

A Charlie Peace Appendix No.1: A context of The Times of Charlie Peace: Victorian Britain.

A context of the times of Charlie Peace: Victorian Britain 1837 - 1901

'If you persist in this aspiration to follow in the family firm, Willie Ward, then practice the craft far away from your own home. Else why were railways invented?'

- Charlie Peace in Charlie Peace by Michael Eaton.

In 1837 after a long period of uncertainty and unrest Queen Victoria ascended the throne and the Victorian era began. With a newfound confidence in their monarch, society began to settle and there was a renewed interest in science, art and literature. One of the major developments of the period was the industrial revolution, which began in Britain and would spread throughout Europe and the United States of America. It marked the change from the use of wood and other bio-fuels to the use of refined coal and the production of Iron. Industrial methods of production went from hand to machinery that had sparked the Luddite rebellion; the textile artisans who protested against newly developed labour saving machinery. Trade and industry was facilitated by the introduction of the canals and railways that allowed goods, raw materials and people to travel the length and breadth of the country. With this revolution came a greater wealth for many at the higher end of the social ladder with a rise in the average income.

"For the first time in history, the living standards of the masses of ordinary people have begun to undergo sustained growth..." Robert E Lucas Jnr: Lectures on Economic Growth - Cambridge, Harvard University Press

It was a time of change, ideas and invention and Charlie Peace, although legendary as a burglar, thief, murderer, violin player and picture frame maker also turned his hand to inventor. Whilst in London he worked closely with a man named Brion and together they both patented an invention for raising sunken vessels, in addition to a smoke helmet for firemen, an improved brush for washing railway carriages, and a form of hydraulic tank.

Here are just a few major innovations of the Victorian Age:

Photography - Compass magnet (Binnacle) - The telephone - Radio - The Toilet - Gin & Tonic - Quinine to combat malaria - Leech barometer (!) - the electric telegraph - Cricket, Bicycling, croquet, roller skating, horseback riding, tennis and the football league (created by the manager of Aston Villa) - the gas and lighting network.

...To name but a few!

Charlie Peace was clearly a man of his age and he made full use of the railway revolution. It was only because of the evolution of the railway network and introduction of steam in the second half of the Victorian era that made it possible for Charlie to travel so extensively. From the research that I have done, here are the possible 'Travels of Charlie Peace' (in order); places of birth, residence, crime, imprisonment, daring escape and finally execution throughout his adventurous life. How many of these places have you been too?

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Born in Sheffield 1832 – Manchester – Sheffield – Lower Broughton – Wakefield – Millbank – Chatham – (Gibraltar: tbc) – Sheffield – Darnall – Hull – Manchester – Banner Cross – Manchester – Sheffield – Ecclesall – Banner Cross – Sheffield – Normanton – York – Beverley – Cottingham – Hull – Doncaster – London (Kings Cross to Paddington) – Bristol – Bath – Didcot – Oxford – Birmingham – Derby – Nottingham – Hull – Nottingham – Hull – London (Lambeth, Greenwich, Peckham, Blackheath, Streatham, Denmark Hill) – Southampton – Portsmouth - Southsea – Newgate – Pentonville Prison – Sheffield- London – Sheffield – Worksop – Kiverton Park – Sheffield – Leeds – Wakefield Prison – Executed at Armley Goal (Leeds HMP) 1879.

The industrial revolution didn't just have an impact on industry. Another great engineering feat of the age were the reforms of the sewage systems, initially in London. This had a direct impact on the death rates and illness. In fact, excluding two outbreaks of cholera from 1848-49 and in 1853 it was the first century that a major epidemic did not appear throughout the whole country. The poorer working classes in Victorian era however still suffered ill health due to starvation. According to House of Commons research, life expectancy during this period was just 45 for men and 48 for woman. Charlie died aged 47.

Neil.

Neil Bull
Assistant Director: Charlie Peace
Nottingham Playhouse
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