvies ‘in the pride of manly health and beauty’ as the heroes, providing the central
motif in his attempt to promote a harmonious social order.250 Brown glorified work as
the supreme virtue, linked to the idea of progress towards civilisation in which even
the humblest person had an allotted role, as Thomas Carlyle (depicted in the image)
insisted. Brown’s navvies are muscular, with shirt sleeves rolled up for work, taking
on a heroic and noble dimension. As Tim Barringer points out, this group in the
throes of labour, brilliantly lit, ‘casts the rest of society into the shade’.251 Labourers
in the Port of London in Frank Brangwyn’s portrayal from the 1900s take on a
similar dimension. In his treatment of dock labour for the decoration of the
committee luncheon room of Lloyd’s Register of Shipping, Brangwyn emphasised
the heroic role played by porters in celebrating the Port of London as the centre of

249 Graphic, 20 February 1892.
250 T. J. Barringer, Men At Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain, New Haven and London 2005,
p. 24.
251 Ibid., p. 22.
world trade. *Fruit Porters* (Fig. 52), for instance, presents large male figures, whose mere gestures of holding farm produce make them look like heroes. The caryatid-like uprightness of the three men in the right and the effortlessness of their labour are combined with their serious yet relaxed gaze to convey unmistakable manliness and strength. They easily acquire the viewer’s trust and convince him of their performance in the imperial hub, which is suggested by St Paul’s Cathedral and Cannon Street Station, forming the backcloth to a superabundance of fruits of the earth in the foreground. The half-naked man in the left barely looks like a worker; rather, his statuesque upper body and pose with his chest opening and muscular arms stretching display a degree of elegance, suited to the grand metropolis. Similarly, Brangwyn’s decorative panel which filled (along with other works) recesses in the ambulatory of the Royal Exchange, *Modern Commerce* (Fig. 53), presents figures carrying sacks, crates and bundles of fruit with cranes and scaffolding in the background. Here in the bustle, vitality and wealth of the modern port, brawny men take central roles as if they were soldiers in the triumphant battle of commerce.

Seen in comparison with both the labourer in Brown’s *Work*, the civilising end of whose energies elevated his stature, and victorious porters in Brangwyn’s celebration of the Port of London, it is clear that the worker in Lanos’s representations is no hero. While he plays a necessary role within the scenes of construction, he neither is as central as the immense structure and thrusting symbol of modernity, nor has as leading a role as the middle-class viewer outside the image. Figures in *The Eve of Completion* (Fig. 49), whose expressions are legible to our eyes, are indeed in no way as heroic as Brown’s navvies or Brangwyn’s porters. By contrast, they have
wary and timorous faces, looking down a frightening distance to the fast flowing water; and their bent bodies and even their knees down on the girder (the man in the right) heighten the level of apparent caution. The following article, accompanying *The Present State of the Tower Bridge* (Fig. 42), might vigorously praise the courage of workers, but the text, however, speaks unmistakably for the spectator:

Here are a horde of impish boys who delight in sitting in blood-curdling proximity to the edge of nothingness. They dash up and down the ladders at break-neck speed, and lark about in mid-air with an indifference to danger which appals you. Nor are the men less daring. A crane is at work getting a girder or a long metal flange of some sort into position. One of the foremen springs on to the flat top of the girder as the crane swings it up from the staging below… To the trembling onlooker it seems that he would be far better engaged in saying his prayers, for there is absolutely nothing between him and the river except some 150 feet of atmosphere.  

In contrast to this view of the workers, Lanos’s figures are not all daring or delighted to be up on a dangerous height. Rather, the men in *The Present State of the Tower Bridge* (Fig. 42) are merely working diligently – most certainly without expressing his moral nature as in Carlyle’s system, which Brown’s *Work* envisaged. Those in *The Eve of Completion* (Fig. 49) are clearly risking their lives in the midst of a frightful construction site above the water. However meaningful it might have seemed to take part in the building of the great structure to the spectator, the site of its construction was undeniably a hazardous place to be. The delight is not the represented worker’s, but the viewer and newspaper reader’s in his comfortable sitting room. That sublime pleasure one could derive from viewing the terrible and the lethal from a safe vantage point Burke discussed.

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252 *Graphic*, 20 February 1892.
The visible presence of workers within Lanos’s views of Tower Bridge from the early 1890s could also provide the viewer with reassurance. In recent years London witnessed various socialist and other protest movements, while the ‘unemployed’ had become a feature of metropolitan labour, inflamed by trade depression and severe winters. Britain’s first organised socialist political party the Social Democratic Federation was formed in 1882, from which William Morris and Eleanor Marx split to set up the Socialist League in 1885. The Fabian Society, with its purpose to advance the principles of democratic socialism, was founded in 1884, to lay many of the foundations of the Labour Party. In parallel, labour unrest, demanding better conditions and wages, continued in the 1880s, propelling the growth of the new trade unionism in Britain. Most notably, the Dock Strike of 1889, involving a shut-down of the London docks, mass meetings on Tower Hill and marches through the City, was organised by such figures associated with the SDF as John Burns, Tom Mann and Ben Tillett. Considered the greatest strike of the century in terms of its effects on the consciousness of London workers and the middle classes, it won an important victory, not only achieving its principal demand for a minimum wage of six pence an hour – the ‘dockers’ tanner’ – but also resulting in the establishment of strong trade unions amongst London dockers, including the nationally important Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers Union.253

Dudley Hardy’s painting *The Dock Strike, London, 1889* (Fig. 54), representing an episode of the Strike, was shown at the Royal Academy in the following year. It shows a group of men listening to an agitator in a dingy commercial district in the East End in the twilight. Compared with Lanos’s close-up views of the construction of Tower Bridge, Hardy’s picture quietly observes and records a disquieting scene. A clear pictorial distance is given in the empty foreground with the group of men pushed to the middle of the canvas. The artist remains neutral without participating in or sympathising with the affair. His painting of an actual event of the previous year is modern in its acknowledgement of the dark sides of metropolitan society, but by no means political. Indeed, most of the depicted figures, except the speaker and the two men with their hands raised, seem ambivalent, possibly wondering if the speech is worth listening to or if its contents are in any way feasible; and few even faces towards the viewer. The exhibition of this painting at the Academy temporarily locates the East End in the West End of London, and presents the dirty and poor to the leisured middle class. It would of course not provide the spectator with that proud and satisfying feeling which Wyllie’s images of the great Port of London did. Hardy’s painting showed that the dock workers struggled with casual employment and low wages, displaying them on a strike. The late Victorian upper and middle classes’ viewing of this image was no pleasant experience; they acknowledged the picture and left it there. Few critics reviewed the picture, with *The Times* reluctantly labelling it ‘a clever rendering of a gloomy scene’.254

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254 *The Times*, 20 June 1890. M. H. Spielmann briefly noted the picture as ‘a demagogue is haranguing a good group of well-characterised strikers’ in the *Magazine of Art*, 1890, p. 256.
The *Art Journal* gave no written response to Hardy’s work, but its suggestive placement of the reproduction of the image evoked the ironic fates of the Thames and questioned the meaning of progress. The magazine put Vicat Cole’s exhibit *Meeting of the Thame and Isis at Dorchester* (Fig. 55) and *The Dock Strike, London* below it on a full single page.²⁵⁵ Cole’s painting, which was part of his Thames series for Agnew, depicted the river’s upstream at its most rural and untouched by industry. While the work recapitulated Turner’s subject of *Union of the Thames and Isis* (exhibited at the artist’s gallery in 1808 and 1809; Tate Britain), Cole’s painting presented a landscape of agrarian practice that was more reminiscent of Constable’s *The Hay Wain* (1821; National Gallery) than of Turner’s or Cuyp’s mammal-centred imagery.²⁵⁶ As *The Hay Wain* does, Cole’s work confirms thoughts about a well-ordered agrarian society. The juxtaposition of this picture of the pastoral Upper Thames and Hardy’s image of an industrial dispute was a telling presentation of pre- and post-industrial social orders – along the course of the Thames – which problematised modernisation. It showed that what was generally considered development did not necessarily mean progress, for the labouring class in particular, and it could destroy the harmony among individuals and between the environment and humanity which had existed in agricultural and feudal society. The Thames that symbolised an ideal rural past as well as the misery of the capitalist present to Morris was encapsulated in this juxtaposition of the two Academy exhibits. The *Art Journal*’s knowing confrontation of these two images was an ironic, perhaps even admonitory, decision, presenting its middle-class readership with the harsh reality of working-class dockland life.

²⁵⁶ James Clarke Hook’s *The Stream* (1885; Tate Britain), produced around the same time as Cole’s work, was also reminiscent of Constable’s painting.
In line with the praise of modernity in his representation, Lanos featured the industrious, skilled and productive worker occupied at the site of construction of London’s new water gate. His work presented an image of the labourer, safely contained within the modern social order. In contrast to Hardy’s painting, Lanos’s illustrations which appeared in the Graphic just a few years after the Dock Strike would have been reassuring for the middle class to view.

2.3 ‘Barry’s Thames Colossus’: Punch and John Tenniel’s Illustration of the ‘Wonderful Bridge’

The rhetoric of wonder emerged at the centre of public debates about Tower Bridge and was found in various accounts of the building, which touched upon not only its technology but also its functional and symbolic roles as a transport ‘machine’ and the gateway to London. With its cutting-edge technology, the suspension bridge with bascules raised by hydraulic powers fascinated the public, the very sense of which could also leave contemporaries intimidated as they felt emotionally and intellectually overwhelmed, as in responses to other new artefacts and technological change in the late nineteenth century. The following commentary in Punch, entitled ‘Robert on the Grand Tower Bridge!’ and written in Cockney dialect, captures those senses of stupefaction and fear in the popular response to the new building:

… so wunderfully is the Bridge made, that when any ship, however big it may be, won’t to pass thro it, all the Pilot has to do is to blow his wissal and the Bridge will open of itself in two minutes and a harf! …

I remembers werry well going to see the werry fust stone of the Bridge laid, ever so many years ago, and not one of us ever thought as how as we should live to see it finished, and lots of clever fellers, as they thought theirselves, all prosefied as it would never be big enuff or igh enuff to let a great big ship go thro it without breaking of it; and I well remembers how artily some on em larfed when they was told that it wouldn’t take above 2 or 3 minutes to hopen or shut it again! But they don’t larf now, but beleevs what they are told by our grate Engineer, like all good Cristiens ort to do, speshally if a Royal Prince and Princess comes and shows em all as there really ain’t not nothink for to be afraid on.258

This text also deals with the role of ‘our grate Engineer’ for the amazed and afraid public. The metaphor of the engineer of the ‘wunderful’ bridge, who contemporaries believe like sincere Christians believe God, may be interpreted as the replacement of God by the engineer, the one who performs wonders in the modern world;259 and seen as signifying the triumph of technology over mysterious incalculable powers and sublime values, which Max Weber theorised as the ‘disenchantment of the world (Entzauberung der Welt)’.260 In much the same vein, Punch’s subsequent article on Tower Bridge, ‘Our Giant Causeway. Old Father Thames, loquitur: –’, published upon the opening of the building, expanded on the theme with the role of engineering, replacing supernatural forces, and was accompanied by an illustration by John Tenniel (1820-1914):

Oh, cloud-capt towers! Oh, spanking spans! What is it here I see? I’m an Old Stream – from the country! – but this quite gets over me! I’ve seen a many wondrous sights, ’twixt Thames Head and the Nore,

258 ‘Robert on the Grand Tower Bridge!’, Punch, 19 May 1894, p. 238.
But such a whopping bit of work, I’ve never twigged before!
Yet I remember lots of things History has half forgotten:
Those old Thames timber bridges, with wood-piers that soon grew rotten,
...
I recollect Old London Bridge, which cost a pretty penny,
And the mighty masterpieces of the great bridge-builder, RENNIE;
*Pontifex maximus*, great SIR JOHN!
But lor! I musn’t tarry O’er memories of the misty past.
Bully for JOHN WOLFE BARRY,
The Engineer-in-Chief of this! A very Thames Colossus,
Striding across my stream in iron. Giants used to cross us (Us rivers) in the
fine old legends, bare-legged and bare-footed!
Ah, Gog, old friend, and Magog, your objection is not rooted
To this jolly Giant Causeway, which the good old Corporation
Have built up here to crown my fame – and their own reputation.
*Palmam qui meruit ferat!* As pontifices, at any rate,
The much-nagged City Fathers have not proved themselves degenerate.
Ah! fancy that Bridge House Estate in Eleven Seventy-six, Sir!
...
A-smiling on WOLFE BARRY’s towers! There’s a thought to link the
centuries!
Well, Engineers get over me! They are the modern Titans.
They’re Bottle-Imps plus Magi, with a touch of those old Sheitans
The Tigris-dwellers dreamed about. But our Thames Genii, thanks be!
...
Well, Time tries all. I hope this Titan Bridge will stand the test of it.
Here’s to it, tower and bascule! It’s a triumph and a thumper!
Here’s to BARRY, and to BRUNEL, and to CRUTTWELL, in a bumper;
...
To Gog and Magog, who are not too often in the applause way,
And those civic Giants’ backers, who have built our Giant Causeway!!!

The river that such giants as Gog and Magog used to cross in legends was now
crowned with an engineering ‘colossus’. It was engineers who were ‘the modern
Titans’, performing the service, which would have been done previously by mythic
demons and biblical magicians. The metaphor of Giant Causeway, referring to the

261 *Punch*, 30 June 1894, p. 306. Isambard Kingdom Brunel was one of the most prominent civil
engineers of the nineteenth century, whose designs revolutionised public transport and modern
engineering. E. Cruttwell was resident engineer of Tower Bridge.
262 Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94), who was a scion of the family of Robert Stevenson (1772-
1850), the engineer and designer of lighthouses, also recently wrote a short story entitled *The Bottle
Imp* (1891).
Giant’s Causeway in Northern Ireland, for Tower Bridge can be analysed as the magnitude of engineering comparable to a wonder of nature, which has a myth that it was built by an Irish giant. Barry’s colossus, ‘striding across’ the Thames, encapsulates the triumph of technology over nature. In addition to this parallel found in Weber’s theory of increasing intellectualisation and rationalisation, according to which ‘knowledge of the universe is less and less understood by reference to supernatural forces and salvation doctrines, and more and more by reference to empirical observation’ and scientific method, several other aspects can be observed in this article.263

Firstly, the persistent rhetoric of ‘giants’, which had also appeared in the Graphic (4 June 1892), is noticeable. This indicates contemporaries’ astonishment at as well as intimidation by the sheer scale of the building positioned over the Thames. Tenniel’s drawing Our Giant Causeway (Fig. 56) highlights that sense which is also captured in the caption of the image – Father Thames. “Well, I’m blowed! This quite gets over me!” – and in the composition, in which the old figure representing the Father Thames has to look up the ‘whopping’ bridge with his upper body pulled back in surprise.264 The crowd of myriad masts in the Pool behind the north tower of the bridge is seen reduced to an insignificant proportion. A similar composition is found in Wyllie’s The Tower Bridge, with the Drawbridge Raised for the Passage of Ships in the Graphic (30 June 1894), which heightens the enormity of the building from

264 Punch, 30 June 1894, p. 306. The Daily News (2 July 1894) recapitulated this image and caption: ‘Tenniel’s cartoon, so humorously depicting Father Thames’s astonishment, must have occurred to many who witnessed Saturday’s brilliant ceremony’.
the low viewpoint of diminutive bargemen just below the structure (Fig. 57). At the same time, both images emphasise the modernity of the innovative bridge with its bascules raised, below which steamers are passing through.

Secondly, the recognition of the civic power and wealth of ‘the good old Corporation’ of London as the source of the wonder of Tower Bridge, ‘our Giant Causeway’, is evident. Allegories of Gog and Magog do not only symbolise mythical forces of the archaic age, over whose achievements modern technology has triumphed, but relate to the tradition of the City of London, according to which the giants are its guardians, and images of them have been carried in the Lord Mayor’s Show since the days of King Henry V. Victorians’ pride in their ‘civic Giants’ backers was even more obvious in *Punch*’s previous article on Tower Bridge (19 May 1894), which suggested their thrilled sense of belonging to the great ancient mercantile capital:

… thanks to the amost boundless ginerosity of our right honnerabel and most liberal LORD MARE. I’m promised a reglar holly-day about the hend of nex month, when the Prince and Princess of WALES is a comming into the City, with their usual kindness, to hopen our grand Tower Bridge … the grandest Tower Bridge in the world, and will cost the grand old Copperashun jest about a hole million of money!

… The Copperashun, with its usual generosity, don’t mean to charge not nothink to go over it or to go under it, tho it will cost em jest about a thowsend thowsend soverains! … it is more than all the other five London Bridges cost put together!

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265 Another similar composition is found later in Frank Brangwyn’s *The Tower Bridge, London* in W. Shaw-Sparrow, *The Book of Bridges*, London 1915.
266 *Punch*, 30 June 1894, p. 306.
267 *Ibid*.
268 *Punch*, 19 May 1894, p. 238.
This text makes the link between engineering and capitalist investment explicit, even though the cheery Cockney language *Punch* assumed takes on a certain irony given contemporary industrial relations in the docklands. It emphasises the power of capital of the City, suggesting that the financial weight of London enables such a triumph as Tower Bridge.

Thirdly, there is a marked sense of time connecting the past to the present and emphasis of history in both the article, ‘Old Giant Causeway’ (30 June 1894), and Tenniel’s drawing (Fig. 56). Old Father Thames’s narrative of Tower Bridge in the article and illustration suggests the extent of time which this deity of a commercial river symbolises as well as the longevity of the river by which the great capital was built to last and prosper to the day.269

This series of texts from *Punch* and Tenniel’s image also indicate a sense of class distinction. In the apparently humorous narrative, there is a sense of condescension, in which the grammar and pronunciation of the uneducated classes is held up to ridicule. Tenniel, on the other hand, depicts the river god, dressed in a sporting club blazer: a middle-class attribute.

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269 There are a sculpture of Father Thames in Trinity Square, where it acts as *genius loci* for the erstwhile headquarters of the Port of London Authority, as well as other sculpture heads and statues along the Thames.
2.4 ‘A splendid addition to the great works of the metropolis’: the Sense of Time in Views from Tower Bridge

The sense of time, conveyed in Lanos’s suggestive treatment of the surrounding built environment in relation to the new Tower Bridge as well as Punch and Tenniel’s reference to the Father Thames and the City of London, in fact recurred in representations of and writings on Tower Bridge around the time of its opening. We have examined in the first section of this chapter how the Gothic Revival style of the Bridge formed an aesthetic link to the medieval past of the City and of the Tower, while resonating with public sentiment about the continuity of the City and the Port of London. Such a structure in the most historic part of the Thames, adjacent to the Tower and connecting the City and Southwark, prompted the public to reconsider the urban landscape of London in terms of history. This viewing of London and the Thames in the historical context came in various forms of response to the completion of Tower Bridge.

Firstly, a new range of views of the Thames and London from the high-level footways of the bridge motivated artists and commentators, who appreciated the hitherto unknown views of London and its constructions in the course of its long history. One of the most notable examples was, as we have seen, H. W. Brewer’s View from the Tower Bridge Looking West (Fig. 40), published in the Graphic three weeks before the opening of the bridge. In his panorama of the Upper Pool, taken from the top of Tower Bridge in the middle of the river, the artist depicted a series of

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270 Daily News, 14 March 1893.
271 The Illustrated London News (30 June 1894) also published a view of the river from Tower Bridge upon its opening. View of the City from the New Tower Bridge, photograph by James Russell & Sons.
structures: from St. Saviour’s, Southwark, across the wide stream of the Pool to Tower Wharf, the image shows barges, ships, wharves, as well as Southwark and London Bridges, Cannon Street Station, St Paul’s Cathedral, the Monument, the Custom House and the Church of St Dunstan-in-the-East. Brewer’s view formed a palimpsest of history of London with edifices from AD 952 (St Dunstan’s), those built after the Great Fire of 1666 (the Monument, St Paul’s), to such modern engineering structure as the Cannon Street Railway Bridge and Station (1866) as well as steamships and smoke. In his own article of the same title as his illustration, Brewer emphasised the value of the new viewpoint in opening up possibilities of viewing London’s cityscape from a fresh perspective. While noting the general tendency to criticise London for its incoherent urban landscape (and environment), the artist asserted that Tower Bridge enabled the beholder to take in ‘the whole scene at once’ and thereby to see the ‘beauty’ of the metropolis, which he related to the outlines of the various structures silhouetted against the misty sky.

Such consideration of London’s cityscape in aesthetic terms was developed further in the following article of the *Daily News*, published upon the opening of Tower Bridge:

... there are eyes which see little or no beauty in the stream from Westminster to the Tower. But such eyes, we cannot help saying, must have formed for themselves a very conventional and Philistine idea of beauty... What of the outlines of buildings on either bank of the stream, some of them common and prosaic enough when taken in mere detail, but the whole combining into picturesqueness and

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272 H. W. Brewer worked for the *Graphic* in the 1880s and 1890s, specialising in bird’s-eye views, which included *Bird’s Eye View of London as Seen from a Balloon* (with W. L. Wyllie, 1884) and *A Half-Century’s Change in London* (1898).

variety? Even incongruity itself is after all better than monotony… What about the spires on both sides, and the dome of St Paul’s, and the shaft of the Monument, and the tower of the Southwark Church where Massinger is buried? What about the Tower of London itself? … A crowded London on a gala day in bright weather is always a magnificent spectacle. We have got over the absurd and conventional idea that London is not a picturesque city. No city is all picturesqueness. The common-place, the monotonous, the colourless, and the vulgar assert themselves largely in the outer appearances as well as the inner life of every town.274

This article notes, as others did, the historic aspect of the Thames and considers Tower Bridge as an achievement of the present in relation to the nation’s past. As he emphasised the sense of time, the writer was clearly defending London’s cityscape of ‘incongruity’ and ‘variety’, in which edifices of different periods stood incoherently. It referred to the existing anxieties about the capital as a fitting symbol of imperial power, of its built environment being ‘insufficiently spectacular’ or ‘appropriately imperial’ when compared to such European capitals as Paris, Brussels and Vienna.275 Critics of London as a capital city complained that it ‘appeared a poor second to Paris’ and that ‘the capitals of lesser powers provided more impressive displays of their reach and authority’.276 Paris had of course gone through a state-sponsored rebuilding in the mid century, resulting in a coherent and lucid cityscape in which the modern had triumphed over the old. This difference between the British and other European capitals has been considered in terms of the particular character of different national imperialisms; and it was argued that London’s relative lack of a coherent cityscape was ‘the manifestation of a distinctively British imperialism of

liberalism and free trade’ (in this rhetoric the Parisian cityscape became the product of bureaucracy and autocracy).277

Secondly, the recognition of the sense of time via the new viewpoint of Tower Bridge was also found in the exploration of the Tower of London. The Graphic, which had published Brewer’s panorama, issued the same artist’s exclusive view of the Tower, View of the Tower from the Top of the Tower Bridge (Fig. 58) in a special supplement issued on the opening of the bridge.278 This bird’s-eye view gave an overview of the medieval castle, with glimpses of the east of the City and Tower Hill in the background, as well as ships and barges, probably from and to Tower Wharf, in the foreground. Such a view of the Tower from the elevated viewpoint of Tower Bridge was new to Victorians. While it was to remind the viewer of the stylistic link of the new bridge to the historic structure, this exclusive representation of the Tower was in line with the recent revival of the building as a tourist attraction after a restoration in the 1850s. With the departure of such institutions as the Royal Mint, Menagerie, and the Office of Ordnance from the Tower for other sites in the early to mid-nineteenth century, a Gothic Revival architect, Anthony Salvin, was commissioned to restore the fortress to its original medieval appearance, which resulted in various changes including the restoration of the Salt Tower as well as alterations in the White Tower and the Wakefield Tower to house the Crown Jewels. The new ‘medieval’ monument attracted visitors, whose number increased dramatically since. Such an illustration as Henri Lanos’s Sightseeing in London during the Christmas Holidays: A Visit to the Tower of London on a Free Day,

277 Ibid.
278 The Tower Bridge. Its Construction and Constructors. Supplement to the Graphic (30 June 1894).
which appeared in the Graphic (31 December 1892), testifies to the phenomenon. The image depicts ‘the equestrian model of Queen Elizabeth as she appeared on her way to St Paul’s to give thanks for the victory over the Spanish Armada’ with visiting crowds and a guide, showing the Victorian admiration of and fascination with the sovereign and her era, during which the Empire was founded.279

It is noteworthy that Brewer’s View of the Tower from the Top of the Tower Bridge was shown below the portraits of such major figures of the Tower Bridge project as Chairman of the Bridge House Estates Committee, Albert Altman, and Engineer-in-Chief, John Wolfe Barry, on the same page of the large-format newspaper, alongside the article outlining the development of the Corporation of London’s eight year-long enterprise. This included the different engineering schemes considered, varied opinions of different parties on them and, notably, a history of the Bridge House Estates, the Corporation’s medieval charitable trust established in 1282, which funded the project as well as the old and new London Bridges, Blackfriars and Southwark Bridges.280 The illustrated article thus highlighted a medieval link to Tower Bridge in its enterprise as well as architectural style. The revival of the Middle Ages through Tower Bridge was similarly seen in the Bridge House Estates Committee’s publication, History of The Tower Bridge and of other bridges over the Thames built by the Corporation of London, in the year of the opening of the bridge. The large book included a separate chapter, ‘The City, the Tower, and the River’,

279 Graphic, 31 December 1892. Similarly, the Illustrated London News also featured an illustration entitled Tourists at the Tower of London. Charles Dellheim mentions the Victorian popularity of historical and archaeological sightseeing especially of medieval survivals in his The Face of the Past, pp. 39-40.
280 The Estates was a fund started to pay for old London Bridge and added to by the rents of the houses thereon, the tolls of those who used the bridge and the gifts of property and land by wealthy citizens over the centuries.
which outlined the history of the Tower in relation to those of the City and the 
Thames, emphasising the significance of the Middle Ages in the history of the 
metropolis and the nation.281

Finally, many views of Tower Bridge itself were carefully composed to include the 
Tower of London, as in Lanos’s *The Present State of the Tower Bridge* (Fig. 42) and 
*The Eve of Completion* (Fig. 49), and in doing so conveyed the sense of time the two 
buildings signified in varied ways. For instance, the largest image of the bridge the 
*Illustrated London Newspaper* issued, *View Looking North-west, with Bascules Up 
for Ships to Pass* (Fig. 41), is taken from a contrived viewpoint to ensure that the 
Tower is visible through the vast bridge with its bascules opened, forming a sober 
documentary image. While depicting both structures, P. R. Perry’s drawing *Tower of 
London and Tower Bridge* (1891; Fig. 59) emphasises the old over the new. The 
view faces the northeast side of the Tower, leaving the new building in progress to 
one side, reversing proportions of the old and new structures. In parallel, only 
manual labour and transport are seen in the fore- and mid-grounds, while the 
engineering features and industrially-produced materials of the bridge are scarcely 
visible. On the other hand, Paul Renouard’s *A Cheap Entertainment: Schoolchildren 
on the Tower Bridge Watching a Large Steamer* (Fig. 60) for the *Graphic* (21 August 
1897) plays senses of time and space more robustly, linking the past, present, as well 
as future in a view of the Tower and Tower Bridge on it, above water. From the 
artist’s viewpoint at the south end of the bridge, children in the foreground and a 
crowd in the mid-ground are seen rushing to the west side of the bridge to catch a

glimpse of the vessel that has just cleared the bridge. This effective sense of movement is combined with the dramatic lines of the structure of the bridge, leading the eye to the background, where the Tower is prominent next to the top of a big ship which has just passed the opened bridge, and the curve of the steel girder connecting a main tower with a lower tower on the abutment is noticeable. Renouard’s image frames the excitement of a rising generation with modern technology, specifically with a view of the past, to embody a sense of continuity.

2.5 The Opening of Tower Bridge: geographical, social and imperial implications

When Tower Bridge was completed in 1894 after eight years of construction, the landscape of the Pool of London and its contiguous east and southeast London was transformed. The monumental structure linked the East End and Bermondsey as well as allowing international shipping in to the Pool in an inventive manner, projecting the capital of the City, the modernity of Victorian engineering, and histories of the City and the Tower. The changed urban landscape brought about by the creation of Tower Bridge displayed London’s wealth and power and at the same time offered an opportunity to consider the duality of the metropolitan landscape and society, which indicated the symptoms of capitalist society and even ironies of British ‘civilisation’.

The opening of Tower Bridge by the Prince of Wales (afterwards Edward VII) on 30 June 1894 was celebrated with great pomp and ceremony. It was a lavish occasion for the City of London to display its authority and wealth and for Victorians to celebrate their capital. It involved the greatest water pageant in the Thames’s long
history as well as a street procession. The latter ran from Charing Cross via the City to Tower Hill and continued over the new bridge to the south side of the river, to return over the bridge. At the Tower the royal dais was located; from here the Prince and Princess of Wales embarked aboard a steamboat, which sailed through the bridge and back again; then the Prince turned the key to raise the bascules and admit the waiting ships to the Upper Pool. The event was extensively reported in the contemporary press in terms largely of the magnitude of the metropolis, the wealth of the City (and how it facilitated both such an impressive celebration and the wonder of Tower Bridge) and the reshaped metropolitan geography.282

Representations of the procession on the bridge visualised the ways in which the stone archways constituting a main tower and a lower tower of the massive, complex structure formed gateways to each side of the Thames. Such views as Henri Lanos’s and J. Nash’s *The Opening of the Tower Bridge: the Royal Procession on the Bridge* (Fig. 38) for the *Graphic* and *The Royal Procession Crossing the Bridge* (the artist unknown) for the *Illustrated London News* (Fig. 61) show the extravagant combination of steel and stone of the bridge in perspectives to dramatise the lines of steel girders, and represent the City’s authority as well as wealth by showing its coat of arms at the top of the lower tower on the abutment (in the latter image). At the same time, these images of wealth and power are set in the background of St Katharine Docks and Bermondsey, which presented another aspect of London and its

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282 For example, the *Graphic* (7 July 1894) wrote: ‘the City’s lavish magnificence in the organisation of ceremonial is traditional, and the decorations and appearance of the Tower Bridge last Saturday were in keeping with the ideas of a corporation which has cheerfully spent a million and a quarter on the bridge… Symbolically the procession opened the bridge for road traffic, and when shortly it returned the ceremony of opening the bridge to the passage of the shipping of the world went on without delay’. See also the *Daily News*, 23, 27, 29, 30 June and 2 July 1894; *Illustrated London News*, 7 July 1894; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 June 1894; *The Times*, 29 June and 2 July 1894.
society. The opening of Tower Bridge in the Lower Thames formed a momentous opportunity to direct public attention to those architecturally, historically and politically less significant quarters of the capital. The Graphic observed:

Lower down the Thames, in the direction of the bridge, the river was a historic sight. The warehouses and wharves, their dinginess tempered by red cloth and bunting, were alive with “fluttering skirts and ladies’ eyes”; and in the Pool the boats on either side of the bridge were as thick as omnibuses at the Mansion House on a busy morning.  

This article notes the commercial nature of the ‘dingy’ buildings in the lower river by relating them to the bustle of the City, and we might also consider the contrasting characters of the social make-up as well as topography of the different metropolitan districts. The Daily News commented on the significance of the opening of Tower Bridge in east London in historical and social terms:

… London sorely needs to be divided in that particular quarter where the Tower looks on the Thames. But the commercial need of such a work as the Tower Bridge has been felt more and more with every year of late… the need is supplied and the triumph is accomplished… That part of London which is joined or divided by the new bridge does not see much of ceremonial splendour. Processions of princes and statesmen and soldiers do not often move down that way. The gallants from Westminster used to go ruffling down to the City much more in the Elizabethan days, or in the days of Charles II than they have been doing in times nearer to our own. But even in those older times they did not go very deeply eastward; and they did not often go in gorgeous procession or for the crowning of some great architectural edifice. This is a rare occasion, an almost unique opportunity for the residents of the East-end, and we hope that its memory may live genially in their hearts for many a long year.

283 Graphic, 7 July 1894.
284 Daily News, 30 June 1894.
The East End, which the creation of Tower Bridge around its boundary gave the middle-class reader an opportunity to reconsider, was subject of a strange mix of fear and fascination in the late nineteenth century. The districts east of the medieval walled City of London and north of the Thames, comprised of Tower Hamlets, Whitechapel, Stepney, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green and Poplar, symbolised depravity and misery, another country, a world away within the capital, an ‘outcast London’. The rapid expansion of the metropolitan population and the transformation of London into a modern capital involved the building of new roads, railways and buildings, which concurrently displaced and forced the working classes to move. As the existing slums were cleared with the construction of St Katharine Docks (opened in 1828) and the central London railway termini (1840–75), the East End became extremely overcrowded with poor people and immigrants, leading to a housing crisis in the early 1880s. The term ‘East End’ became synonymous with poverty, overcrowding, disease and criminality. These troubling, alienating aspects of the capital were, however, not avoided; rather, they were observed and investigated by the people of the West End with the blend of ‘prurience, fear, conscience, breast-beating and voyeuristic slumming’.

For Gustave Doré (1832-83) those aspects had been a source of fascination and artistic inspiration. His engravings for the well-known publication London: A Pilgrimage (1872), capturing the grim life of the poor in the capital, formed some of the most notable aesthetic responses to the horrors of late nineteenth-century

London, and enjoyed commercial success. His scenes around the docks, including St Katharine Docks and the Surrey Commercial Docks – in warehouses, on quayside and on water, as well as slum scenes in the nearing districts – explored the East End squalor as brutally and vividly as such preceding and subsequent verbal descriptions as Henry Mayhew’s and William Booth’s. Doré’s *The Docks – Night Scene* (Fig. 62) shows a violent mob struggling around a hovel through the doorway in Bermondsey on Friday night (according to Eric De Maré), with a distant thick network of masts and rigging in the background. The dockers were paid their wages in the public houses owned by the employers in the system of trucking; the men were kept waiting for their pay until midnight or later, so that, in boredom they might drink away a large part of their earnings in advance. Bluegate Fields (Fig. 63), on the other hand, shows the densely-packed haunts of poverty and crime in one of the worst slums just north of the old docks in the East End, whose inhabitants were later classified as ‘lowest class, vicious, semi-criminal’ by the social investigator (and ship owner) Charles Booth.

The burgeoning literature of urban exploration and outcries from the liberal intelligentsia in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, exposing the shocking conditions of life and labour in the East End, emphasised in particular darkness, closeness and immorality, and readily drew imperial analogies. In his blunt publicity of the wretchedness of the East End and criticism of the Church and state policies,

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290 Ibid.
The Bitter Cry of Outcast London (1883), the secretary of the London Congregational Union, Andrew Mearns, called the district the ‘great dark region of poverty, misery, squalor and immorality’. Doré’s engravings signified this darkness of ‘outcast London’ through the adjustment of tone. The overall tonality of his portrayals of the East End was distinctly dark, compared to the general brightness of his renderings of the West End and the City. This variation in tone corresponded to the condition of physical lighting in the different metropolitan districts; but, more significantly, it symbolised vast and vivid discrepancies between the lives of the destitute and the affluent in London.

In addition, darkness in the description of the East End was used metaphorically to refer to Africa and the unknown. In his Darkest England and the Way Out (1890), the founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, drew parallels between east London and Africa, highlighting the resemblance of the former to the latter. The General wrote, ‘the stony streets of London would tell of tragedies as awful, or ruin as complete, or ravishments as horrible, as if we were in Central Africa; only the ghastly devastation is covered, corpse-like, with artificialities and hypocrisies of modern civilisation’. Charles Booth, whose survey Life and Labour of the People (published in two volumes in 1889 and 1891) exposed lives in ‘darkest London’ in great detail through the provision of an exact social profile and a classification of poverty on the basis of ample data, stressing how unknown east London and its life were to the rest of the society and how unbelievable such a terrible place was situated in England. He called east London ‘terra incognita’ and wrote, ‘it is not in

This rhetoric of ‘unknown’ and ‘far’ also related to the imperial terms of geography and exploration especially during the period of colonisation of Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The journalist George Sims’s introduction to his *How the Poor Live, and Horrible London* (1889) highlighted the startling nearness of such an unexplored dark terrain to central London as well as of the life of the East End to that of savage tribes:

> In these pages I propose to record the result of a journey into a region which lies at our doors – into a dark continent that is within easy walking distance of the General Post Office. This continent will, I hope, be found as interesting as any of those newly-explored lands which engage the attention of the Royal Geographical Society – the wild races who inhabit it will, I trust, gain public sympathy as easily as those savage tribes for whose benefit the Missionary Societies never cease to appeal for funds.

The ironies of the unknown ‘dark continent’ being right in the heart of British capital repeatedly astonished contemporaries. Some entertained their audience with the exposure of the horrible hidden districts of London, and others lamented. In his text for *London: A Pilgrimage*, Blanchard Jerrold (1826-84) wrote, ‘east from the City, to the heart of Shoreditch and Whitechapel, is one of the walks which best repay the London visitor… The West End Londoner is as completely in a strange land as any traveller from the Continent’. The author continued, ‘when we move out of Fleet Street towards Smithfield, we leave familiar London in a few minutes, and reach the lanes and byeways, dark and noisy, and swarming with poor, that come under the

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294 Booth, *Life and Labour*.
merciful guardianship of good Mr. Catlin’s Cow Cross mission’. Doré’s *Scripture Reader in a Night Refuge* (Fig. 64) in the page facing Jerrold’s remark, shows a gentleman reading the bible in the middle of an east London refuge full of poor and sick men. The image is emblematic of British civilising mission in Africa. The artist’s light symbolism has lit the area around the scripture reader in the dark space; the white Christian man is enlightening the dark continent. Ironically, the key to this image is that it represents a room in east London, not Africa. General Booth’s lament for British civilisation encapsulates the anticlimax of the scene: ‘What a satire it is upon our Christianity and our civilisation, that the existence of these “colonies of heathens and savages in the heart of our capital” should attract so little attention!’

The journalist W. T. Stead, whose phrase Booth repeated (the above), notoriously reported on child prostitution in his popular *Pall Mall Gazette*. Arguing that ‘the crying scandal of our age’ was ‘the excessive overcrowding of enormous multitudes of the very poor in pestilential rookeries where it is a matter of physical impossibility to live a human life’, Stead deplored ‘the stunted squalid savages of civilisation’. Mearns also wrote of the alarming conditions and consequences of internal crowding and the absence of morality or religion among the London poor, in order to disturb the Victorian middle-class sense of morality and jolt its political culture. This series of exposés of ‘outcast London’ would not only harm the image of London as a dynamic hub of a Christian people selflessly devoted to spreading commercial wealth and civilised values across the world, but also contribute to a breakdown in British civic pride and a fear that it might undermine the foundation of imperial

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299 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 October 1883.
London. The situation brought about by those revelations had become so fraught that imperialists thought the ‘heart of the Empire’ was in danger of threatening the Empire itself. ‘With a perpetual lowering of the vitality of the Imperial Race in the great cities of the kingdom, warned Charles Masterman, ‘no amount of hectic, feverish activity on the confines of the Empire will be able to arrest the inevitable decline’. 300

Doré’s final full-page illustration of London (Fig. 65) envisioned a future of the dissolved Empire with an artist from New Zealand, seated on the remains of London Bridge looking across the river to London’s wrecked built landscape, including the broken dome of St Paul’s Cathedral. Divided by the dark foreground which appears as if set in a natural environment and the lit background full of shattered classical architecture, the image shows a figure from the New World surveying and sketching the elegant imperial capital in ruins, which is reminiscent of imperial Rome, under a foreboding sky. In the accompanying text, Blanchard Jerrold wrote:

Now we have watched the fleets into noisy Billingsgate; and now gossiped looking towards Wren’s grand dome, shaping Macaulay’s dream of the far future, with the tourist New Zealander upon the broken parapets, contemplating something matching –

“The glory that was Greece
The grandeur that was Rome.” 301

Thomas Babington Macaulay’s reference to the New Zealander is from a 1840 review of Leopold von Ranke’s History of the Popes, in which Macaulay speculated, ‘she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand

300 Masterman, Heart of the Empire, p. 25.
301 Doré and Jerrold, London, p. 190.
shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul’s’. By 1840 Britain had just annexed New Zealand, so, for Macaulay, the traveller witnessing the ruins of London represented ‘a prescient reversal of imperial fortune’. Doré’s *The New Zealander* at the end of the book which presents the metropolis in the contrasting scenes of the civilised West End and the dissolute residuum of the East End envisages the final destiny of the Empire: a rhetorical figure for a desperate capital of economic, moral and social disorder, which lay behind London’s glitter, pomp and majesty, observing the downfall of the Empire.

These outcries about the lowest spectrum of the imperial capital and its representations satirising the duality of modern civilisation and predicting the dissolution of the Empire from the last decades of the nineteenth century might indicate that perceptions of an inner rottenness in metropolitan society remained strong and possibly even grew, despite the housing and sanitary improvements made by the Metropolitan Board of Works (1855-89) and through philanthropic initiatives and charitable activities in Victorian London. Roy Porter considers those wails from journalists and philanthropists as revealing above all new tensions between ‘haves and have-nots, new anxieties among the rich, a new social conscience’ or a heightened interest in ‘how the other half lived’. Doré’s dramatic portrayals would have amplified that bourgeois consciousness about outcast London.

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In this light, such an image as Wyllie’s *The Opening of the Tower Bridge* (Fig. 39) may well be interpreted in social as well as historical terms. The following review by the *Art Journal* provides a description of the initially apparent subject of representation, pomp and ceremony in the main artery of the Empire:

The day was glorious, the sun hot enough to raise a tremulous golden haze over river and land, the breeze brisk enough to keep colour sparkling and the landscape clear. Mr Wyllie found here all that his heart could desire – the close-packed flotilla of shipping, the race of the mighty river tide, the avenue of unpaintably brilliant and varied flaunting bunting, which led up to the mighty bridge standing white midstream in the westering sunlight, and the great fleet of craft of all sizes and rigs, headed by the Admiralty yacht *Irene*, passing under its vast uplifted arms. Here was a subject for a historical painter, and in that sense he has conceived and executed it.  

Wyllie, who had previously produced a drawing of the pageant for the front page of the *Graphic* (7 July 1894) in its limited vertical format, chose a very large canvas to represent the historical event for his Academy exhibit of the following year, so as to present a complete picture of the opening of Tower Bridge. Wyllie’s painting depicts nearly the entire structure from the river, the fleet of ships and bunting, and the ceremonial crowds in bright and vivid colours.

This image of ceremonial on the Thames does three things. Firstly, it displays the wealth and modernity of the capital of the maritime empire. The painting splendidly reveals the complex construction comprised of bascules, suspension chains, and the Gothic stone towers, which was facilitated by the capital of the Corporation of London and the cutting-edge Victorian engineering. It shows Tower Bridge opening

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306 *Art Journal*, 1895.
its bascules for the first time for the procession of the impressive Royal Navy ships, including the gunboat HMS Landrail and the Clacton Bell. Secondly, Wyllie’s view of the bridge, from the river, articulates Tower Bridge as a monumental entrance to London, allowing people and goods to flow in and out between the imperial port and the rest of the world. While this work is one of the first major images of the bridge from the river, such a view from (more or less) mid-stream remains the most usual way of depicting Tower Bridge, which became a landmark of London.\(^{307}\)

Finally, the painting addresses the question of Tower Bridge as a point of social as well as topographic reference – to either join or divide east and southeast London to or from west and central London –, as the Daily News posed it.\(^{308}\) Wyllie’s 2.13 metres-wide canvas links the worlds of both the west and east London by the means of composition, colour and exhibition. Taken from the northwest side of the bridge, near Tower Stairs, his view looks downstream towards the south bank of the river. Differences between the two parts, roughly divided by the diagonal running from the top left to bottom right within the composition, are discernible. The left side shows the north bank of the Upper Pool, where such notable buildings as the Custom House and the Tower of London stood; here the royal dais was located and the gala guests gathered and watched the show. The right-hand side of the image shows the south bank of the Lower Thames. Although the procession is running by it, its view, in the area around the southern side span and abutment of the bridge, is noticeably

\(^{307}\) Richard Dennis notes this side-on depiction of Tower Bridge in comparison with the case of Brooklyn Bridge, which is usually portrayed end-on or obliquely, as a gateway to Manhattan, in Cities, p. 14.
\(^{308}\) Daily News, 30 June 1894.
monotonous – especially in comparison with the more colourful opposite side which is lined with purpose-built warehouses and wharves.

Figures in the foreground to the left, including the lady in blue with binoculars in her hands, represent the haves, whose interest in have-nots and how those lived were evidently strong at the time. Wyllie’s image of Tower Bridge captures a slice of the heart of the Empire, which displays the very easy distance which separates both groups. The co-existence of the two worlds in Wyllie’s painting also extends to the space of its exhibition in the Burlington House; the viewer would identify himself with those attending the ceremony, while looking across Bermondsey, that ‘terra incognita’, represented in Doré’s The Docks – Night Scene (Fig. 62). The Opening of the Tower Bridge, which remains the most memorable record of the event, brings together those who distanced themselves from what they considered as another country, a world away within London, and those who belonged to that working-class world.

Tower Bridge embodied the late Victorian ideals, in which the modern does not simply dominate but recognises history as a means to articulate the relationship between the nation’s present and its past, and thus to symbolise continuity. Images of the engineering and structural triumph displayed man’s attempt at conquering nature and supernatural forces as well as conveying the sense of the sublime that modern technologies in turn provided the late nineteenth-century audience. Representations of Tower Bridge also posed questions of the meaning of progress and of where
modernisation and capitalism might situate the individuals within the fractured modern metropolis.
Chapter 3

The Representation of Greenwich: Modernising Turner’s Motif

This chapter considers Greenwich as national and imperial spectacle and as a prospect. It questions what it meant for late Victorian artists to represent the complex landscape of Greenwich, historically and art historically. It analyses the ways in which some of the major landscape and marine painters of the time constructed their images of the present, whilst contending and engaging with legacies of the past in Greenwich.

Greenwich is located close to the south bank of the Thames between the Deptford and Woolwich Dockyards and opposite the southern apex of the Isle of Dogs, within the reach of the Port of London. Maritime Greenwich, as inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997, encompasses the old Royal Naval College, the National Maritime Museum (the Queen’s House and the old Royal Naval Hospital School), the Royal Park, including the Royal Observatory, and Greenwich town centre bordered by the eastern and southern boundaries of the Park. The Heritage Site of Greenwich, which fulfils mainly cultural and educational functions today, occupied a historically unique place in the late Victorian imagination of the

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309 Greenwich formed part of Kent until 1889 when the County of London was created to be governed by the London County Council (LCC). The County of London (1889-1965) corresponded to the area now known as Inner London.

310 For further details of the boundary of the Heritage Site, see The Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site Steering Group, 2004, p. 49.
nation and its capital. Its ensemble of buildings and landscape formed a spectacle of the Empire as a great maritime power, symbolising the nation’s past of royal patronage and its outstanding heritage of scientific and artistic achievements. The site was a potent emblem of the foundation of British naval supremacy – on the river leading to the capital.

Greenwich had also been a favoured subject of artistic representation since around the time the palace of Placentia became a favourite of the Tudors. Previous representations influenced the ways in which the site was viewed and portrayed. The waterfront images of the site from the Thames and the prospect of the Royal Park, looking towards London, in particular, were re-iterated, whilst articulating the symbolism of the site in various terms. Especially important for the late Victorian artist were images by J. M. W. Turner. His work had a strong presence within the Victorian visual culture, with the continued publication of new literature on and public access to it.

Turner’s representations provide a potent vehicle of discussion of later century views of Greenwich in the following respects: the major influence of his work on the following generation of artists and in the public perception of the site; important changes in the fate of the Empire as well as the development of landscape art; and a shift in the ways in which urban modernity was viewed and depicted in the visual arts during the course of the nineteenth century. Turner’s key images of Greenwich and other works in the early nineteenth century conveyed a patriotic mood during the Napoleonic Wars and the beginning of the Pax Britannica. At the same time,
Turner’s aim of promoting the status of landscape painting to and even beyond the level of history painting could be manifested in them. His works also conveyed intricate attitudes to the modernity of his native city. Greenwich indeed formed a great subject to encapsulate all these complex political, artistic and social aspects. It combined symbols of the nation’s imperial identity in its landscape which could be couched in arcadian terms and yet looked out over the burgeoning metropolis.

The historical and art historical situation in Turner’s time was visibly altered by the late nineteenth century. The nation was now at the height of its imperial power. The Empire was bigger, richer, more powerful and yet beginning to lose its industrial advantage over competition from Europe and America. Landscape painting, on the other hand, no longer needed to prove its artistic value as in the early century; nor did it strive to avoid the city, its industry, commerce and pollution. London’s fog rather offered aesthetic potential.

Three case studies in this chapter – on *London, from Greenwich Park* (1881) by James Aumonier, *The Thames at Greenwich* (1890) by Vicat Cole and prints and drawings by William Wyllie made at the turn of the twentieth century – illustrate different ways in which late Victorian artists articulated equivocal modernity and history as well as the extents to which they exploited the potential of naturalism in the shifting realm of the visual arts. An artist such as Aumonier could relish the sense of the modern, surveying the vast metropolis and its river from Greenwich Park to produce an apparently undisguised representation of what was seen. For Cole, on the other hand, who specialised in portraying an unspoilied rural England as the heartland
of the Empire, distancing himself from the modern, on the other hand, the landscape of Greenwich presented too much of the malevolent influence of industrial modernity and too many anxieties about the present. Greenwich remained a potent source of inspiration for a marine artist, whose maritime focus allowed him to envisage the power and continuity of the Empire and the dynamism of the present.

In the following sections, we examine the formation of Greenwich as spectacle of the nation and empire as well as the key artistic representations of the site to explore the ways in which late Victorian artists interpreted and articulated the complex implications of the site, while engaging or disengaging with the modernity of their age.

3.1 National, Imperial Spectacle

Greenwich is a spectacle whose seventeenth century formation signified Britain’s political identity and which showcased its artistic and scientific accomplishments. Through the examination of the history of key buildings in Greenwich this section considers the site as an emblem not only of the wealth, power and security of the maritime nation but also of its artistic and scientific character.

Maritime Greenwich has the Baroque complex of the original premises of the Royal Naval Hospital on the waterfront to the north, and the Royal Park to the south, on whose highest ground the Royal Observatory stands, with the Queen’s House and the old Royal Naval Hospital School in between. The estate had been the property of the Crown since 1447 when the original court built by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester,
was given to Margaret of Anjou, wife of Henry VI. The palace was thereafter rebuilt and improved by Henry VII and Henry VIII, who also founded shipyards in Deptford and Woolwich in 1512-3, thus placing Greenwich between the two royal shipyards. The Queen’s House, which is the first Palladian building in England by Inigo Jones, was begun for Anne of Denmark, wife of James VI and I, and finished for Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I, in 1630-38. It was, however, the later Stuarts whose patronage would shape the landscape of Greenwich in its current form, establishing it as a potent national spectacle and an emblem of Britain’s scientific and maritime pre-eminence in the nineteenth century.311

The restoration of the monarchy in 1660 placed Charles II on the throne, who soon after went on to embark on new projects in Greenwich. He began on the construction of a new palace under the direction of John Webb on the grounds of the original red-brick palace, which was demolished in 1662-9, and on the remodelling of Greenwich Park, which had been originally enclosed by Duke Humphrey, on the basis of a design of about 1662 by the celebrated French landscape designer André Le Nôtre.312 Charles was a patron of the arts and sciences, who supported the foundation of the Royal Society (1660) and invited the Van de Veldes to England to begin a tradition of marine painting in the country (1672-3; they were in fact given a studio in the Queen’s House). His most notable contribution in Greenwich came in 1675, however, when the King established the Royal Observatory as an astronomical

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312 The Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site Steering Group, 2004, pp. 8-9. Charles’s palace project was abandoned in 1669-70 after only the west range, the King Charles block facing the Thames, of Webb’s design was built. André Le Nôtre was also working for Louis XIV, designing the Gardens of Versailles.
solution to the Longitude Problem.\textsuperscript{313} John Flamsteed and Christopher Wren were appointed as the first Astronomer Royal and as Surveyor General respectively.\textsuperscript{314} The first purpose-built scientific research facility in Britain was built in Greenwich Park ‘upon the highest ground’ at or near the site of the recently demolished tower of Duke Humphrey’s, according to Wren’s design and Robert Hooke’s supervision.\textsuperscript{315} The institution was founded with a view to compiling accurate astronomical tables to help the English Navy to perform better, and permitted the accurate measurement of the earth’s movement which contributed to the development of global navigation. It would concurrently establish Greenwich as a symbol of the nation’s scientific pre-eminence. The latter culminated in 1884 with the universal adoption of the Greenwich Meridian and Mean Time as the world standards for the measurement of space and time.

The other critical event in the formation of Greenwich as national spectacle was the creation of the Royal Naval Hospital in 1694. Following the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9, which established a Protestant constitutional monarchy in England, the joint monarchs William III and Mary II founded the Greenwich Hospital for Seamen. It was to be a maritime counterpart of the Chelsea Hospital for Soldiers, established by Charles II in 1682. It was in response to the plight of the wounded after the battle of La Hogue in 1692 that Mary decided to donate the riverside palace grounds to build a hospital for seamen disabled through serving their country. The aims of the

\textsuperscript{313} Royal Warrant on 4 March 1675 records the purpose of the Observatory as, ‘so as to find out the so much-desired Longitude of Places for perfecting the art of Navigation’, quoted in K. Lippincott, \textit{A Guide to the Royal Observatory}, London 2007, p. 12.


\textsuperscript{315} Hooke was the City Surveyor for the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666 as well as Curator of the Royal Society and Gresham Professor of Geometry.
institution and its building design are notable. William’s Commission for the Hospital described the former’s task as to promote the benefits of ‘the Trade, Navigation and Naval Strength of this Our Realm of England (whereupon the Safety and flourishing State thereof does so much depend)’ and to ‘encrease the Number of English Seamen’ and strengthen ‘Our Navy Royall’. This statement was not only an assertion of the maritime orientation of the mercantile nation but also an expression of the state’s aim of protecting and providing for the public. The Hospital’s purpose, as stated in its founding charter, was ‘the relief and support of Seaman on board the Shipps or Vessells belonging to the Navy Royall … uncapable of further service… and be unable to maintain themselves…. Also for the further reliefe and Encouragement of Seamen and Improvement of Navigation’, this elucidated the benevolent meaning of the establishment. Furthermore, the Hospital was designed not only to fulfil this duty felt by the monarch, but also in a manner which ‘conspicuously demonstrated the political and naval power of the state’. Its buildings were to formulate a statement of its aim highly visible to the people of England and the broader world through the palatial expression of its architecture.

Mary’s ‘fixed Intention for Magnificence’ for the design of the Hospital would be fulfilled through the work of leading architects of the day over the next fifty years. When Wren, who had designed the Hospital at Chelsea, was called in to design the Naval Hospital to be constructed on Charles II’s unfinished palace grounds, Mary’s

316 William III, Commission for Greenwich Hospital. The Hospital also had a purpose of encouraging naval recruitment by providing residential care.
conditions were that both the Queen’s House and the King Charles wing of Webb’s design stayed and that the vista from the former to the Thames must be retained. According to Wren’s plan, he was to build rectangular courts behind Webb’s building and its counterpart, framing the axial view of the Queen’s House with colonnades and vestibules to the hall and chapel; in the two southern blocks, surmounted by domes, were installed the chapel and James Thornhill’s Painted Hall (1717-25).

The Hospital was built with Nicholas Hawksmoor working as Wren’s Clerk of Works and Deputy Surveyor and completed in 1751 (although the first 46 naval pensioners had already entered the largely incomplete Hospital in 1704). Wren’s design for four courts, with room for 2044 pensioners, was four times the size of Chelsea Hospital, and the final cost of carrying out this plan mounted to £400,000.

The outcome was the most outstanding group of Baroque buildings in England and among the grandest schemes of Wren’s career. The charitable institution in its regal architectural expression would be seen as ‘the noblest structure’, ‘one of the noblest of our national institutions’ or ‘the noblest of European hospitals’ by the generations to come, evoking patriotic sentiments in literary and artistic representations, while showcasing some of England’s finest architecture.

The creation of the Naval Hospital which asserted a nation’s commitment to its own defence and naval expansion and symbolised the wealth and security of the state – on the river leading to the capital – was a political as well as a philanthropic act. Seen from the Thames, the view of the Hospital with its qualities of austerity and grandeur

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319 Wren offered to design the hospital without charge, as work “too near akin to him to let it want any degree of furtherance he could give it”, quoted in Van der Merwe, A Refuge for All, p. 1.
320 For a detailed history of the architecture, see Bold, Greenwich. The Painted Hall would prove to be a visitor attraction. It became the National Gallery of Naval Art (or Naval Gallery) in 1824.
321 Van der Merwe, Maritime Greenwich, p. 12.
was framed by a landscape of the sky and the distant hill, on which the Observatory stood, completing a graceful and imposing spectacle.

### 3.2 The Prospect of Greenwich

Greenwich was a complex subject of artistic representation in the late nineteenth century. The site did not only combine a spectacular visual expression of the past with the busiest commercial river in the world, but also it had been a subject of a stream of representations, especially since the time of creation of the Naval Hospital, which continued to influence its public and artistic imagination. In particular the northern prospect of London from the Royal Park and the view of the riverfront at Greenwich from the middle of the Thames had been reiterated by notable printmakers and painters. Among them the early nineteenth century images by Turner provided conventions and a model against which his successors adopted, negotiated, disguised or rejected. His work articulated the symbolism of the site in specific ways; it offered a salient point of comparison with late Victorian representations in terms of the relationship between urban modernity and art; and its changing interpretation reflected developments in the visual arts and shifts in tastes. It is useful to consider Turner’s representations and how they continued to preoccupy Victorian visual culture, before a close analysis of the late nineteenth century imagery.
The View of Greenwich from the Thames

The view of the riverfront at Greenwich directly displays the architecture of the Hospital. It highlights the geometry, proportion and combination of Wren’s colonnades and twin domes, with the Park, on which the Observatory stands, in the background. This view was captured in Turner’s Greenwich Hospital (Fig. 67), a vignette for Poems by Samuel Rogers, published in 1834.322 Turner’s composition, which depicts Greenwich from more or less the same point of view as Canaletto’s well-known painting, Greenwich Hospital from the North Bank of the Thames (National Maritime Museum: BHC1827), is notable in its foreground. It shows the imaginary shore with steps on which a one-legged naval pensioner standing by a telescope and facing Greenwich. They rhyme with the Naval Hospital and the Observatory on the other side of the river. These signs and symbols of political and naval power as well as navigation suggest the wealth, security and scientific character of the maritime state. The part of Rogers’s The Pleasures of Memory which Turner’s image illustrates in the 1834 publication relates memories of the brave who served the nation with its spectacle at Greenwich, emphasising the honourable aim of the symbolic architecture.323

Danger and death a dread delight inspire;  
And the bald veteran glows with wonted fire,  
When, richly bronzed by many a summer-sum,  
He counts his scars, and tells what deeds were done. 
…
Go, view the splendid domes of Greenwich—Go,  
And own what raptures from Reflection flow.

322 Turner’s illustrations are considered to have increased the sales of Poems (and Italy, 1830) considerably, and first made the young Ruskin aware of Turner’s existence.  
323 The Pleasures of Memory was originally published anonymously in 1792, before it was included in the anthology Poems, London 1834.
Hail, noblest structures imaged in the wave!
A nation’s grateful tribute to the brave.
Hail, blest retreats from war and shipwreck, hail!
That oft arrest the wondering stranger’s sail.324

It is with these solemn and patriotic sentiments that Turner framed his elegant view of Greenwich. His image is quiet, austere and focused on legacies of the nation, in line with Rogers’s verse. The pensioner in Turner’s foreground is to frame the view in one’s ‘memory’. This representation of Greenwich from the Thames would be directly challenged in the late nineteenth century in terms of focus and character.

The Vista of London and the Thames from Greenwich Park

The prospect of Greenwich from the Royal Park with distant views of the capital and its river formed a synoptic subject in landscape art. It combined nature and culture, rural and urban, leisure and commerce, the historical and the modern, embodying both the perceived virtues of rural landscape and vices of urban modernity. The view was traditionally favoured by prospect painters, forming one of the classic motifs of landscape art in England since the seventeenth century. Such topographical works as Prospect of Greenwich from the Observatory at the Top of the Hill by Rigaud, published in Paris in 1736 (NMM PAI7091), and A View from One Tree Hill in Greenwich Park (Fig. 68) by Peter Tillemans, published in London in 1746, both from the mid eighteenth century, display the view of the Park with leisurely figure groups in the foreground, the Observatory to the left, the river over the still

324 Rogers, Poems, p. 33.
incomplete Hospital and the capital beyond. Most famously, however, the prospect was captured in Turner’s painting in the collection of Tate Britain.

Turner’s *London* (Fig. 69), first exhibited in the artist’s own Queen Anne Street gallery in 1809, depicts the view from a vantage point further north, closer to the Hospital, than Rigaud’s or Tillemans’s representations: on the sloping curve of One Tree Hill with firs and deer in the foreground.\(^{325}\) The smoky Thames and London are seen in the background, with the dome of St Paul’s Cathedral on the horizon around the centre of the image. This work has been discussed in the recent literature mainly in terms of a tension between the Park’s rural character and the modernity of the metropolis and the river. The fact that it was the only image of London in the series of oil paintings focusing on the Thames, its tributaries and estuary, which Turner exhibited between 1805 and 1810, and the seeming incompatibility of the artist’s own fragmentary verse appended to the picture (see below) with traditional landscape aesthetics, has led scholars to interpret the relegated view of London and the Thames as Turner’s unwillingness to admit urban modernity in his oil and to conclude that the artist used Greenwich Park to frame the troubling view of the capital:\(^{326}\)

Where burthen’d Thames reflects the crowded sail,
   Commercial care and busy toil prevail,
   Whose murky veil, aspiring to the skies
   Obscures thy beauty, and thy form denies,
   Save where thy spires pierce the doubtful air,

\(^{325}\) The painting was originally in the possession of Turner’s major patron, Walter Fawkes, but was returned to the artist by exchange to remain with him until his death.

As gleams of hope amidst a world of care.\textsuperscript{327}

Alex Potts points to the relative absence of a visual drama of modernity in painted and engraved views of London in the Romantic period, which contrasted with the dramatic literary evocations of the modern urban scene. He suggests that Turner was consistent in not considering that the drama of the modern city had a leading role in the visual arts of the earlier nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{328} Referring to the rarity of views of London by the artist (this was true only up to the beginning of the century), Potts argues that Turner had to supply a poetic fragment to accompany his exhibited painting of the distanced panorama of London, which merely floats over the rural parkland, in order to put the spectator into the appropriate frame of mind.\textsuperscript{329}

Sarah Monks’s reading, on the other hand, is based on an ideological debate about the distinction between privately owned land and the city in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and reflects John Berger’s Marxist interpretation of Thomas Gainsborough’s \textit{Mr and Mrs Andrews} (circa 1750; National Gallery). In his chapter in \textit{Ways of Seeing} (1972) on the relation between oil painting and property, Berger argues that landscape images in the eighteenth century served to ‘naturalise’, and hence mystify, basic property relations by emphasising the estate’s rural ‘nature’ and

\textsuperscript{329} Potts, ‘Picturing the Modern Metropolis’, pp. 30-31.
proving by analogy the moral virtue of its owners. Monks recapitulates such an aesthetic legitimisation of the dominant landed ideology as the principal mode of British landscape art at least until 1832. In this vein, the cityscape represented the spaces and values of a new urban economic order and, with its social and moral ambiguities, could present ‘an ideological threat to the very basis of a British landscape imagery’.

She argues, in this light, that Turner’s image uses Greenwich Park to frame the city, securing the beholder’s social, political and moral personality against the threats of the urban world of commerce; the idyll of his foreground with deer and oak trees could serve to counter London’s contentious modernity, isolating the viewer from any immediate signs of urban society.

These readings of Turner’s London, valuable as they are, limit its interpretation within the broad contexts of the visual arts of the period and overlook Turner as an agency, an artist who was acutely conscious of historical processes, including the international as well as domestic affairs of the nation, and a landscape painter keen to promote the status of the genre. A close look at the image in terms of his career and contemporary historical events allows an alternative interpretation of the work, which draws significant parallels with the late nineteenth century representations of Greenwich, to which this chapter will turn.

Firstly, we might consider Greenwich itself as a significant subject which Turner could load with meanings, rather than assuming that Turner – following the other artists – chose the prospect of Greenwich Park basically to frame his view of

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London, allowing the spectator to survey the metropolis from the safety of the rural estate-like landscape. After all, Greenwich takes up nearly a half of the canvas and its largest part excepting the sky; furthermore, the magnificent Naval Hospital prominently occupies the middle of the canvas. This emphasis on the Baroque buildings distinguished Turner’s image from such preceding representations as Rigaud’s, Tillemans’s or William Daniell’s *London, from Greenwich Park* (1804, British Library and the City of London), whose composition is otherwise akin to Turner’s. The architectural symbol of the nation’s political and naval power had resonance especially around the time of Turner’s painting, as Britain’s decisive victory at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 confirmed its naval supremacy, while securing the nation from invasion by the French. In fact, Turner produced two compositions of the event in 1806. His view of the heart of the Empire with Greenwich Hospital visibly highlighted, dating from the period of the Napoleonic Wars, emphasises the nation’s maritime prowess as well as conveying patriotic pride.

Such a view of Turner’s work may also relate to his artistic aim of demonstrating that landscape painting could encapsulate the great themes of the day and compete with (and even supersede) history painting. *London* was indeed etched and mezzotinted for the manifesto of his artistic achievements. *Liber Studiorum* or ‘Book of Studies’ was the series of engraved landscapes first published in 1807-19, which was inspired by Claude’s *Liber Veritatis* (1777). *London, from Greenwich* formed

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333 W. G. Rawlinson pointed to the similarity of Turner’s work to Daniell’s colour aquatint in his *Turner’s Liber Studiorum: A Description and A Catalogue*, London 1906, p. 68.
334 The Battle of Trafalgar, as Seen from the Mizen Starboard Shrouds of the Victory (Tate Britain) and Portrait of the ‘Victory’ in three Positions passing the Needles, Isle of Wight (Yale Centre for British Art). A. Bachrach, ‘Seapieces’ in Joll, Butlin and Herrmann, *Oxford Companion to J. M. W. Turner*, p. 287.
part of the volume ‘Architectural’ (1811) among the series including Historical, Mountainous, Pastoral and Marine.

Another notable aspect of Turner’s painting is the Park, which is presented from an angle to maximise its particularly English landscape. Greenwich Park is unique in its synthesis of symmetrical landscape design and irregular terrain. On the plan, it is formal and arranged on either side of the principal north-south axis aligned on the Queen’s House; but because of the land form and abrupt and irregular changes in level, this symmetry is not always apparent on the ground. From certain angles the Park has much more of the character of a later eighteenth or nineteenth century English landscape park than of a baroque park attached to a royal palace. From One Tree Hill, Turner’s viewpoint, the Park appears characteristic of an English landscape garden. This is in marked contrast with such earlier representations such as Rigaud’s rugged foreground or Tillemans’s compressed perspective, emphasising the formal aspect of the Park. Turner’s ideal image of Greenwich Park highlights the English idea of landscape, which had been associated with an openness indicating freedom and a spirit of liberty. Horace Walpole argued that ‘the English spirit of liberty manifested itself in the school of gardening perfected by Brown’. This could be contrasted to the artificial, autocratic design of Versailles, which was seen as a sign of hierarchical power.

337 Ibid.
Finally, how reluctant was Turner to admit urban modernity in his representation of Greenwich? As mentioned, many scholars focus on his verse appended to the picture to emphasise his ambiguous attitudes towards the city and pollution at the time. Its importance or meaning in the interpretation of his painting is however doubtful. While Turner’s poetic fragment follows James Thomson’s *Seasons* in depicting the city as a ‘World of Care | Whose Vice and Virtue so commixing blends’ – as his series of oils exhibited at his gallery in the period drew on the associations of the Thames as developed in the poetry of Alexander Pope and James Thomson – Turner’s images do not actually display such a sense of rhetorical outrage at the polluted state of the metropolis felt in the lines. 338 Not only did the artist add a positive line, ‘As gleams of hope amidst a world of care’ at the end, but also the effect of whiteness at the centre of his picture may be read in different ways. The fog can be seen as submerging the city; but also, as Potts suggests, the illuminating sunlight above the fog can be seen as ‘a kind of divine light or transcendent realm in which the lofty spires and domes are afloat’. 339 An examination of Turner’s painting in the original reveals that his portrayal of London and the Thames is by no means gloomy and in fact rather attractive, with white sails dotted around and with a gentle sense of movement. This is further heightened in the print; *London, from Greenwich* (Fig. 70) does reveal the commercial character of the capital and its river, with sunlight, smoke and the Thames rendered with a greater sense of movement.

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339 Potts, ‘Picturing the Modern Metropolis’, p. 31. Turner was also clearly more willing to depict the smoke of contemporary London in this work than his earlier watercolour depicting the capital, *London – Autumnal Morning* (private collection; reproduced in D. Hill, *Turner on the Thames: River Journeys in the year 1805*, New Haven and London 1993, Fig. 28), exhibited at the Royal Academy of 1801.
It is not so much that Turner avoided urban modernity in these works. Rather he emphasised his patriotic pride in the maritime nation, whose past was symbolised in the elegant legacies of Greenwich and provided the foundations of its triumphant present – especially at the time of the Napoleonic Wars – and vaunted this over the uncertain modernity of London. In the late nineteenth century, however, Turner’s representation would be read in both terms: as historic landscape and images of London’s modernity.

**The Influence of Turner’s Work**

The influence of Turner’s images was insistent in the public imagination of Greenwich throughout the end of the nineteenth century. It was discerned notably in publications on London and the Thames, which mentioned Turner’s vista every time Greenwich was brought up. Such illustrated books as Walter Armstrong’s *The Thames from its Source to the Sea* and *The Thames from its Rise to the Nore* (1886) and Grant Allen’s *The Tidal Thames* (1892) also indicated where his pictures were located to view: ‘The “prospects” from the park itself … Turner’s famous drawing, in the South Kensington, was taken from just below the base of the Observatory’, wrote Allen in 1892. Six years previously Armstrong had noted:

… the famous view over Greenwich, over the curves of the Thames, to the distant dome of St Paul’s, which seems to stand on tiptoe to catch a glimpse of its two kinsmen at our feet. This view has been painted again and again. It was painted by Turner in a picture … now in the National Gallery, and it was repeated in a plate for the Liber Studiorum.\(^{341}\)

\(^{340}\) Allen and Wyllie, *Tidal Thames*, p. 120.

The fact that his images of Greenwich were readily accessible for public viewing and that they were discussed in popular books as well as literature on art, including the new biographies of the artist by Walter Thornbury (1862 and 1877), Armstrong (1902) and Wyllie (1905), as well as W. G. Rawlinson’s catalogue of *Liber Studiorum* (1878 and 1906) meant that his representations were the inescapable source of reference for the artist representing Greenwich in the late nineteenth century.

In spite of Turner’s fluctuating reputation, especially after his death, art historical assessment of his work was ongoing.342 When the Turner Bequest was made to the nation posthumously in 1856, Ruskin volunteered his service to sort and exhibit paintings and drawings from the Bequest. *London* was among the works the writer selected to display and to loan for other exhibitions.343 Since the Bequest, it was on display at the Marlborough House and the South Kensington Museum before it was transferred to the National Gallery in 1877, where it stayed until 1910 when it was again transferred to the Tate Gallery (founded as the National Gallery of British Art in 1897).344 Engravings for *Liber Studiorum* and *Poems* as well as his drawings for these works, almost all part of the Bequest, were available to view on request, if not on display, at these national institutions.345 Such commercial institutions in the West End as the Burlington Fine Arts Club and the Fine Art Society also showed Rawlinson’s and Ruskin’s collections of Turner’s series of prints in 1872 and 1878.

342 One of the notable examples was an exhibition of his paintings in the Guildhall Art Gallery in 1899.
343 The National Gallery Archive Files NG27/12 and NG27/13.
344 I am grateful to Ian Warrell for sharing his research.
respectively, both of which included *London, from Greenwich*. Artists would have not only seen these exhibitions but also studied the master’s works closely, particularly those in the Bequest, to which all representations of Greenwich belong, and in *Liber Studiorum*, which was widely known among artists. Ruskin’s encouragement of artists to analyse and imitate Turner’s art in the 1850s also continued to be in effect in the later nineteenth century.

Of the three representations of Greenwich that were exhibited at the Royal Academy in the years between 1880 and 1905, two – by the recognised landscape painters James Aumonier and Vicat Cole – made unmistakable reference to Turner’s *London*; the third by Wilfred Williams Ball (1882) is untraced. Their works invite interesting comparisons, which help analyse how late Victorian artists responded to and articulated metropolitan modernity as well as the altered course of the Empire in history. The following sections examine the different ways in which Aumonier and Cole manipulated Turner’s model, analysing the artist’s work in relation to their methods and their attitudes to modernity, as well as considering how their images, and Turner’s too, were interpreted in the late nineteenth century.

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3.3 London, from Greenwich Park by James Aumonier, 1881

James Aumonier (1832-1911) exhibited his London, from Greenwich Park at the Royal Academy of 1881. The painting is now lost and is only known from a contemporary reproduction (Fig. 71) and a watercolour study for it, held in the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle (Fig. 71-1). It was a major work by an established landscape artist who had been showing his paintings at the Royal Academy every year since 1870. The Magazine of Art gave the most extensive review that had been given to any view of London shown at the Academy in recent years, hailing it as ‘the most memorable view of London which art has yet attempted’. It did not however attract wide critical attention. The Times which reviewed the picture as ‘interesting’; none among the journals and periodicals including the Art Journal, Athenaeum, Spectator, Pall Mall Gazzette, Morning Post, Graphic and the Illustrated London News gave a notice. This disparity between a dedicated art journal of a progressive tendency and the majority of major literary, political and popular press in the assessment of Aumonier’s painting can be posited as a problem. As we will see, the Magazine of Art was prepared not only to discuss smoke but also to associate London with Babylon in reading his image, when the others were disconcerted by its naturalism and preferred not to comment on it. Through the analysis of the Magazine of Art’s reading of it in the contemporary historical and art historical contexts and of Aumonier’s work in terms of design, relating to Turner’s model, this section locates

350 The Times (27 June 1881) wrote, ‘Aumonier’s “London from Greenwich Park” is interesting, as all his work is, though this specimen is hardly so good as some we have seen’. ‘All his work’ that had been shown at the Academy and other major exhibition venues for the past decade referred to representations of the rural landscape.
London, from Greenwich Park at the moment of a critical turn towards naturalism in the late Victorian visual arts.

Born in London, of English parentage (of French descent), Aumonier learned to draw and paint by attending evening classes at the Birkbeck Institution and subsequently at the South Kensington School, while working as a designer for printed calicoes. Aumonier’s reputation as a landscape artist was established in the 1870s as he regularly exhibited works at the Royal Academy, the (Royal) Institute of Painters in Water Colours and the (Royal) Society of British Artists. Though his fame was not as remarkable as those of the Royal Academicians George Vicat Cole or Benjamin Williams Leader, whose formal artistic careers began earlier, in the 1850s, Aumonier’s work was almost always fondly received by contemporaries for its Englishness in its method and subject matter. In the centre of the reception of his large-scale landscapes were quiet, unaffected and unpretending qualities in the treatment of nature. Critics would describe his work as ‘thoroughly English rendering of English scenery’, in which they saw the continued ‘traditions of English landscape’ and ‘characteristics of old England landscape painters’. Such images of rural England by Aumonier would represent the country at the world’s fairs including the Exposition Universelle, Paris, of 1889 and the Brussels International Exposition of 1897, receiving a Gold and Silver Medal respectively.

351 He continued to work at the textile factory for sometime after he started exhibiting his work in the 1860s.
352 Aumonier was also an original member of the (Royal) Institute of Oil Painters and for a time a member of the New English Art Club.
353 He had been recommended in the elections of associate members of the Academy, though unsuccessful.
354 Anonymous, ‘Art of England’, Universal Review, 1890, quoted in N. Bell, Studio, vol. 20, 1900, pp. 144, 148. Aumonier’s gentle and light-handed style was distinguished from Turner or Constable, though the latter seems to have influenced Aumonier’s work in the 1900s. Some saw affinities of his work with David Cox and Peter De Wint.
It was only three years after the publication of Rawlinson’s *Turner’s Liber Studiorum: A Description and A Catalogue* and Ruskin’s exhibition of Turner’s watercolour drawings, including that of Greenwich, at the Fine Art Society that this artist specialising in rural landscapes exhibited what seemed rather exceptional in his oeuvre, *London, from Greenwich Park*, at the Academy. Aumonier’s unprecedented attempt at a cityscape may have been triggered by the viewing of Turner’s representation of the capital, as the painting clearly took its theme from latter’s *London*. It was a view of Greenwich Park and the Thames and London behind it, while its title suggests the work is principally a representation of the metropolis, as Turner’s does. Aumonier however manipulated Turner’s model to a considerable extent to exemplify a late nineteenth century approach to and view of London and urban modernity. Aumonier exploited the potential of Greenwich as a point for the prospect of modern London and represented the site as a boundary of the past and the present: history as *repoussoir* and modernity in the panorama.

The most distinguishing factor of Aumonier’s image was its panoramic design, on a large scale in particular, constructed from the high viewpoint of Greenwich. The size of his canvas might be estimated to be approximately a metre in height and two metres in width, based on the assumption that the image was not visibly smaller than Turner’s or Aumonier’s other exhibited paintings, whose average size was a metre in height and one and a half metres in width: *Oxford, Port Meadow from Medley Fields*.

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355 In fact the painter exhibited another cityscape, *Chelsea from Battersea Park*, at the Institute of Painters in Water Colours in the same season. Its current location is unknown; according to the review of the *Graphic*, however, the panoramic view also represented the city in the mist from a distance. See the *Graphic* (30 April 1881) and the *Illustrated London News* (30 April 1881).
(1880, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum) at 104.8 x 194.2 cm, *Thames Scene*
(1880, Shipley Art Gallery) at 66.2 x 134.5 cm, and *Sheep-Washing in Sussex* (1889; Tate Britain) at 95.9 x 165.7 cm. Such a wide format and large scale were characteristic of Aumonier’s landscapes, which presented distinctive qualities of space or distance, requiring a larger than usual amount of spectator attention. For example, his *Oxford, Port Meadow from Medley Fields* (Fig. 72), whose scale was similar to *London, from Greenwich Park* and which was exhibited at the Academy a year before the latter, represents extensive space between the sky and the water, whilst demanding the eye to move across the canvas, roaming over the flow of the river with its boats, onto the long stretch of the horizon lined with buildings. Similarly, another view of Oxford Aumonier did in the watercolour *View of Oxford from the South West* (Fig. 73), in the same format, depicts a wide expanse of the country with the townscape on the horizon in the background; at the same time, the view invites the spectator’s gaze to traverse from the rural foreground with a herd of cattle, through the spacious middle ground, to the distant view of buildings, over which the rainbow is found. Contemporary critics noted these qualities in Aumonier’s landscapes. In its review of the above exhibit of the 1880 Academy, the *Magazine of Art* identified Aumonier’s ‘peculiar love of long lines and horizontal spaces’ and observed ‘just rendering of the various planes of a landscape’. Others including the *Graphic* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* considered that the view should have hung ‘on the line’, not only because the work deserved a better place than where it was placed in the gallery of the Burlington House but, more notably, its composition ‘peculiarly required to be seen on a level with the eye’.

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357 *Graphic*, 29 May 1880; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 24 May 1880.
of Aumonier’s work were some of the generic features of the panoramic landscape, which were adopted specifically to highlight urban modernity in *London, from Greenwich Park*.

Aumonier’s image might be analysed in Walter Benjamin’s terms for the nineteenth century panoramas: ‘the plastic foreground of those panoramas with their anecdotal form and the sweeping background of the panoramas with their store of information’.

Firstly, as panoramas do, Aumonier’s Greenwich painting features a casually arranged foreground. In contrast to Turner’s foreground, which is carefully staged with royal deer on the picturesque hills of arcadian landscape, Aumonier’s is not mediated by the conventions of the vista. There is no conventional foreground to assist spatial recession, repeated in his own *View of Oxford from the South West* (Fig. 73) as well as in Cole’s representation of Greenwich (Fig. 74); instead, Aumonier’s foreground ‘rises towards the spectator’, as the *Magazine of Art* describes, with the large section of trees cut short in the lower left of the canvas. The view seems as if it were a view from the window, which could have been acquired in passing from anywhere near the Observatory. This accidental quality of Aumonier’s composition may be seen as modern in that it emphasises a sense of moment.

Secondly, his extensive background – with its ‘store of information’ – presents a long stretch of the great river and capital on the horizon. This distinguishes Aumonier’s painting most significantly from Turner’s relegated view of the Thames, which occupies only a slight proportion of the grand architectural and landscape setting. Again, Aumonier’s

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359 The relationship between a sense of moment and the panorama is considered by William Vaughan, who argues in his discussion of Thomas Girtin a sense of the momentary was crucial to both his panorama of London and *The White House, Chelsea* from 1800. Vaughan, *British Painting*, pp. 194-5.
panoramic format and system of landscape allowed him to construct a prospect of Greenwich which highlights modernity.

It might be said *London, from Greenwich Park* is a two-fold picture, which may be largely divided into the dark foreground and the lit background. The informal foreground is de-emphasised; Wren’s buildings remain as a historical marker, however, they are pushed to the side, losing the prominence seen in Turner’s representations. Aumonier’s background, on the other hand, is highlighted. The Laing sketch (Fig. 71-1) makes this tonal distinction between the Park and the urban panorama clear; in this drawing the bright and sweeping view of the river and the city seems to come forward, over the dark bushes of the autumn trees in Greenwich, to the spectator. In Aumonier’s view, arcadian and historic Greenwich is a *repoussoir* and offers a prime viewpoint from which the panorama of modern London is acquired.

Aumonier’s London – however lit and coming forward to the eye and very different from the dense murkiness of Turner’s – is hazy. It represents barely any specific information, abandoning the panorama’s capacity as an inventory of data. There are few topographical elements but only the sense of uncertainty, immensity and flux. From the highest viewpoint of Greenwich Park near the Observatory, the capital appears virtually infinite in the smoke, while ships on the Thames and chimneys in the Isle of Dogs give an unmistakable sense of movement. The *Magazine of Art* reviewed Aumonier’s work in the very contemporary cultural terms of modernity:
In his important picture of “Greenwich”, Mr. Aumonier has given the most memorable view of London which art has yet attempted. The great sweep of the Babylonian city, lost in the smoke of its innumerable fires, stretches grey and immense over the whole distance, with the river winding in the middle distance. To the right is the Isle of Dogs, planted with great groves of chimneys in full activity; and in the foreground rises towards the spectator the slope of Greenwich Park. It is a work of most sincere intention, so true, straightforward, and simple, that its great science is rendered almost unnoticeable. To have conveyed so impressive a sense of distance and innumerableness, where the universal smoke swallows all details, is no small achievement.\footnote{360 \textit{Magazine of Art}, 1881, p. 307.}

First of all, this text is to a certain extent reminiscent of Marx’s definition of conditions of production in a modern capitalist society. The critic sees in Aumonier’s London the epicentre of bourgeois political economy; ‘innumerable fires’ and ‘great groves of chimneys in fully activity’ are the symbols of ‘uninterrupted disturbance, everlasting uncertainty and agitation’ in Marx’s phrase. Secondly, in the critic’s view of \textit{London, from Greenwich Park}, the smoke is a pictorial agent of modernity, as it could suggest the capital’s immeasurable scale and scope of its economic activities. The sheer scale of Victorian London and the rate at which it had grown in the course of the nineteenth century were indeed astounding, as seen in Introduction. The metaphor of ‘the Babylonian city’, on the other hand, implies this greatness of London, while invoking the parallels between the ancient centre of global commerce subjugating the rest of the world and the modern metropolis of the same kind. In this parallel that was frequently drawn in the nineteenth century, Babylonian London symbolised the worship of money and power and the extinction of Christian ideals,
and conjured up images of material wonder and tumultuous destruction, serving as warnings of the dangers of hubris as well as indices of greatness.\textsuperscript{361}

On the other hand, the ways in which the critic applauds Aumontier’s rendering of smoke indicate a shift in the perception of the polluted urban environment, and acknowledge smoke’s aesthetic potential in landscape painting. This is easily discernible in comparison with Turner’s own verse appended to \textit{London}, in which the ‘murky veil’ ‘obscures’ the city’s beauty and which could be seen in line with the absence of a visual drama of modernity in painted and engraved views of London during the early nineteenth century, mentioned earlier.

Changes in the approach to viewing and representing the metropolitan environment in the nineteenth century were continual, if not necessarily consistent. Apart from Turner’s late painting such as \textit{The Thames above Waterloo Bridge} (1830-5; Tate Britain), the striking rendering of the smoky commercial capital had been unseen, with the previously examined exception of Wyllie’s \textit{London from the Monument}.\textsuperscript{362} Whistler’s \textit{The Thames in Ice} (1860; Freer Gallery of Art) and \textit{Grey and Silver: Old Battersea} (1863; The Art Institute of Chicago) from the early 1860s shows mere faint traces of smoke in the background of steamers and factory; and in his Nocturnes of the 1870s pollutant (as well as topography) diminished to the overall tonality. As seen in Chapter 1, certainly up to 1870 the critical reception of such views of the smoky metropolis as the above mentioned Wyllie remained controversial.

\textsuperscript{361} Lynda Nead titled her 2000 book \textit{Victorian Babylon} and discusses the metaphor in its introduction and the final chapter ‘Reflections on the Ruins of London’.

\textsuperscript{362} Turner’s unfinished painting was of course not exhibited. Tate Britain assumes that the work could be part of his planning for a response to Constable’s \textit{The Opening of Waterloo Bridge} (1832; Tate Britain).
It was in the years around 1880 when a shift in the visual and verbal descriptions of London’s atmosphere and environment occurred and, notably, Turner’s ambiguous treatment of the capital was freshly viewed in more positive terms. Rawlinson in particular praised the ‘beauty’ of the smoky commercial cityscape in Turner’s *London, from Greenwich* in the 1878 catalogue of *Liber Studiorum*. The art historian wrote in response to Ruskin, who saw the prevailing tone of sadness in the volume:

Is there “no exultation in thriving city or mart”? I would point to ... *London seen from Greenwich* lying low on the horizon, its towers and steeples lighted by rays of sunlight, nonetheless beautiful for the smoke of the city behind them – its ships making their way to and from its crowded docks, the whole scene full of the poetry which such a view of London always has for eyes open to see it.

Rawlinson in 1878 questions Ruskin’s persistent and influential pessimism about the industrial, capitalist modernity which London epitomised. He recognises London as subject of poetry and its smoke as source of beauty; ‘the doubtful air’, obscuring the beauty of the city in Turner’s words, rather enhances the view. It was this critical turn in the perception of the city and towards naturalism that Aumonier’s *London, from Greenwich Park* can be said to have marked in 1881. *The Times*’s response to it as ‘interesting’ encapsulates the sense of resistance to an image, whose kinds they were to see more of in the years to come.

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365 Wyllie had not exhibited images of London since *London from Monument* of 1870 and until 1882.
3.4 The Thames at Greenwich by George Vicat Cole, 1890

At the Royal Academy of 1890, George Vicat Cole, who had been one of the most central figures in English landscape painting since about 1870 and a Royal Academician since 1880, exhibited two paintings of the Thames. One was a scene in the Upper Thames, *Meeting of the Thame and Isis at Dorchester* (Fig. 55), and the other in the lower river: *The Thames at Greenwich* (Fig. 74). The former, which we examined in Chapter Two, was a landscape of agrarian practice; the latter a view of Greenwich Park overlooking the Thames in smoke, from One Tree Hill, Turner’s viewpoint some 80 years earlier.

The two paintings by Cole were part of the series of paintings of the Thames which had been commissioned by William Agnew and with which the artist achieved his greatest popular success. The artistic journey through England’s verdant heartlands to London, which began in the year of Cole’s election to the status of a full Academician in 1880 and on which the artist worked almost exclusively afterwards, included the archaic, picturesque, historic and commercial views of the river such as *The Source of the Thames, Pangbourne, Oxford, from Iffley* and *The Pool of London*. All of these were shown at the Academy. By 1890, critics and the public were well aware of the senior Academician’s Thames series and expecting what might come next, particularly after the great success of *The Pool of London* in 1888. *The Thames at Greenwich* and *Meeting of the Thame and Isis at Dorchester* did not thrill the Academy audience – clearly not in the way the 1888 picture did – though the former was seen nonetheless as one of the two major works in landscape in the exhibition along with Frederick Goodall’s *The Thames from Windsor Castle*. The *Daily News*
wrote, ‘Vicat Cole’s Thames at Greenwich is a conscientious and industrious panorama’;\(^{366}\) and the *Pall Mall Gazette* claimed, ‘Mr. Vicat Cole has done Greenwich Park through an older-fashioned pair of eyes’.\(^{367}\) What do these critical responses in the popular press mean? Why did Cole’s painting of Greenwich not achieve the usual popularity of his work?

*The Thames at Greenwich* represented the classic view of Greenwich from One Tree Hill, which had been captured in Turner’s famous vista. Cole’s image, however, displayed little colour and light and no ‘gleams of hope amidst a world of care’, in any ambiguous (suggested in Turner’s verse and whiteness of the fog) or lucid way. The shaft of light above the Thames in Turner’s painting and the gleaming reaches of the river beyond, dotted with white sails, in his *Liber* plate were replaced by the dull sky and water in Cole’s work. Some trees in his foreground veiled a large section of Wren’s architecture as well as of the industrial Thames. The general lack of energy in the canvas seemed to suggest an artist at the waning of his career. Still, the painting was part of one of the most important projects in the life of this ambitious artist and important figure in the wider Victorian art world; the series had been conceived as ‘a work of national importance’\(^{368}\). How did Cole deal with the famous landscape of Greenwich? What does his representation reveal about his attitudes to nature, history and modernity in Greenwich? To answer these questions we need first to understand his art and career, and the place of the Thames in them, as well as the meaning and role of Cole’s landscape painting in the context of its contemporary reception.

\(^{366}\) *Daily News*, 16 May 1890.  
\(^{367}\) *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 May 1890.  
\(^{368}\) *The World*, 6 May 1885, quoted in Barringer, *Cole Family*, p. 94.
Cole was known foremost for his painting of English countryside. For the Victorian public, his works provided a modern contribution to a proud tradition of English landscape painting represented by Wilson, Turner and Constable. Seen by his contemporaries and by the artist himself above all as national, Cole’s art was thus described by his biographer Robert Chignell, quoting Redgrave on Constable: ‘His art is purely English – English in subject, in feeling, in execution’. The Englishness of Cole’s art can be related to the debate about landscape painting as an art of the Empire since the late eighteenth century. Tim Barringer argues that landscape painting emerged as a ‘modern genre that could respond to and register the momentous historical developments of the era’ exactly at the time of the industrial revolution and the rise of the British Empire, and how images of the countryside came to stand as emblems of the nation itself – with the Royal Academy advocating such a national self-image – attaining a prominent position among the cultural products of the world’s first modern industrial nation. As the vision of the rural world offered a reassuring vision of an unchanging natural environment against the industrialised, increasingly urban and imperial nation, idyllic representations of the countryside by such artists as Constable and Cole symbolised that national image.

Cole’s art was, as Barringer puts it, ‘a celebration of England’, which encapsulated characteristic Victorian attitudes to the countryside. His landscape images were attractive as a celebration of the home counties, the heart of the Empire, and offered

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369 Redgrave, quoted in Chignell, 1896, vol. 1, title page.
370 T. J. Barringer, Opulence and Anxiety, London: Royal Academy of Arts 2007. See also Vaughan, British Painting.
371 Barringer, Cole Family, p. 10.
a comforting rural ideal in the homes of town-dwellers. In his painting the
countryside was ‘surveyed and recorded in a manner reflecting the scientific and
utilitarian temper of the period, and the requirement of the Victorian public for
correct detail’. The carefully-recorded botanical, climatic and agricultural details in
Cole’s typical English scenes related also to the impact of Pre-Raphaelite realism on
the artist at the beginning of his career in the late 1850s when he painted large,
brightly-lit works out-of-doors, with hard, scrupulous detail, along with his
contemporary Benjamin Williams Leader (1831-1923) (the two would become the
most prominent landscapists in the RA exhibitions from the 1860s to the 1890s). Cole’s work was not directly associated with Ruskin’s ideals of the ‘higher
landscape’, laid out at the conclusion of his first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843),
in the way works by such Pre-Raphaelite landscape artists as William Holman Hunt
and John Everett Millais were. The meaning Ruskin sought in landscape, a stable
ground in which a consistent order can be found – in the face of the apparent chaos
of industrialising Britain – and the critic’s emphasis on a close observation of the
natural world, nonetheless, ran in parallel with Cole’s art. Though the artist’s style
broadened in the 1860s, the naturalistic assumptions of his art remained intact and
widely accepted by the exhibition-going Victorian public. Frederic Leighton’s tribute
to Cole’s scenery of the Thames encapsulated its appreciation as a proud national art
by the public:

A type of England were the scenes on which
He loved to dwell – …

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372 Ibid., p. 70.
The majority of Cole’s work was attractive because it presented ‘the dream of England’, steadfastly avoiding industry and modernity, treating instead the agrarian and idealised aspects of the countryside. In Chapter 1, however, we also discussed the pastoral character of his Thames series, especially in the Upper Thames subjects such as The Source of the Thames and Pangbourne, in terms of the artist’s regressive contempt for modernity. In the same vein The Pool of London of 1888 (Fig. 2) could be interpreted as ‘the capitalist anarchy of the Pool, a kind of destruction of the picturesque ideal’.376 The grandiose canvas in which smoke and cloud at sunset part to reveal the dome of St Paul’s departed from Cole’s usual quiet rural scenes but was made acceptable to the majority of late Victorians by emphasising the energies of shipping and trade in a dramatic fashion. It appealed to its audience as it recognised capitalist enterprise in a Royal Academy exhibit.377 The Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone commended The Pool of London in his Liberal economic rhetoric:

I recollect … the seizure … a very large and effective combination – effective alike for the eye and the mind – … a scene of commercial activity so as to impress upon it… the idea and character of grandeur.

375 F. Leighton, quoted in Chignell, 1896, vol. 3, p. 6. The President of the Royal Academy paid this tribute to Cole at the Academy banquet weeks after the artist’s death.
377 Barringer, Cole Family, p. 97.
The picture seemed to speak and to say ‘You see here the summit of the commerce of all the world’.378

while the critical reception of the work was mixed, with the *Athenaeum* attacking it for its ‘begging of the question of pictorial representation of nature’, ‘hackneyed motives’ and judging it as ‘even less acceptable than the very obvious artifices, timidity and insincerities’.379

Returning to *The Thames at Greenwich*, which was one of the three final works in Cole’s Thames series, reasons for its relative unpopularity can be explained in terms of the complexity of subject – in comparison with the rest of the series as well as with Turner’s representation of Greenwich. At first glance, the large painting may be seen as following Cole’s typical successful formula for depicting a well-known scene of the pastoral Thames. *The Times* in its review of the Academy exhibition of 1890 indeed recognised the Englishness of Cole’s subject, without praising his work or preferring it to an image of the Upper Thames by Frederick Goodall, *The Thames from Windsor Castle* (Salford Museum and Art Gallery):

The two large landscapes by Mr Goodall and Mr Vicat Cole … Mr Goodall takes us to the Upper Thames, Mr Vicat Cole to the Lower; the one to Windsor, the other to Greenwich Park. No finer or more thoroughly English points of view would have been chosen by either artist than those from which they have painted … The success of this picture should encourage Mr Goodall to devote himself … to English landscape.380

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379 *Athenaeum*, 23 June 1888.
380 *The Times*, 16 May 1890.
In spite of the general regard for Greenwich as one of the classic themes in landscape art, the subject was clearly more complex topographically, art historically and historically than, for example, Cole’s *Iffley Mill* (1885) or *Great Marlow on Thames* (1886). Greenwich combined culture, heritage, commerce and the city in an apparently arcadian landscape on Le Nôtre’s layout. Not only had it been a royal estate since the Tudors and presented with such architectural symbols of the nation’s maritime and scientific pre-eminence as the Naval Hospital and the Observatory, but also it was situated within the Port of London. Thus by the late 1880s the audience who expected pastoral simplicity, a picturesque idyll or even historic or mythical tropes would be confronted with the contaminated view of the commercial, industrial river. *The Times* revealed disappointment at Cole’s picture, which seemed to offer neither the grandeur of *The Pool of London* nor the adored landscape of Greenwich:

… it was only to be expected that “The Pool of the Thames” would be followed by some more large pictures of that region, and that the wonderful beauty of Greenwich Park, which neither smoke nor holiday-makers can entirely destroy, would tempt the artist. There are faults in Mr Cole’s picture; the stags are gigantic and the pensioners too small; the colour is a little weak…

While the critic does not directly relate pollution and middle-class leisure with Cole’s representation, he implies that modernity may be destructive in the landscape of Greenwich. In fact, in *The Thames at Greenwich* even nature seems to betray its meaning as the reassurance of order in the perceived chaos of the modern world. The trees on the right, which are presented most prominently within the image, taking up a large proportion and depicted in meticulous detail, are distorted. Several branches

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are deformed in unnatural, often downward directions, and one of the limbs is cut short at the top. This is in sharp contrast to Cole’s other representations of trees in such landscapes as *Autumn Leaves* (1869), *Iffley Mill* (Fig. 75) or *Autumn Morning* (Fig. 76), where they are presented in visibly healthy and verdant forms in untroubled rural environments. For an artist to whom truth to nature was vital and the meaning of whose art, for his contemporary audience, was in the celebration of England’s rural landscape, the presentation of distorted natural forms in the foreground of his painting of the nation’s beloved royal landscape could be significant. Viewed in the context of Cole’s plausible Tory pessimism about modernity, discussed in Chapter 1, these trees can be interpreted as palpable forms of destruction in nature and the deprivation of order which Ruskin sought in landscape.

The contemporary reception of *The Thames at Greenwich* was also unfortunately relative to the great success of *The Pool of London* two years earlier. Claude Phillips wrote in the *Art Journal*: ‘Mr. Vicat Cole’s “The Thames at Greenwich” nearly equals in dimensions, but in other respects falls far short of his important “Thames below London Bridge”, which now hangs in the Chantrey Bequest Gallery at South Kensington’. A view of Greenwich with the magnificent architectural symbols of the nation’s naval prowess and the vista of the Thames, of course, had the pictorial potential of grandeur, which *The Pool of London* projected to the Victorian public. Cole’s image of Greenwich however does not display the similar kind of energy or grandeur. This can be analysed closely through a comparison with Turner’s *London*.

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382 *Art Journal*, 1890, p. 218.
One of the most notable differences between Cole’s representation and Turner’s is composition, even if both views are taken from One Tree Hill and the general landscape of Greenwich Park from this position appears identical. While Cole’s vantage point is more or less the same as Turner’s, Cole seems to have positioned himself more southeast than Turner. Greenwich Hospital is placed slightly further back in the middle and, accordingly, St Paul’s is relegated completely off the centre of the image. In addition, a large section of Wren’s buildings, which splendidly occupy the middle of Turner’s picture, is hidden behind the trees to the right. This reduced significance of the rear Hospital and of the Cathedral is exceptional among any topographical and landscape images of this celebrated prospect. Ironically, repoussoir trees at either side of Cole’s composition, which are a feature distinguishing his work from the other representations of the site, seem to obstruct rather than assist the viewing of the symbol of Britain’s maritime power and wealth. The Thames to which the eyes are led appears dull, lacking energy, light and colour – The Times noted it as ‘weak’ – and certainly without any dramatic ray of light found in Turner’s painting or sparkle on the river in his mezzotint. It is as if Cole would rather not display the grand architectural symbols of the nation’s imperial identity and religion, and does not see vitality in the great commercial river.

Things were certainly different at the time of Cole’s work from Turner’s. Turner exhibited his view of Greenwich in 1809 between the Battle of Trafalgar and of Waterloo. The previous section of the current chapter argued that there was a sense of thrill at the beginning of the Pax Britannica and patriotic pride in Turner’s London. By 1890 when Cole produced his view of Greenwich, on the other hand,
Britain’s naval and maritime superiority and global pre-eminence was increasingly challenged by such countries as Germany, France and the United States, and in the 1890s the editorial pages and parliamentary debates spoke of ‘defeat’ in a German commercial ‘invasion’, or of the ‘conquest’ by Americans of another ‘outpost’ of British exports.383 There was a weakening sense of Britain’s imperial status and growing doubts about the ultimate benefits of the Empire. Such uncertainties and an increasing sense of anxiety about its destiny would surface even in the writings of such imperialist authors as Rudyard Kipling.384 In these historical and cultural contexts, Cole’s Thames at Greenwich can be seen as conveying a sense of nostalgia, in contrast to Turner’s pride.

The two naval pensioners (and a boy from the Royal Hospital School, established for the children of disabled or poor pensioners) in Cole’s foreground may be suggested to exemplify this. While pensioners had appeared in representations of Greenwich before, it is notable that Cole depicted them in his painting more than 20 years after the closure of Greenwich Hospital. As its pensioners chose to leave Wren’s buildings in exchange for an annuity, the home of the British Navy for nearly two centuries finally closed in 1869.385 Since 1873, the Royal Naval College, incorporating the School of Naval Architecture, occupied the former premises of the historic late seventeenth-century establishment. Cole’s choice of placing the old pensioners in his 1890 painting seems nostalgic or deliberately regressive. The naval pensioners

385 Greenwich Hospital remains a charitable organisation with an updated welfare and educational role.
occasionally appeared in representations of Greenwich before, in such works by Turner and William Havell as *Greenwich Hospital* (Fig. 67) and *London from Greenwich Park* (Fig. 77), as well as figure paintings. In most landscape images, pensioners are depicted standing and by a telescope, often looking out across the Thames from a hill in the Park – although in Turner’s case the pensioner is directed towards Greenwich from the other side of the river. In Havell’s picture, the one-legged pensioner with his telescope is situated in a scene of leisure filled with adults and children picnicking and strolling in the Park; he could be seen as connected to play, interests in popular science associated with the Observatory, and excitement over the sprawling river beyond. Turner’s pensioner facing the spectacle of Greenwich conveyed patriotic sentiment and the nation’s tribute to the brave, encapsulated in Rogers’s poem. On the other hand, Cole’s pensioners are at rest, sitting on a bench, and with the Hospital in their background, in marked contrast with Havell’s and Turner’s pensioners, both of whom are directed to it from either side of the river. Cole’s work de-emphasises the continuity of Greenwich Hospital as the new Naval College by showing instead the pensioners no longer relevant to Wren’s buildings. Fallen leaves in front of them highlight a sense of nostalgia.

**3.5 W. L. Wyllie in Greenwich, c. 1889-1908**

The case of Wyllie’s work at Greenwich is a departure from Aumonier’s or Cole’s and forms a rather more significant turn from Turner’s templates. Wyllie produced many drawings in grey wash, graphite and watercolour as well as etchings of Greenwich from the 1880s to 1900s, many of which are now in the collection of the
National Maritime Museum and a few of which are reproduced in Wyllie’s publications *The Tidal Thames* (1889) and *London to the Nore* (1905). On small scales, with mostly less than half a metre width, these images are designed to be viewed at a close distance, mostly in a private setting; and for this purpose Wyllie’s particular aesthetic of the Thames was adjusted, as this section will consider. The works included views of the riverfront at Greenwich and its reach from varied angles and also of the Naval College from different sides, prospects of London from the Park, as well as depictions of industrial districts around the edge of the royal site. Wyllie clearly spent a considerable amount of time there over the years, which may have been in large part related to his artistic and professional links to the site.

Greenwich meant something more significant to this marine painter than the other artists, who worked mainly within the tradition of landscape painting. It was here that the tradition of marine painting in Britain began; in addition, the Royal Naval Museum (Naval Gallery until 1873) within Wren’s complex displayed such major works as *The Battle of Trafalgar, 21 October 1805* by Turner, the artist whose work played an important role in the development of Wyllie’s art and career; and the site was still lodged in the public memory in Turner’s celebrated painting *London*. Greenwich as a maritime spectacle and as subject in the history of art offered Wyllie plenty of materials for his representation of the Lower Thames as well as for competition with Turner and others.\footnote{Wyllie won the Turner gold medal at the age of eighteen with *Dawn after a Storm* in 1869. His work had been seen in relation to Turner’s as well as the Van de Veldes’ in the contemporary critical reception.} Furthermore, through his engagement with the Royal Navy – for example, to produce images of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee (1897; NMM) and funeral (1901; Walker Art Gallery) – and with the Society for
Nautical Research, Wyllie was professionally linked with the site that had been the home of the Navy since the eighteenth century and now of the Naval College. Wyllie’s representations of Greenwich would manifest the artist’s knowledge of the site, and suggest the continuity of the maritime nation via the symbolism of its industry, trade, arts and science, whilst satisfying the public tastes in turn-of-the-century Britain.

Shipping in Greenwich Reach: Images of Continuity

One of the various ways in which Wyllie represented Greenwich was to depict its riverfront in the background of scenes of shipping. Such works as the opening vignette for the chapter ‘Nearing London’ in *The Tidal Thames* (Fig. 78) and the drawing entitled *Shipping in Greenwich Reach* in the Maritime Museum (Fig. 79) display the Naval College on the horizon within the dynamic images of the working Thames. These are of course very different from Turner’s vignette for *Poems* (Fig. 67). Primarily, their naturalism is distinct from the predecessor’s patriotic topography, which is framed with an imaginary figure. Rather, they are much in line with Wyllie’s manifested aesthetic of the Lower Thames, whose key example is *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide*, as examined in Chapter 1. In all these works, his marine perspective gives the distinctive sense of actuality and movement on the working river; and a variety of maritime craft, with that workforce of barges prominently occupying the foreground, are introduced. There are however

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387 Wyllie was a founding member of the Society for Nautical Research. He chaired its inaugural meeting in 1910, and campaigned for the restoration of Nelson’s flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar HMS *Victory* at Portsmouth.
noteworthy differences between Wyllie’s large painting and his drawings of Greenwich.

As their titles clarify, these drawings specify the site of representation by displaying Wren’s buildings in Greenwich. This is different from Wyllie’s exhibition pictures, which had rhetorical titles, and either depicted unknown reaches of the Thames, avoiding its typical landmarks or suggested the represented site in a way barely identifiable, as in Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide and Our River. Because the drawings were composed on limited scales, the artist seems to have used the pictorial space more economically, with the close scrutiny of the viewer in mind. In these images, the river is given more space than in such large paintings as those mentioned above; and that space is carefully manipulated to relate to Greenwich on the horizon. From the cargo barges with bargees heaving away at the oars in the foreground, eyes are led diagonally through the steam vessels in the middle – the paddle steamer immediately behind the barges in Greenwich Hospital (Fig. 78), the single-funnelled ship with two masts dominating Shipping in Greenwich Reach (Fig. 79) – eventually reaching the Naval College. Wyllie’s Greenwich is placed in the clear context of the regular river traffic. Wren’s domes in no way dominate the images but are seen from the level of the bargee in the foreground.

Wyllie’s emphasis on the dynamism of the present, ‘working’ Thames in his views of Greenwich is particularly discernible and bears political and social significance

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388 Cargo barges existed on the Thames in various forms for centuries either hauling cargo or acting as lighters for larger ships, while the different types of could be dated from the early to late nineteenth century, with many lasting into the twentieth century. I am grateful to Andrew Choong Han Lin at the National Maritime Museum for sharing his immense knowledge of ships.
when analysed in comparison with Turner’s *Greenwich Hospital*. In line with Rogers’s poem it accompanies, *The Pleasures of Memory*, Turner’s image focuses on the Hospital as a legacy of royal patronage and frames the view in the memory of a naval pensioner, who is looking up at Greenwich (it also depicts a royal trip on the Thames, as suggested by royal barges in the background). Rogers’s lines read, ‘hail, noblest structures imagined in the wave! | A nation’s grateful tribute to the brave’. 389

Turner’s picture highlights the glory of the past and the symbol of the benevolent state over the subject. By contrast, in Wyllie’s representations, the Naval College and the bargee are on the same level and, moreover, Wren’s buildings form only part of the dynamic pictorial displays of shipping. It is the present and the power of individuals that are in focus in Wyllie’s work. We already examined Wyllie’s focus on the mundane in Chapter 1; situated in the context of the royal site (and compared with Turner’s representation), Wyllie’s views can also be interpreted as emphasising the proactive role of individuals in bourgeois political economy.

This heightened role of individuals is of course capitalist and imperial in the sense that the working classes are brought into the middle-class imperial enterprise. The success of Wyllie’s portrayals of the dirty workaday Thames could imply the satisfying prosperity gained by a bourgeois audience. The vignette for *The Tidal Thames* and drawing *Shipping in Greenwich Reach* are noteworthy in this light; these were produced to be taken home by the middle-class consumer, offering a sample of that satisfaction in a small-scale version of looking at the large paintings by Wyllie at the Royal Academy, which were seen to give a near experience of ‘being there’ on

the terrible lower river. The spectacle of Greenwich in the background could not have been more appropriate in the view of the bourgeoisie, as it linked a building associated with empire through the continuity of naval power to the commercial river in the foreground.

Furthermore, Wren’s buildings did not necessarily signify the legacy of the past in Wyllie’s drawings. Not only had they become by the time of Wyllie’s work the premises of the new Naval College, whose scheme stressed the modernity of ‘scientific education’, but also the structure symbolises home, the hub of empire, in these images. The chapter ‘Nearing London’ in The Tidal Thames, featuring Wyllie’s vignette, is mainly about the capital, its tidal river, their origins and developments. It describes the journey approaching London: ‘as we thread our way cautiously through the manifold perils of the great deep between Woolwich and Greenwich, the aspect of Nature grows more and more Londony at every tack…’ The author also evokes the Elizabethan days, during which bases of the Empire were laid. Greenwich signalled home, into which memories of the past were woven:

The great Queen, in whose “spacious days” English sailors laid the foundations of that world-wide colonial empire ..., loved to watch from the oriels of her palace the ships of her revived sea-dogs, her Drakes, her Frobishers, her Raleighs, and her Baffins, starting forth on their adventurous voyages, “discovering kings and countries new”; and often, “as their pinnaces passed Greenwich,” waved her own hand to them as a token of farewell before their final departure for the unknown coasts of Guiana or the ice-bound channels of the North-West Passage.

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390 Allen and Wyllie, Tidal Thames, p. 115.
391 Allen and Wyllie, Tidal Thames, p. 119.
On the other hand, *Shipping in Greenwich Reach* (Fig. 79) displays a steamer heading up to London on the right and a three-masted barque also inbound under tow beyond in the distance, while warehouses and factory chimneys on the eastern point of the Isle of Dogs close the view on the far right.

‘At Longitude Nothing’ and Imperial Appeal

In his illustrations of Greenwich for publication, which were targeted at the broad middle-class audience in particular, Wyllie often deliberately touched upon the public imagination of the site by bringing out its widely recognised aspects or visibly handsome elements of the river. The ways in which the artist suggested the Prime Meridian at Greenwich and displayed the Thames Sailing Barges in his book illustrations at the turn of the century are noteworthy.

One of the most public developments concerning Greenwich in the late nineteenth century was the adoption of the Greenwich Meridian and Mean Time as the world standards for the measurement of space and time. Greenwich Mean Time had been widely known and used alongside local times in Britain throughout the nineteenth century and became the official time in Britain in 1880. The decision to adopt a single world Prime Meridian, passing through the Airy Transit Circle in the Meridian Building of the Royal Observatory at Greenwich – in place of the innumerable meridians that existed –, however, would mean that all time and space was now to be measured relative to the Greenwich Meridian. From this ‘initial meridian’ – zero degrees longitude – all the continents spread out east and west; London thus put the world in its place. This major decision from the International Meridian Conference in...
Washington in October 1884 was made on the grounds that over two-thirds of all ships and tonnage already used Greenwich as the reference meridian on their maps.\textsuperscript{392} The universal adoption of the Greenwich Meridian and Mean Time thereby confirmed the global influence of British trade and commercial power, as well as re-affirming the centrality of London in the global realm. Grant Allen expressed the pride over what Greenwich symbolised that felt among the British public in \textit{The Tidal Thames}:

\begin{quote}
\ldots Greenwich Reach, at longitude nothing, as our skipper loves to impress upon us in due form, and steer straight down the line of $0^\circ$, with the Observatory facing us on its hill in front, and the lower entrance to the West India Docks and the City Canal fronting the river on our right. The bank bristles on both sides with oil-mills, telegraph-cable works, and torpedo-boats. The view on either hand commands impartially the tall warehouses and iron shipbuilding slips of the Isle of Dogs, or the equally ugly level of Bugsby’s Marshes…… at Greenwich, passing the familiar façade of the great naval hospital …
\end{quote}

This text highlights the Prime Meridian, on which the map of the world is centred. It furthermore describes the historic setting of Greenwich in the context of the commercial and industrial Thames, lined with docks, shipbuilding yards, and in so doing completes a spectacle of the hub of empire.

While the reproductions of Wyllie’s originally exhibited images in \textit{The Tidal Thames} did not suggest the Greenwich Meridian – as the artist tended to avoid typical markers in exhibition pictures – he implied its significance in his book illustration. The vignette (Fig. 80) at the top of the chapter ‘Millwall to Greenwich’ in \textit{London to

\textsuperscript{392} See Lippincott, \textit{Guide to the Royal Observatory}.  
\textsuperscript{393} Allen and Wyllie, \textit{Tidal Thames}, p. 117.
the Nore represents a close view of the Naval College from the river, seen behind the Thames sailing barges. This small-scale image is in fact one of the least modern representations of the Thames by Wyllie in the sense that every element in the picture could be dated from a time much earlier than his own. In a composition, which is generally reminiscent of Turner’s Greenwich Hospital and yet vividly lively as it was likely to have resulted from Wyllie’s skilful plein air sketch, the artist included the Baroque architecture, the Observatory on top of the hill and the Thames sailing barges: the seventeenth century establishments and the vessels of comparatively ancient lineage, which indeed outlived a number of the more modern steam types, including paddle tugs. To title such an image full of the perpetual symbols of the maritime nation ‘Longitude 0˚’ could be interpreted as a message of enduring British power, as the Greenwich Meridian and Mean Time as recently accepted as the universal standards of space and time would continue to be in use.

Wyllie also employed a simple pictorial element to enhance his images of Greenwich in terms of popular appeal. Greenwich Hospital (Fig. 81), reproduced in colour in London to the Nore, for example, represents a Thames Barge Sailing race with the Naval College in the background to the right. The Thames sailing barges were widely regarded as ‘picturesque’ vessels; and in this image Wyllie uses the stylish form of the boats in full gear and their typical dark red to contrast with the tides of the water and the sky in the overall blue tone, whilst juxtaposing them with Wren’s domes on the horizon.
Images of Greenwich and the Middle-Class Consumer

Among Wyllie’s images of Greenwich in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, drawings and etchings from the 1890s and early 1900s are particularly notable. Most of these works except Shipping in Greenwich Reach examined earlier differ from his better-known dynamic scenes of shipping or battle. Such works as Greenwich (Fig. 82) and Sugar Boats. Greenwich Reach (Fig. 83 and Fig. 83-1) explore the maritime site at various angles in a manifestly more delicate and quieter manner and from fixed viewpoints rather than moving yachts. At the same time they display Wyllie’s skills as an accomplished draughtsman at his peak and the especially close care with which he treated the subject. There is however no information about the commission and sales of works in this group of representations of Greenwich in the existing records, including lists of exhibitions, biographies of and literature on the artist. The NMM collection includes inconsistent sets of images; in some cases there are both drawings and prints and in others there are only trial proofs but no drawings, and vice versa. This indicates that parts of this group of works were sold separately, while the rest was acquired by and for the Museum largely after (and some before) Wyllie’s death in 1931. A brief look at the artist’s career during the period is useful in gauging the reasons why, and for whom, Wyllie made these elegant images of Greenwich.

Wyllie’s career in the decades after the 1880s was marked by an expanding client-base and many international travels. Assisted by the critical and public successes of the 1880s, commissions from shipping companies, the Royal Navy and Bond Street dealers increased noticeably, which involved trips to the different parts of the world
and often the Empire. Thus not only did Wyllie continue to exhibit at such institutional venues as the Royal Academy, Institute of Painters in Oil Colours and the Society of British Artists, but also he was able to show his watercolour drawings and paintings in group or solo shows at a number of commercial galleries, including Agnews, the Fine Art Society and Dowdeswell and Dowdeswell.\textsuperscript{394} The exhibited works were representations of historical and modern naval events, the launching of new steamships, and river- and seascapes. The titles of shows at the dealers included \textit{Oceans, Seas and Rivers: a series of water-colour drawings made during a year's yachting in the West Indies, Atlantic, Mediterranean, Solent and Thames} (Dowdeswell and Dowdeswell, 1894), \textit{On Many Waters} (Dowdeswell and Dowdeswell, 1902) and \textit{Pleasure Cruises in a P&O from Spitsbergen to the Golden Horn} (Fine Art Society, 1907). At the same time, the number of private patrons increased; among them were the Liberal politician and MP Joseph Pulley, the engineer John Wolfe Barry and the royal family including Queen Victoria and the Princess of Wales.\textsuperscript{395}

Viewed in these contexts, Wyllie’s drawings and prints of Greenwich from the 1890s and 1900s would have been aimed at existing and potential clients: financiers, industrialists, ship owners and naval officers, who were closely engaged in the imperial enterprise and for whom an image of Greenwich could symbolise the proud project in which they took active part. A notable example is Wolfe Barry, the engineer of Tower Bridge and son of the architect Charles Barry, who became an

\textsuperscript{394} Robert Dunthorne, who ran the Rembrandt Gallery, also commissioned from Wyllie etchings and drawings.

\textsuperscript{395} The Queen and the Princess bought Wyllie’s paintings of the royal yacht \textit{Britannia} for the Prince of Wales. Also, the Royal Academician James Clarke Hook owned a few pictures by Wyllie. See M. A. Wyllie, \textit{We Were One}, London 1935.
important patron of Wyllie’s work during this time. He commissioned a series of works from Wyllie, representing his own and his father’s buildings and the historic architecture on the Thames, some of the monumental symbols of imperial Britain. These included the painting of Tower Bridge, shown at the 1895 Academy, London’s Water Gate, as well as images of Barry Docks in Wales, the Houses of Parliament, St Paul’s and the Tower. An oil or watercolour of the Naval College at Greenwich, painted in 1908 according to the biography of the artist by his wife, might well relate to works in the Maritime Museum, given that the NMM collection encompasses his studio material. For example, the waterfront views of the College from northwest and northeast Greenwich (Fig. 82) and The River at Greenwich (NMM PAF2116; PAF0788) emphasise the architectural spectacle of Wren’s buildings, seen from the viewpoint of the Thames with shipping, in a way similar to London’s Water Gate (reproduced in the Art Annual, Art Journal, 1907, p. 1).

Sugar Boats. Greenwich Reach (Fig. 83) is an image from around 1890 whose contemporaneity is noteworthy in terms of British industry and arts. It represents a swarm of barges and lighters, which are clustered around the steamships, with the Naval College in the background to the left. These new types of steam vessels are either loading sacks of sugar or unloading the unprocessed material into lighters to the west of the Greenwich town centre to the right. Given the proximity of Henry Tate’s and Abram Lyle’s sugar refineries downriver at Woolwich (since 1878 and 1883 respectively), the depicted vessels presumably belonged to either one of these

396 Wyllie and Wolfe-Barry acquainted through the artist’s dealer Robert Dunthorne.
397 A drawing for London’s Water Gate is in the NMM collection (PAF2267). Barry Docks was a coal port developed by the Welsh industrialist David Davies in the 1880s, which grew to the world’s largest coal exporting port by 1913.
398 Wyllie, We Were One, pp. 137-8.
firms. Wyllie would have been more likely to include the ships of Henry Tate & Sons considering a recent event. In 1889, Tate donated his large collection of contemporary paintings as well as a fortune to the government to establish the National Gallery of British Art, which opened in 1897.\textsuperscript{399} Tate’s own collection was comprised of many canvases by the Royal Academicians senior to Wyllie such as John Everett Millais, William Orchardson and Edwin Landseer; and the Gallery would be the home of Wyllie’s own painting of 1883 as well as the later \textit{The Battle of the Nile} of 1899. The significance of this establishment would have been clear to the artist, who would himself be elected an RA in 1907. Given that the fortunes of tycoons such as Henry Tate & Sons were built on imports from imperial possessions, Wyllie’s representation of their vessels on the river was an implicit recognition of the Lower Thames’s umbilical links to empire, as well as perhaps being a self-seeking commercial gambit in its own right.

**Bird’s-Eye Views**

Wyllie’s representations of the prospect of Greenwich Park came after his views of the site from the Thames and publication of his biography of Turner (1905). While clearly aware of his great predecessor’s \textit{London}, which he discussed and reproduced in his book, Wyllie took Turner’s motif to experiment with his own long-standing interests in London’s topography and aerial viewpoint. Two drawings in the Maritime Museum reveal these interlinked aspects of Wyllie’s artistic outlook and his experience of producing the aerial views of the capital.

\textsuperscript{399} It was also in 1889 that Wyllie was elected Associate of the Royal Academy.
*Greenwich Park* (Fig. 84) is a prospect of Greenwich which is distinguished from Turner’s and other artists’ work in its keen delineation of the winding course of the urban Thames and new buildings. Taken from slightly south of Turner’s viewpoint, the picture shows the clutter of the Royal Observatory buildings, notably including the Great Equatorial Building (built in 1857 and from whose opening onion-shaped dome a refracting telescope began its service in 1893) at the lower left, and Tower Bridge as well as St Paul’s in the distant background. Compared with representations by other artists, which suggested the capital and its river in pictorially generalised manners, Wyllie’s half-aerial view is particular about metropolitan topography, and can be seen as part of his exercise in the aerial image making of London and the Thames. Already in 1870 he depicted the recently built Cannon Street Railway Bridge and Station in *London from the Monument*; and the numerous watercolour and pencil sketches of central London from the same and other high viewpoints in the Maritime Museum (PAE4910; PAE4916) also prove his attraction to the reshaping topography of the capital, viewed from above in particular. In 1884 Wyllie produced *Bird’s-Eye View of London as Seen from a Balloon* (London Metropolitan Archives; Museum of London) for the *Graphic* (31 May), with H. W. Brewer. The large view, which was printed in the newspaper’s facing sheets, showed Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament in the foreground and the meandering Thames stretching towards the hazy skyline, which was to be found similarly in *Greenwich Park*. Furthermore, Wyllie’s prospect of Greenwich could be seen also in relation with his aerial sketch of the Thames in the NMM (Fig. 85), in which it appears that Wyllie considered Greenwich as a point of mapping the great imperial river.
In these turn-of-the-century images of Greenwich and the adjacent river, Wyllie explored the site from different angles and for different purposes in a confident manner, departing from Turner’s models. His play with the architectural, commercial and technological symbols of the maritime empire revealed his support of imperialism as well as his chosen role as an artist continuing the tradition of marine painting in modern naturalist idioms. The particular geographic position of Greenwich was a source of Aumonier’s panoramic view of the capital, realising the aesthetic potential of London’s scale and smoke. Cole’s conservative aesthetic, by contrast, implied his unwillingness to come to terms with modernity and his constricting nostalgia for the past.
Conclusion

The Thames in the late nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century is called to mind by images such as *Nocturne in Grey and Gold* (1871-2; Burrell Collection) by James McNeill Whistler and *Houses of Parliament* (1903; Metropolitan Museum of Art) by Claude Monet. The art historical preoccupation with modernism has until recent years produced a large number of publications and exhibitions repeatedly analysing and presenting those familiar paintings: of the Thames at Battersea in a quiet night setting, delineated by Whistler’s flat patches of colour, and of the misty river with the Houses of Parliament dimly set against Monet’s brilliant effects of the sunset. The scholarly books and exhibitions which have concentrated on such work have, however, presented a picture that is unbalanced both geographically and artistically. They have focused not only on modernist works but, in so doing, on the western sections of the London river.

This dissertation has tried to redress the balance in the study of the visual representation of the Thames by examining images of the Thames specifically below London Bridge. The research was founded upon the premise that these representations of the Lower Thames – which were, as it turned out, non-modernist works of art – did actively address the modernity of contemporary London and its life. It is an attempt to understand works which have been largely neglected in the existing historiography in their historical as well as art historical context, rather than
the twentieth century measurement of modernist aesthetic. It analysed the works which were accessible to the broad middle-class cultural sphere in particular: paintings and drawings shown in major exhibitions and critically reviewed, as well as drawings and engravings which were reproduced in major illustrated publications. Through these analyses, the thesis has tried to prove the importance of the Lower Thames for the artists of the time, the significance of those works in contemporary visual culture, and also their links to imperialism.

Questions asked to these ends included: why did such artists as Wyllie and Cole paint the Lower Thames? What were the ways in which did they do so? How were their works disseminated and viewed by critics? What were their functions in late Victorian visual culture and middle-class metropolitan and imperial life? Are the prevalent art historical assumptions of their seeming anti-modernity valid? If not, what were the terms of modernity of these images of the Thames; and what do they tell us about late nineteenth-century London and its life?

We have seen that these artists represented the lower river as the heart, artery and home of the Empire. Wyllie’s Thames was a dynamic port, full of smoke, steamships and other modern equipment and working men, getting the trading Empire going. Cole’s London river was contaminated for doubtful reasons; his representation could imply a sort of destruction of the picturesque ideal, a ruined harmony with nature and the artist’s longing for the past and the rural. Lanos’s Tower Bridge and Thames, on the other hand, were an enormous water gate into the imperial capital and a wonderful and even frightening site of cutting-edge technology and construction.
Aumonier’s panorama of the river from Greenwich Park showed the modern present, elegantly bridged with the proud past. These representations of the Thames at its lower reaches were the artists’ ways of endorsing, disapproving, magnifying or picturing capitalist, imperial modernity.

The visual analysis of this select group of works, combined with the examination of their interplay with textual sources, has revealed the works’ naturalist aesthetic and means of dissemination. Those significant characteristics which critically distinguished them from modernist representations included the following. Wyllie’s and Lanos’s images depicted and often highlighted things that were common, dirty, working-class, modern and were thus considered ugly – and opposite other things that were conventionally deemed grand or picturesque. Everyday life in the Lower Thames was brought before the eye in legible and vivid representations. We have seen in the case of Wyllie’s pictures how the marine painter’s close physical and emotional distance to the river (and sea) constantly captured the viewer’s imagination by giving a remarkable sense of being on the flowing water. As an article in the Graphic said, its accompanying close-up image of the vast and fast-flowing river from the top of Tower Bridge by Lanos gave the viewer a sensation of ‘Mahomet’s feeling in his suspended coffin’.400 These works’ naturalist means of addressing the audience meant that they were not only exhibited at galleries in the West End, but also reproduced in books and periodicals. Wyllie’s publications could be purchased, borrowed or, in the case of his luxurious tome The Tidal Thames, even presented to guests in a domestic setting. Lanos’s illustrations on the other hand were

400 Graphic, 20 February 1892.
in the hands of the *Graphic* subscribers all around the Empire. The close-up images and radical perspectives from which they depicted the Port of London visualised the sublime spectacles of the pumping heart of the Empire for the newspaper readers both at home and in distant colonies.

By not taking modernist form, were these works then not ‘modern’? Did they fulfil the widely accepted notion of Victorian art as modernity’s other? Our examination of these images of the Lower Thames has proved otherwise – in terms of both subject and means of representation. The modernity of Aumonier’s, Wyllie’s and Lanos’s subjects were clear and powerful. It was the smoke and groves of factory chimneys of the Babylonian capital, steamships, lighthouses and gas buoys on ‘the busiest waterway on earth’ and a monumental triumph of innovative engineering and capital over such incalculable powers or mythic forces as Father Thames, standing like a giant on the water at the entrance of the biggest city in the world that were represented in their works. It was the actual labour which the works depicted. Wyllie’s working men in *Our River* and *Toil, Glitter, Grime and Wealth on a Flowing Tide* and Lanos’s navvies in images such as *The Present State of the Tower Bridge* and *The Tower Bridge: the Progress of the Work* assume specific and professional roles in a manner quite different from that of dock-side workers with no clearer role than being generally of the labouring classes in Whistler’s early Thames etchings such as *Eagle Wharf* (1859; British Museum) and *Black Lion Wharf* (1859; British Museum). We have also seen how powerfully these symbols and marks of the modern capitalist world were manifested through the pictorial manipulations of the images discussed. By highlighting the sense of immediacy and movement and the
close-up of extreme heights and the stormy river, images such as Lanos’s *The Completion of the Tower Bridge* and *The Eve of Completion* and Wyllie’s *Gravesend Reach* encapsulated the sense of stupefying ‘modern wonders’; since such terrifying scenes were viewed from a safe distance and from a safe vantage point they could give the viewer sublime pleasure; and as the industrious workers were depicted ‘at work’, not on strike, they could offer the middle-class spectator a feeling of re-assurance.

The dissertation has shown that these images of the Lower Thames – direct in observation, naturalist in style and imperialist in ethos – characterised a particular modernity. Such images articulated for their broad publics many things: the scale, traffic and technology of the port, the seamen and the architectural symbols of history, making the incoherent cityscape of modern London conjure up the extent of the Empire’s wealth and power and even suggesting the superiority of the British in the present and the past. Envisaging the Empire by means which gave the capitalist classes an enhanced sense of pride, naturalism proved a powerful aesthetic for imperialism and a way of intervening in and shaping modern cultural life in late nineteenth century London.
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Figures

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Oil on canvas, dimension and location unknown.
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