



Selling the
British Empire Exhibition 1924
Through Mass Media and Material Culture

A Humanities Thesis submitted by
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Abstract

The British Empire Exhibition of 1924/25 was intended to bring together the many nations that made up the British Empire, to improve trade and to better understand other nations after the turmoil of the First World War. The end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century saw the birth of mass communication through mass circulation of newspapers, cinema, the gramophone, and wireless radio. Furthermore, changes in education laws, and the introduction of compulsory education, meant that printed material was more in demand than ever before and had a more diverse audience. This thesis will demonstrate the ways in which the various methods of mass media, together with the material and consumer culture of the era, were utilised to link the British Empire Exhibition with the monarchy, modernity and the British Empire. The thesis will examine how the organisers of the British Empire Exhibition enhanced the visitor experience and promoted the exhibition with those media. The multimedia experience required established forms of media such as printing, through to the fledgling media of wireless broadcasting. This thesis will first explore how print media was used by the organisers, who ensured the guidebooks, printed souvenirs and advertising targeted that wider audience, including women and children. It will then analyse how wireless broadcasting enabled listeners to hear the opening ceremony and the King's speech instantaneously, and how newsreel films brought the ceremony to life, for those who did not attend. Finally, the material and consumer culture surrounding the exhibition was represented in the souvenirs and memorabilia, and this is explored along with the Queen's dolls' house, presented to Queen Mary at the exhibition and described in the press as the highlight of the exhibition. The dolls' house was designed to be the epitome of upper class material culture of the 1920s and this work considers how the companies who contributed to the dolls' house used the link with the exhibition through advertising. Together, these chapters will demonstrate that the various uses of media, and material and consumer culture shared common themes, linking empire, monarchy and modernity.

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Author Declaration

I declare that this thesis is all my own work and the sources of information and the material I have used (including the internet) have been fully identified and properly acknowledged.

Student signature: Sarah Coles

Introduction

On 23 April 1924, the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley opened its gates to its first visitors. It closed on 1 November 1924 and re-opened on 9 May 1925. When it closed again on 31 October 1925 it is estimated that over 27 million people had passed through the entrance. This research will argue that the use of mass media, and material and consumer culture, linked the British Empire Exhibition with the monarchy, modernity and the British Empire. In doing so, I will argue that the organisers of the exhibition, as well as exhibitors and companies associated with the exhibition, used older and newer forms of mass communication, and material and consumer culture to sell the exhibition to potential visitors and how they continued to use the same media to enhance the visitor experience. In doing so, the exhibition was a way in which the oldest medium of mail could be given a sense of modernity with the introduction of the first ever commemorative stamps issued by the Post Office, whilst the newest media of radio was instrumental in relaying news from the exhibition to the British Empire.

The last decade of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century mark the beginning of the “age of mass communication”, starting with mass circulation of newspapers, followed by silent films and gramophone records, then the introduction of wireless telegraphy and broadcasting. As Kevin Williams writes, the phrase ‘mass media’ was, and still is, viewed with suspicion by politicians and those in power because it responds to the needs and wants of the people – the masses. Mass circulation newspapers were viewed as being full of gossip and trivia; mass art was seen to be inferior to fine art; and mass culture was seen as an attempt to pacify the lower social classes.¹ These, however, were all ways to reach large audiences and were accessible to all people.² As this research will show, by using media and material and consumer culture, that connected exhibition visitors to empire, monarchy and a sense of modernity, the

¹ Kevin Williams, *Get Me a Murder a Day* (London: Arnold Publishers, 1998), 2.

² Williams, *Get me a Murder a Day*, 3.

British Empire Exhibition was a significant event that set out to provide a multimedia experience. Together, media and material and consumer culture helped to sell the British Empire Exhibition as an experience, as well as helping to sell the idea of the British Empire as an entity that was both rooted in and connected to tradition and monarchy, but also a commercial culture. As Daniel Stephen suggests, the backing of the royal family and parliament from the very early stages was a significant factor in building the support of the dominions.³ Building on these ideas, this research will demonstrate how the use of old and new media, together with visual culture, strengthened the connection between The British Empire Exhibition and monarchy, modernity and empire.

A common thread which runs throughout this work is the link to monarchy. George V was known as the Emperor-King and the organisers of the exhibition advertised the support of the King and his family at every opportunity. Edward, the Prince of Wales, was President of the British Empire Exhibition and both his and the King's voices were broadcast live during the opening ceremony, demonstrating the royal family's willingness to embrace the modern technologies of the 1920s. Radio broadcasting also enabled George V to "project to the people the image of monarchy that he had worked so hard to achieve during the First World War".⁴ The Queen's dolls' house which is discussed in chapter three, was considered by many to be the highlight of the exhibition but its origins were as a gift for Queen Mary from one of the King's cousins, Princess Marie Louise. Queen Mary was the patron of the 'Women's Section', supported by others including Elizabeth, the Duchess of York (later the mother of Queen Elizabeth II), and Lucy Baldwin, the Prime Minister's wife. As consumers, it was important that women were targeted through advertising, and the guidebooks included sections dealing solely with women's interests. A vast majority of the souvenirs were household items and representations of the popular consumer culture of the inter-war period. Several of the British Pathé films show the King with various other royal visitors

³ Daniel Stephen, *The Empire of Progress. West Africans, Indians and Britons at the British Empire Exhibition 1924-25* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 2.

⁴ Sarah Coles, "King George V the Emperor-King" (Undergraduate Diss., Bournemouth University, 2021), 37.

to the exhibition, providing a further link between the exhibition and monarchy. Finally, although the commemorative stamps were the first pictorial stamps, the monarch's bust remained in the top corner of those modern versions of an established method of mass communication, continuing the link between monarchy and the exhibition. This thesis will therefore show how old and new media, and material and consumer culture, used in the British Empire Exhibition further strengthened the link between monarchy, empire and modernity.

Origins of the Exhibition

The idea of a colonial exhibition was first mooted by the British Empire League in 1902 but was put on the back burner by a new liberal government in 1906, before being brought back to the forefront in 1913 by one of the founders of the British Empire League, Lord Strathcona. It was proposed again in 1919 after the war, at which time Edward, the Prince of Wales, agreed to be president of the organising committee. In 1920 the British Government decided to hold the exhibition at the site of Wembley Park and having become a joint guarantor by an Act of Parliament, the government contributed half of the £2.2 million cost involved in holding the exhibition. The exhibition was promoted, and exhibitors were encouraged by means of a world tour by the assistant general manager of the British Empire Exhibition, Major Ernest Belcher. The tour lasted ten months and Major Belcher was accompanied for some of the tour by the author Agatha Christie and her husband, Archibald Christie.

The planning and organisation of the exhibition was in the hands of a specially appointed board, representing various interests. For example, the Chairman of the Board of the Exhibition was James Stevenson, who in 1922 was appointed a Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George for his services during the First World War. Other committee members included James Henry Thomas M.P, the Secretary of State for the Colonies under the new Labour Government; Victor Cavendish, the ninth Duke of Devonshire, who was the previous Secretary of State for the Colonies; Sir Charles McLeod, chairman of the National Bank of India and the Imperial Tea Company as well as chairman of

the Royal Colonial Institute; Lieutenant Colonel Sir Arthur Henry McMahon, a retired British Indian Army Officer; and Colonel the Honourable Sir James Allen, New Zealand's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.⁵ The initial plans had been made over a decade earlier, before the First World War, and this delay necessitated a change in some of the intentions of an Empire Exhibition. World trade was limited because protectionism was widespread following the war. Many of Britain's overseas assets had had to be liquidated to raise funds for the war effort and by the time the war was over Britain owed the USA £1,150 million.⁶ At the beginning of the 1920s, according to Piers Brendon, "the British Empire continued to bestride the world like a colossus" and Britain remained the only superpower, while the Soviet Union and the USA were "bound up in their own affairs".⁷ Adding to this is Daniel Stephen who described the British Empire as being at its geographical zenith in 1919.⁸ Alexander C.T. Geppert, however, describes the exhibition as an "attempt at reinventing the empire" after the First World War, while writing that it also "foreshadowed the empire's subsequent political disintegration".⁹ Jiyi Ryu also draws attention to the idea of 'reinvention', and writes that the inter-war period was a time of "intensive reassessment of the imperial relationship".¹⁰ To this end the organisers stated the aim of the exhibition was:

To find, in the development and utilisation of the raw materials of the Empire, new sources of Imperial wealth. To foster inter-Imperial trade and open fresh world markets for Dominion and home products. To make the different races of the British Empire better known to each other, and to

⁵ J.H Thomas, *British Empire Exhibition 1925*, British Library ref YD.2014.b.148. These names, along with those of the vice presidents, administrative staff, and honorary advisers are listed here.

⁶ Martin Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political history of Britain Since 1870* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 234.

⁷ Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire, 1781-1997* (London: Vintage, 2008), 328.

⁸ Stephen, *The Empire of Progress. West Africans, Indians and Britons at the British Empire Exhibition 1924-25*, 2.

⁹ Alexander C.T. Geppert, Wembley 1924-1925, p230-236, "*Encyclopaedia of World Fairs and Expositions*", Edited by John E. Findling and Kimberley D. Pelle (North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc, 2008), 235.

¹⁰ Jiyi Ryu, "The Queen's Dolls' House within the British Empire Exhibition: Encapsulating the British Imperial World", *Contemporary British History*, 33:4, 464-482, (2019) DOI: 10.1080/13619462.2018.1519433, 464.

demonstrate to the people of Britain the almost illimitable possibilities of the Dominions, Colonies and Dependencies overseas.¹¹

The exhibition was therefore intended to be a way to improve trade and to educate the people of Britain about the other nations and people that made up the British Empire.

Scholarly Context

The British Empire Exhibition of 1924 and 1925 has received much less scholarly attention than some other British exhibitions from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite it being an event at which both existing and newer forms of mass media were significant. As Jiyi Ryu has argued, the British Empire Exhibition was a “trigger for active publicity” that would eventually lead to other key “imperial propaganda activities” such as the Empire Marketing Board and the BBC Empire Service.¹² The organisers of the British Empire Exhibition engineered an extensive publicity campaign which incorporated a multi-media approach. Scott Anthony has explored how public relations developed in the first part of the twentieth century and named Stephen Tallents as the pioneer of British public relations.

Public relations in Britain began with Tallents’ attempt to systemise the innovations of contemporaries who had begun to creatively rethink the manner and method of public administration.¹³

In 1926 Tallents was instrumental in the formation of the Empire Marketing Board (‘EMB’) and was the first chairman. One of the aims of the EMB was to encourage the people of Britain to buy products from the empire and this was done through advertising campaigns including poster campaigns, radio programmes, documentary films and advertising in newspapers. All of these were campaigns

¹¹ John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire, the Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 108. This quotation was within a free guide that accompanied the official programme.

¹² Ryu, “The Queen’s Dolls’ House”, 464.

¹³ Scott Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 17.

used by the organisers of the British Empire Exhibition in 1924, two years before the EMB was formed. Tallents stressed that “Public relations needed to be understood as a series of overlapping co-operative processes rather than just the propagation of a message.”¹⁴ This work demonstrates how the organisers of the exhibition used overlapping cooperative processes in the form of new and old media, and whilst it confirms some of Anthony’s views, it does challenge his view that public relations in Britain began with Tallents, and instead suggests that the publicity campaign used by the organisers of the exhibition can be seen as a forerunner of the aims of the EMB. This further supports Ryu’s argument.

In the years between 1851 and 1924 printing methods had improved, mass circulation of newspapers arrived, newsreels and cinemas were born as well as recorded sound, and in 1922 the British Broadcasting Company (hereafter ‘the BBC’) came into being. The opening ceremony of the British Empire Exhibition was broadcast live to the British Empire, giving people the first opportunity to hear the voice of the King and the Prince of Wales. Furthermore, the British Empire Exhibition also included the first theatre capable of showing talking films in Britain and newspapers such as *The Times*, the *Daily News* and the *Daily Telegraph* had their own stands, with the *Daily Telegraph* publishing mini versions of its newspaper. The Post Office issued commemorative stamps for the first time and fourteen official series of postcards were issued. Official guidebooks and handbooks were full of photographs and maps to guide the visitors around the vast exhibition space.¹⁵

Many of the original guidebooks and other primary source material were destroyed in a fire during the Second World War and this is a possible explanation of why the British Empire Exhibition has received much less scholarly attention than other exhibitions of a comparable size, or perhaps it was simply overshadowed by those other exhibitions. What is clear is that this exhibition has

¹⁴ Anthony, *Public Relations*, 30.

¹⁵ Leslie Wood, *The Miracle of the Movies* (London: Burke Publishing Company, 1947), 299.

several historically important aspects, not least of which was the overarching intention of bringing together the nations of the empire.

This research is concerned with the role played by forms of mass media and material and consumer culture during the preparations, the opening ceremony and throughout the exhibition, and this is an aspect about which little has been written. Despite the opening ceremony being the BBC's largest live broadcast at the time, the event is barely mentioned in the diary of its managing director, Sir John Reith.¹⁶ The exhibition receives very little if any mention in a variety of scholarly works on the history of radio. For example, Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, in their history of inter-war broadcasting, point to the significance of the opening ceremony broadcast, saying it was the "most successful single broadcast to date". However, the role of the BBC at the exhibition is not explored any further.¹⁷

The majority of published work that exists about the exhibition focuses on aspects of race and racism at the exhibition. Daniel Stephen's work concentrates on the representation of the West African and Indian nations of the British Empire. Stephen explores how the people of these nations were treated both at the exhibition and away from the exhibition during their stay in Britain, including experiences of racism. Stephen's view is that the general public's interest in the empire was as a consumer or leisure activity rather than an educational or imperialist experience, and that the new forms of mass media that were emerging in the 1920s increased the propaganda content of the British Empire Exhibition. Stephen concludes:

Wembley succeeded in attracting public audiences, not because visitors wanted to study Victorian empire lessons, but because the growth of mass

¹⁶ Charles Stuart (Editor), *The Reith Diaries* (London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1975), 133 includes one short entry which is discussed in chapter 2.

¹⁷ Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting Volume One 1922-1939* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1991), p281; Seán Street, *A Concise History of British Radio 1922 – 2002* (Tiverton: Kelly Publications, 2005) makes no mention of the broadcast at the British Empire Exhibition; nor is it mentioned in Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997); nor Martin Conboy and John Steel (Editors), *The Routledge Companion to British Media History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

media and an expanding culture of leisure time encouraged fairgoers to become consumers of spectacles of empire and imperial tourists.¹⁸

His view is expanded upon in this research by further exploration of the role played by those forms of mass media in relation to the exhibition.¹⁹

John M. Mackenzie posits that exhibitions provide a valuable source of study “because with them we have the rare opportunity to gauge public reaction... The many publications that were left behind gave an insight into the imperial ideas and racial attitudes that were prevalent at the time”.²⁰ He writes that the British people were far from indifferent to imperialism as has been suggested by other historians such as Bernard Porter.²¹ Instead, he argues that the British Empire was represented in the daily lives of the people of Britain between 1880 and 1960. His work “seeks to explore the centripetal effects of empire in creating for the British a world view which was central to their perceptions of themselves.”²² He goes on to describe a dominant ideology of patriotism, militarism and imperialism which he claims can be found in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By analysing the British Empire Exhibition, this research confirms this finding and will further build on MacKenzie’s ideas and argue that the exhibition was also a tool in promoting an ideology of patriotism, militarism and imperialism. The various methods of mass communication in use at that time were utilised by the organisers of the British Empire Exhibition to help to present that ideology, by presenting an exhibition which celebrated imperialism. The displays by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy were a link to the ideological militarism, and the many links to the monarchy represented the sense of patriotism of the time.

¹⁸ Stephen, *The Empire of Progress*, 140.

¹⁹ It is not the intention of this thesis to examine the planning of the exhibition in detail other than in relation to media. However, more information on this can be found in Daniel Stephen, *The Empire of Progress, West Africans, Indians and Britons at the British Empire Exhibition 1924-1925*.

²⁰ MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 118.

²¹ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²² MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 2.

In his later work, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, MacKenzie reports that by 1951 more than half of those interviewed by the Colonial Office surveys could not name a single British colony, suggesting they were ignorant of, or indifferent to, the British Empire.²³ However, Mackenzie argues that at the time of the British Empire Exhibition, just after the First World War, the British Empire was still being represented to the people as a world power through popular culture, and that, despite the fact that “economic indicators pointed the other way”, the British Empire could in fact be seen as a “saviour from decline” that was being portrayed as such to the public through a public relations campaign of propaganda, advertising and censorship. He further argues that this campaign was assisted by the new media that was becoming popular at the time.²⁴ This work confirms MacKenzie’s view and argues that the exhibition in 1924 was presented through the popular culture of the time – that being visual culture, cinema and radio - as a celebration of empire.

Siân Nicholas has described mass media culture in the inter-war period as being interrelated and multi layered, and this will be highlighted throughout this work. In his study of monarchy and mass media, *The Family Firm*, Edward Owens makes the point that inter-war Britain produced a mass media culture, and that the monarchy recognised that this was a tool to strengthen their relationship with the people of Britain.²⁵ This connection between media, the monarchy and the exhibition is also something that will be evident in this research. In 2008, Alexander C.T. Geppert, the author of the chapter “Wembley 1924 – 1925” in the *Encyclopaedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions*, wrote “to date there has been no large-scale historiographical analysis” of the British Empire Exhibition and that the exhibition had received “little scholarly attention”.²⁶ Whilst the exhibition has featured in some works of cultural history since 2008, namely art and sports, the significance of the various forms of mass media and material and consumer

²³ John MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 8.

²⁴ MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Culture*, 8.

²⁵ Edward Owens, *The Family Firm. Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public, 1932-1953* (London: University of London Press, 2019), 34 and Siân Nicholas, “Media History or Media Histories? Re-addressing the History of the Mass Media in Inter-War Britain”, *Media History*, xviii, 2012, 379-394, 390.

²⁶ Geppert, “Wembley 1924-1924”, *Encyclopaedia of World’s Fairs and Exposition* Edited by John E. Findling and Kimberley D. Pelle, 236.

culture to the exhibition has not been studied in detail.²⁷ By also exploring material culture this thesis is building on arguments and ideas of Ryu whose study of the Queen's dolls' house shows how material culture embodied the British imperial world.²⁸

From Fairs to Exhibitions

Since the Middle Ages, trade fairs and regional markets provided entertainment alongside exhibits. Figure 1 illustrates a fair on the River Thames dated 1683, showing circles of people watching performances by dancers and actors. By the eighteenth century, exhibitors were able to expose consumers to their wares at trade fairs and exhibitions, allowing the consumers to view a wider choice of products than was generally available to them. All this whilst being entertained by watching plays, processions and jugglers. Although industrial exhibitions were popular in the 1820s, their popularity had waned by the early 1830s.²⁹

²⁷ Examples of these works can be found in Jonathan Woodham, "Images of Africa and Design at the British Empire Exhibitions between the Wars", *Journal of Design History* 2, no 1 (1989): 15-33; Eileen Harris, "Bolton's Adam Room at Wembley", *Furniture History* 29 (1993); 201-4.

²⁸ Ryu, "The Queen's Dolls' House".

²⁹ Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851, A Nation on Display* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 2.

²⁹ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 12.

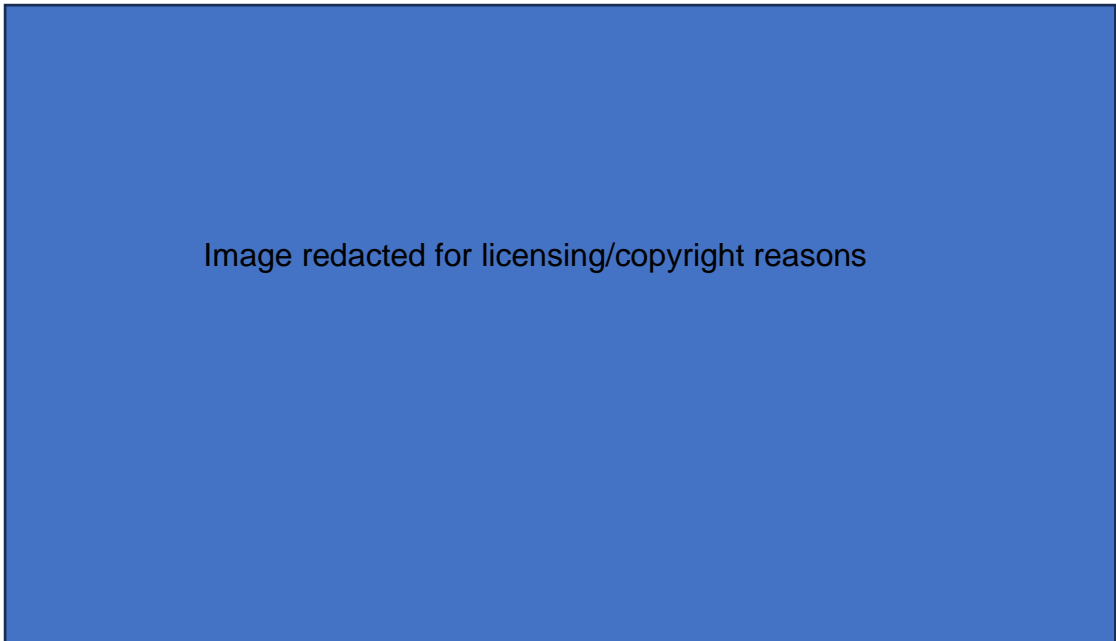


Figure 1 - Fair on the Thames 1683. Reproduced in Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, p13.

The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations 1851 ('the Great Exhibition'), was the first international exhibition of its kind. It has been the subject of many academic works and has been represented as a symbol of the Victorian era and the industrial revolution.³⁰ In his work, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display*, Jeffrey Auerbach writes:

The Great Exhibition was arguably the greatest defining occasion for nineteenth century Britons between the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 and Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897.³¹

With its variety of narratives, the Great Exhibition was able to demonstrate some of the many social, economic, political and cultural changes that were taking place within Victorian society around the middle of the nineteenth century.

³⁰ For further reading around the Great Exhibition of 1851 see Jeffrey Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (London: Yale University Press, 1999); C.R Fay, *Palace of Industry, 1851: A Study of the Great Exhibition and Its Fruits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951); Christopher Hobhouse, *1851 and the Crystal Palace* (London: John Murray, 1950); D. Lardner, *The Great Exhibition and London in 1851* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1852); Michael Leapman, *The World for a Shilling* (London: Review, 2002).

³¹ Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, 4.

Auerbach continues that there was much to be learned by people of all classes about “themselves, their country and their place in the world”.³² While the Victorian British population were unsure of their own place in society, they had no doubts about “what differentiated them not only from their closest neighbor [sic], but from the exotic, foreign other”.³³

For Auerbach, “historians have made the Great Exhibition the pre-eminent symbol of the Victorian age”. He describes his book as analysing the promoters of the event, giving credence to the opposers and investigating “the contemporary views of and subsequent meanings ascribed to the Great Exhibition.” He writes of the exhibition being an ‘idea’ that required a sophisticated publicity campaign.³⁴ This work will specifically consider the role of mass media and material culture in a similar publicity campaign for the British Empire Exhibition.

The Great Exhibition is considered the first World’s Fair, and in the period between 1851 and 1924, firstly British exhibitions developed a much more colonial approach. At the Great Exhibition out of 14,000 exhibits only 520 exhibits were colonial. By the London Exhibition of 1862, 7000 of the exhibits were from India. There were also exhibits from another thirty colonies, but their total floor space was only one quarter of the space designated for India. By 1886 exhibitions were “almost entirely concerned with empire” and “were charting the growth of, and contributing to the development of national perceptions about, the Empire”.³⁵ In 1886 the Colonial and Indian Exhibition attracted 5.5 million visitors: planned by a Royal Commission, and supported by government funding, this was the first official imperial exhibition.³⁶ Its objective was to:

³² Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, 4/5.

³³ Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, 3.

³⁴ Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, 2.

³⁵ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 99.

³⁶ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 102.

give to the inhabitants of the British Isles, to foreigners and to one another, practical demonstration of the wealth and industrial development of the outlying portions of the British Empire.³⁷

Secondly, British exhibitions began to include more attractions and entertainment for visitors, something which was already happening in America and Europe. A large Ferris wheel had been a feature of the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893 and was incorporated into the Paris World Fair of 1900.³⁸ The British Empire Exhibition boasted a funfair with a huge roller coaster and flying swings, as well as many other attractions. In 1911 the Festival of Empire at Crystal Palace was held as part of the coronation celebration of George V. Representatives from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Great Britain took part in an organised sporting event, which was recorded as the first Commonwealth Games.³⁹ Emigration was strongly supported in the advertising material, and it is likely that the increase in emigration just before the war was a result of this campaign.⁴⁰ This theme was repeated in the printed material for the British Empire Exhibition with the intention of encouraging inter-Empire emigration.

Research Sources and Methodology

This research aims to further develop our understanding of the British Empire Exhibition by focusing on how new and emerging forms of mass media were significant in promoting the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 and how souvenirs of the exhibition represented the material and consumer culture of the post-war period. This research draws on primary source material held at the British Library including some of the guidebooks and handbooks. These sources were analysed along with advertisements accessed via the British Newspaper Archive online, guidebooks and handbooks, radio broadcasts, Pathé newsreels, and souvenirs

³⁷ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 101.

³⁸ Asa Briggs, *A Social History of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 114.

³⁹ Commonwealth Games Australia,

https://web.archive.org/web/20140212142054/http://commonwealthgames.org.au/Templates/Games_Overview.htm, accessed 30 April 1922.

⁴⁰ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 107.

that were produced for the event. Regional and provincial newspapers have been viewed wherever possible to demonstrate that the excitement surrounding the British Empire Exhibition was not merely limited to London and the suburbs.

Sarah Moore describes exhibitions from around the turn of the twentieth century as good case studies of the “cultural production of meaning and identity” and quotes US President William McKinley, who at the 1901 World’s Fair asserted that exhibitions are showcases of the host nation - “the timekeepers of progress. They record the world’s advancement”.⁴¹ With this in mind, this research will consider what kind of progress was being mediated at the British Empire Exhibition.

The questions that this thesis sets out to address are:

- How did the organisers of the British Empire Exhibition use mass media and material culture to provide a multimedia experience to visitors as well as to promote the exhibition?
- How did the organisers use media to steer visitors to specific exhibits and amenities and how did the exhibition target specific audience groups and visitors?
- By using media and material culture what sort of representation of Britain, monarchy and empire was being portrayed?
- How did the souvenirs and memorabilia which were available target a wider, inter-class range of consumer?⁴²

⁴¹President McKinley at the 1901 World’s Fair, Sarah J. Moore, "Mapping Empire in Omaha and Buffalo: World’s Trade Fairs and the Spanish-American War," *Bilingual Review / La Revista Bilingüe* 25, no. 1 (2000): 111-26, 122.

⁴² *Wembley Guide*, British Library, Ref YD.2017.a.1616, 36.

Thesis Organisation

The thesis is organised into three chapters. Chapter one considers the printed material produced for the exhibition, including guidebooks, handbooks, advertising campaigns and posters, maps and photographs. Since the introduction of compulsory education in the 1870s, Britain had a generation of educated adults for the first time by 1924. The printed material was therefore accessible to more people than ever before, and the analysis of these documents will consider the ways in which the organisers catered for this larger audience as well as what information was provided in them.

Chapter two will turn to the media of radio and film. The BBC broadcast the opening ceremony on 23 April 1924, just seventeen months after its first broadcast. As this chapter will show, broadcasts from the exhibition were an opportunity to demonstrate radio's potential as a source of mass communication both nationally and globally. British Pathé showed their first newsreel in a theatre in 1910. The original reel has not survived but it included a suffragette demonstration in London and the first passenger flight across the channel.⁴³ By 1924, cinemagoing was no longer a pastime just for the upper classes, it was available to and enjoyed by every class, and British Pathé continued to bring the news to life with *Pathé Journal*. Although the scope of this thesis does not warrant a chapter dedicated to cinema, the newsreels relating to the British Empire Exhibition will be referred to within this chapter, as they had a dual purpose. Chapter two will demonstrate that, as well as advertising the exhibition to the public and potential visitors and offering further ways to promote and publicise the exhibition, the films also provide a clearer picture of the exhibition, some of the exhibits and the visits from royalty. In addition, they act as a historical source for later generations.

⁴³ The Story of British Pathé, The Birth of News, 02:10 14/03/2016, BBC4, 60 mins, <https://php/prog/01E597C2?bcast=121243442>, accessed 1 May 2022.

The third chapter analyses both material and consumer culture and the vast number of souvenirs and other memorabilia which was produced for the exhibition, including the first commemorative stamps issued by the Post Office. The Wembley lion logo was designed for the exhibition and appeared on all the official merchandise. Chapter three will explore some of the ways in which manufacturers used the exhibition to sell their products and how the dolls' house presented to Queen Mary at the exhibition represented some of the highest quality home furnishings available at the time. It is intended that examination of this memorabilia and merchandise will create a picture of how the consumer culture and material culture of the era was utilised and applied through the exhibition.

Chapter 1

Print Media and Advertising

Owing to changes in educational provision in the nineteenth century, the majority of people in 1924 would have been able to read printed material and it was this widespread literacy combined with new styles of communication which was instrumental in the success of the British Empire Exhibition. As this chapter will argue, printed material for the British Empire Exhibition catered for a much larger and diverse audience than ever before and contributed to several elements of the exhibition. This chapter will explore the ways in which printed material was utilised to advertise the exhibition both in the months leading up to it and during the time the exhibition was open by using newspaper articles and advertisements as well as a poster campaign. Attention will then turn to guidebooks and maps that were available to visitors which, whilst providing a practical purpose, were also souvenirs of the exhibition. Inspection of a selection of the guidebooks will give an indication of some of the highlights of the exhibition as considered by the organisers. The photographs used in the guidebooks will be examined to gauge the organisers' choice of pictures. As will be shown, by analysing the highlights and the photographs, the exhibition organisers appear to have favoured a certain representation of empire, with focus clearly on the dominions. Through these lenses this chapter will demonstrate how the organisers of the British Empire Exhibition utilised various forms of print media and journalism to their advantage in their publicity campaign and in longer lasting souvenirs and memorabilia.

Newspapers and Periodicals

On 29th November 1814 the *Times* was the first newspaper in Britain to be produced using steam-powered machinery capable of printing fifteen hundred copies per hour instead of the previous run of two hundred and fifty per hour and by 1927 the figure had increased to four thousand per hour.⁴⁴ These figures

⁴⁴ Williams, *Get Me a Murder a Day*, 33.

demonstrate that “with steam printing, information had become an industrial product.”⁴⁵ Newspapers and pamphlets have been widely used as a way of reaching the masses since the invention of the printing press. At the time of the Great Exhibition newspapers were somewhat restricted as they were still liable for advertising duty, stamp duty and a duty on paper and it would be another decade before these had all been abolished. Despite the restrictive legislation, *The Times* newspaper reached a readership of approximately 40,000 and the newly formed *News of the World* on a Sunday was reaching 100,000 by 1855.⁴⁶ With the turn of the new century came mass circulation of newspapers and in 1924 the leading newspapers each had a readership of over one million, with the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *Daily Herald* accounting for nearly fifty per cent of the total newspaper circulation.⁴⁷ Advertising was the main source of revenue for newspapers and the columns of classified ads began to give way to display advertising.⁴⁸

Mass circulation newspapers had become popular at the end of the nineteenth century and their style, language and format was designed to appeal to the lower-middle classes and make newspapers more accessible to the masses. Martin Conboy describes the writing style of the *Daily Mail* as “light and lively”.⁴⁹ The use of larger print for headlines caught the readers’ attention and allowed the article to be assessed at a glance. The *Daily Mail* specifically targeted women readers which was previously unheard of for newspapers.⁵⁰ Adrian Bingham argues that in the inter-war period it was vital that newspapers and popular magazines included articles that would appeal to women readers, and this is discussed further in chapter 3.⁵¹ Women were addressed as both homemakers and consumers in a number of women’s magazines, including *Good Housekeeping* from 1922.⁵² “Annual sales of newspapers rose from 85 million in 1851 to

⁴⁵ Tom Standage, *Writing on the Wall* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2013), 171.

⁴⁶ British Newspapers 1800-1860, Gale Primary Sources, <https://www.gale.com/intl/essays/ed-king-british-newspapers-1800-1860>.

⁴⁷ Williams, *Get Me a Murder a Day*, 61.

⁴⁸ Williams, *Get Me a Murder a Day*, 59.

⁴⁹ Martin Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2002), 102.

⁵⁰ Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture*, 101.

⁵¹ Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 105

⁵² Peter Gurney, *The Making of Consumer Culture in Modern Britain* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 2017), 144, accessed 11 September, 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central.

5,604 million in 1920".⁵³ In order for the mass newspaper market to reach as wide as possible, it was vital that it appealed to women, and the way to do this was to ensure that it included articles and stories that engaged with women's interests, such as marriage, housewifery and motherhood.⁵⁴

The expansion and growth of the press also benefitted from a growth in literacy. In 1870, the Education Act made schooling more accessible to children aged between five and twelve. This Act followed the expansion of suffrage with the Reform Act of 1867 which meant that more men than ever had the right to vote. By providing government-funded education to all children, it was hoped that the next generation would be better placed to use their vote responsibly, as they "held in their hands the destiny not only of Britain but also the vast empire that was being accumulated across the globe".⁵⁵ The 1870 Act provided for the establishment of board schools and created a number of school boards to oversee this provision. However, it was the Education Act 1880 that made education compulsory. This meant that by 1924 Britain had a generation of educated adults which, in turn, made printed material more in demand than ever before. For the organisers of events such as an exhibition this opened up a new channel for disseminating information and advertising to the masses. In addition to the expansion of educational provision, the growth of the popular press also contributed to this dynamic.

Between 1918 and 1926 the sale of national daily newspapers such as *The Daily Mail* and *The Express*, rose by fifty per cent, from 3.1 million to 4.7 million and mass circulation had been firmly established.⁵⁶ The British Empire Exhibition was the topic of thousands of articles in newspapers and periodicals throughout the planning period and during the time it was open to the public. The Chairman of

⁵³ Lyn Gorman & David McLean, *Media and Society in the Twentieth Century, A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 9.

⁵⁴ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, 86.

⁵⁵ Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC Books, 2006), 141.

⁵⁶ Gorman & McLean, *Media and Society in the Twentieth Century*, 21.

the Board of the Exhibition, Lord Stevenson, reported that £120,000 was spent on advertising and that over 200,000 press cuttings were collected in 1924 alone.⁵⁷ *The Times* printed more than 2,000 articles about the British Empire Exhibition between 1923 and 1925.⁵⁸ The diverse nature of the displays and exhibits attracted attention from many different sectors including science, art, architecture, engineering and horticulture and in turn, these articles acted as further advertising of the exhibition.⁵⁹ In September 1923 the *Orkney Herald* reported that the British Empire Exhibition would “bring home to the people of Great Britain the wonderful resources and extent of the mighty British Empire.” It told readers that they would be able to “see the world in little” and suggested people go and see for themselves what other countries of the empire had to offer, with a view to encouraging emigration within the empire. Not only was the exhibition being more widely advertised, but the potential of inter-empire trade was emphasised as well.⁶⁰

The organisers advertised in newspapers for people to become members of the British Empire Exhibition Fellowship, whereby for a reasonable fee members received a certificate signed by the Prince of Wales, who was President of the Fellowship, a pin badge which was made of a variety of metals depending on the subscription fee paid, and a free pass to the exhibition. On the certificate, the Prince of Wales asserted that “In view of the importance to British trade and industry of the success of the British Empire Exhibition, I trust that the Fellowship will receive the hearty support of the community.”⁶¹ The Fellowship of the British Empire Exhibition was an opportunity to raise funds and awareness. Advertisements encouraging membership were widespread in the months leading up to the opening ceremony, with each advertisement being a further opportunity to promote the exhibition. The pin badge presented itself as a

⁵⁷ Lord Stevenson, “The British Empire Exhibition”, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol 73, no 3783, 22 May 1925, 609.

⁵⁸ Daniel Stephen, “The White Man’s Grave: British West Africa and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924-1925,” *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 1 (2009): 102-28, Accessed 27 March 2021.

⁵⁹ J. Murray Easton, “Wembley: An Architectural Comment”, *Architecture, a Magazine of Architecture and the Applied Arts and Crafts*, Vol 2, Issue 20 (June 1924), p392-403.

⁶⁰ “Seeing the World at Wembley”, *Orkney Herald*, 26 September 1923, 7.

⁶¹ “British Empire Exhibition Fellowship”, *The Scotsman*, 7 March 1924, 4.

souvenir of the exhibition while the material from which it was made reflected, to some extent, the economic status of the wearer.⁶²

Days after the exhibition opened *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* included an article titled 'The Meaning of Wembley' which described the exhibition as "an act of faith and a gesture of hope and courage to the world". It attributed the excitement surrounding the exhibition to the exhibitors, whose contributions represented a cumulation of over a century of industrial enterprise. The author of the article (who is not named) believed the exhibition would be a harbinger of world peace and "co-operation between the nations of the world".⁶³ Weekly and periodical magazines were also a means by which to reach people from different classes and with different interests as well as people who did not read newspapers or academic journals. So many interests and occupations were represented at the exhibition that specialist magazines were able to inform their readers of and promote exhibits that would have been of interest to them.⁶⁴ For example, *The Engineer* covered the British Empire Exhibition in great detail with a series of twenty-eight articles between April and October 1924. The topics covered included broadcasting arrangements, woodworking machinery, locomotive development, electrical apparatus, photocopying machines, and details of individual exhibits, to name a few. Businesses which had any association with the exhibition made sure to mention their connection in their own advertising and this is discussed later in chapter three.

Specialist publications were not the only ones focusing on the exhibition. It was also featured in publications aimed at schools and educational establishments.

⁶² A gunmetal badge was free, a silver-gilt badge cost an extra 5 shillings, and a gold badge cost an additional 25 shillings. "British Empire Exhibition", *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 23 February 1924, 12.

⁶³ "The Meaning of Wembley", *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, Vol 137, Issue 3574, 26 April 1924, 428.

An educational campaign was also launched through *The Weekly Bulletin of Empire Study*, a magazine produced for schools and educational establishments to teach its readers about the British Empire in weekly segments. As well as educating the school-age generation of 1924, this campaign doubled up as a publicity campaign for the exhibition, encouraging families to visit. The Inter-Departmental Educational Sub-Committee of the Government Participation in the British Empire Exhibition published *The Weekly Bulletin of Empire Study* through twenty four issues throughout the time of the exhibition. This weekly publication was available to Local Education Authorities, schools and educational associations at a price of £10 for one hundred copies each week and was arranged with the intention of educating school children to improve their knowledge and understanding of the geography and history of other countries in the empire (something which had previously not been taught), as well as encouraging future emigration. The January 1924 issue indicated that:

In these days when we see the beginning of a movement for the migration of British boys who want to go overseas early in search of that full opportunity which is denied them in the over-crowded Mother-country, the proper teaching of the history and geography and general conditions of the British Dominions overseas is one more instance of the effort to provide better chances for the coming generation than were enjoyed in youth by many of their parents.⁶⁵

The programme encouraged children, particularly boys, to leave their 'mother' country when they reached adulthood. This education programme was comprehensive and consisted of lesson plans, complete notes for the delivery of each lesson, proposed activities and suggested relevant poetry. As the programme progressed the school children would learn about the countries of the British Empire as well as the "idea of a commonwealth of free peoples". By the end of the programme the students would have a much better understanding of the empire to enable them to "play their proper part as loyal members of the British Commonwealth of Nations".⁶⁶ This programme of potentially educating a

⁶⁵ *The Weekly Bulletin of Empire Study*, No 1, 31 January 1924, The British Library, Ref P.P.3610.fab, 1.

⁶⁶ *The Weekly Bulletin of Empire Study*, No 1, 31 January 1924, 2.

whole generation of young people about the British Empire is an example of the ways in which the government of 1924 used the Wembley exhibition to further disseminate information about the empire. With this newly learned information schoolchildren could then visit the exhibition with a better understanding than they would have had otherwise. If they later chose to emigrate within the British Empire, they would also have been able to make a more informed choice. In this way the exhibition can be viewed as an educational tool. This educational series which was produced specifically in relation to the British Empire Exhibition deserves further exploration, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis. The exhibition was not only promoted via newspapers and other publications, but the organisers also used a poster campaign to further advertise the exhibition.

Posters, Guidebooks and Handbooks

Posters, a guidebook, and handbooks were the ideal way to advertise the exhibition, and it was through these methods that the organisers were able to steer potential visitors towards specific elements of the exhibits and entertainment. Several publications were available to visitors and those will be explored in this section, starting with the *Wembley Guide* before moving on to the guidebooks of individual countries. But first, attention is turned towards the use of posters.

In an article published in *Twentieth Century British History* in 2018, James Thompson explored the visual culture of politics surrounding the 1907 London County Council Election. The 1907 Conservative London Municipal Society campaign alone included no less than 369,000 posters, many of which were “directed at a gender-mixed audience”, with the aim of appealing to the approximately 100,000 female members of the electorate.⁶⁷ Thompson writes that despite the increased use of posters and other visual culture in 1907 being “identified as new and American”, it was instead the case that both older and

⁶⁷ James Thompson, “The Lights of the Electric Octopus Have Been Switched Off: Visual and Political Culture in Edwardian London”. *Twentieth Century British History* 29, no. 3 (2018): 331–356.

newer methods of mass communication could co-exist and combine to give deeper meaning to the cause they are advertising or portraying.⁶⁸ He describes the ‘visual culture of London politics’ as being made up of a range of media, including lectures, cinematographs, posters, cartoons in newspapers and journals, and lantern lectures, and writes that prior to World War One, the new media that was becoming popular did not replace the older methods, but rather they enriched them.⁶⁹ This work confirms Thompson’s ideas that several methods of mass communication could co-exist, but also expands on his article by demonstrating how visual media was combined at the British Empire Exhibition to present a multimedia advertising campaign, and then continued to be used within the exhibition itself both to promote the exhibits and events, and also becoming a part of some of the exhibits and events. The use of this new visual culture to present and advertise the exhibition was a way in which the organisers could communicate political ideas to the visitors, and in doing so the link between the exhibition and modernity was further strengthened.

The organisers launched a huge poster campaign to advertise the exhibition, with more than 500,000 official posters displayed in workplaces, public transport, and public buildings.⁷⁰ Posters that survived the fire at the British Library are A2 sized and demonstrate the range of aspects that were advertised. As well as general posters to encourage visitors, individual businesses were also able to advertise on similar posters which bore the details of the exhibition as well as their own wares. These posters included the emblems of some of the colonies and dominions of the empire. The exhibition ran from April to November 1924 and again from May to October 1925. Some of the posters created for the re-opening in 1925 were of a very different artistic style from the 1924 opening, as can be seen below at figure 2. The two different styles communicate different things – the earlier poster representing empire and colonies, while the later poster represents the exhibition as a source of entertainment, with bolder colours, bright

⁶⁸ Thompson, “The Lights of the Electric Octopus Have Been Switched Off: Visual and Political Culture in Edwardian London”.

⁶⁹ Thompson, “The Lights of the Electric Octopus Have Been Switched Off: Visual and Political Culture in Edwardian London”.

⁷⁰ Stephen, *The Empire of Progress*, 18.

lights, and large crowds. These changes also demonstrate the ways in which perception of the exhibition moved from an educational event, to more of an attraction, with the fairground being at the centre of the 1925 poster.



Figure 2 promotional posters. [British Empire Exhibition, Wembley, London, April-October 1924. Entrance gate, India pavilion | Exhibition, Art deco travel posters, Empire \(pinterest.co.uk\)](#) and [british empire exhibition 1924 - 1925 - Google Search | Wembley, Vintage travel posters, Poster art \(pinterest.co.uk\)](#)

The organisers of the British Empire Exhibition were able to select what was considered to be the highlights of the exhibition for inclusion in the various guides and handbooks that were produced, and this is demonstrated in the *Wembley Guide*, which purports to have “been completed after a careful and detailed study of the British Empire Exhibition”.⁷¹ The cover of the guide sets out what is inside at a glance. The language is clear and simple – “what to see, how to find it, how to get there”, and it tells the reader that there are photographs and maps (see

⁷¹ *Wembley Guide*, 6.

figure 3). Priced at one shilling it contains eighty pages of information, with nineteen photographs. The first photograph is of Edward, Prince of Wales, who was President of the British Empire Exhibition, followed by four photographs of the pavilions of Australia, Canada, India and South Africa. These demonstrate the different building styles for each of the countries represented. Furthermore, the enormous Palace of Industry, Palace of Engineering and British Government Pavilion are shown in the next photographs, along with the lake on which naval battles were played out throughout the course of the exhibition. Other countries whose pavilions appear in photographs include British Guyana, Burma, West Africa, Bermuda and New Zealand. The guide suggests what are considered to be the highlights of the exhibition and includes a suggestion of how to see the best of the exhibition in one day, with a map to demonstrate the same (figure 4).



Figure 3 – Front cover of the *Wembley Guide*.
British Library. Ref YD.2017.a.1616.

The top ten highlights, according to the guide, are as follows –

1. The Palace of Engineering
2. India and Burma
3. London Bridge
4. British Government Building
5. Horticultural Section
6. South Africa Pavilion
7. Canada
8. Australia
9. Palace of Arts
10. Palace of Industry

The amusement park is recommended for the evening hours.



Figure 4 - Map of One Day Highlights shown in the *Wembley Guide*. Follows p32

It is immediately apparent that promotion of the exhibit spaces of individual countries is very limited in the highlights tour and only includes the India and Burma space, plus the Dominions of South Africa, Canada and Australia. The total number of countries of the empire who participated in the exhibition was fifty-six and yet the highlights give no mention of the others that were represented. This observation is confirmed by Daniel Stephen, who describes the exhibits of West Africa and British Guiana as displays of the people of these nations as “objects of ethnographic interest before public audiences”.⁷² Out of all the dominions and colonies only Ireland and Gibraltar did not take part. The *Wembley Guide* described the Palace of Engineering as the “largest concrete building in the world”, which housed exhibits from hundreds of different British firms. The Liverpool Docks was given special mention and the Pavilion of India was described in the guide as “a building of loveliness and grace”, in which a host of Indian art was housed. For a further fee of 1s 3d visitors could enter the Indian theatre and see snake charmers, jugglers and devil dancers.⁷³ Exhibits from Burma include cheroots made by “Burmese girls with curiously wound coiffures”, and the lighting system was able to mimic the natural light from midnight to

⁷² Stephen, *The Empire of Progress*, 1.

⁷³ *Wembley Guide*, 33.

midday to midnight again by an “ingenious system”.⁷⁴ Daniel Stephen describes such exhibits as “transforming dominance into exoticism”.⁷⁵

Little is said of London Bridge other than it was a route to the British Government Building, where a map of the world was set on water and model ships travelled to their destinations across the empire. The Royal Navy’s history was played out with models, and the ‘Defence of London’ air display was set in the skies above here. A walk through the horticultural gardens brought the visitor to the South African Pavilion, which boasted a diamond-washing plant and an ostrich paddock. Next on the highlights tour was the Canada Pavilion, which consisted of three buildings, two of which were dedicated to railways, the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian National Railways. Other Canadian exhibits that were mentioned were a working model of a goldmine, a three-ton silver nugget and a model of the Niagara Falls. The best of the Australian exhibits included indigenous creatures such as platypuses, kangaroos and kookaburra, as well as black opals and gold ornaments, a cinema, and wheat and dairy farms.

The Palace of Arts housed “the most fascinating single exhibit of the whole Exhibition – the Queen’s Dolls’ House”. There was an extra charge to view this exhibit which, according to the guide, nobody should miss.⁷⁶ Visitors were then guided to the Palace of Industry and advised to pay attention to the interior design of this building, before having dinner. After dinner they were encouraged to enjoy themselves at the amusement park, where one of the listed attractions was the tomb of Tut-ankh-Amen. Although Egypt had been recognised as an independent sovereign state since 1922 ‘Tut-mania’ was still raging in 1924 and Howard Carter’s discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb in November 1922 was represented at every opportunity, from jewellery and collectibles to a large-scale attraction at the exhibition.

⁷⁴ *Wembley Guide*, 34.

⁷⁵ Stephen, *The Empire of Progress*, 3.

⁷⁶ *Wembley Guide*, 36.

Amusement parks had become popular in America at the end of the nineteenth century, and in 1896, in Britain, Blackpool Pleasure Beach opened and quickly became synonymous with the rollercoaster. In striving to offer the biggest and the best of everything, the organisers of the British Empire Exhibition ensured that the rollercoaster was the highlight of the amusement park. By including a rollercoaster, the organisers tapped into popular forms of leisure as well as it being an attempt to target specific groups of visitors such as women and children. Josephine Kane writes that in 1912 the newer rides at amusement parks were more appealing to women than to men and that women contributed to a “significant portion” of visitors. She describes the amusement park as being “part of a wider process in which commercialised entertainments increasingly catered for the female consumer.”⁷⁷ Women’s needs were represented at every opportunity at the exhibition. A nursery was available where young children could be left while their parents enjoyed the exhibition. This encouraged mothers of babies and very young children to visit and enabled them to spend the whole day at the exhibition. Professional nurses were employed along with trained kindergarten teachers, and responsibility for the nursery fell to the Central Council for Infant and Child Welfare.⁷⁸

This is the extent of the highlights according to the official guide, and it is immediately clear that the organisers were steering visitors towards British sections and those exhibits of the larger dominions, with barely a glance at other countries which were represented at the exhibition. Stephen writes that the organisers “ensured that the autocratically governed territories of India and the colonial empire were the leading attractions...”⁷⁹ This is also confirmed by analysing what was highlighted in the main guidebook, *The Wembley Guide*. However, for those visitors who were able to spend more than one day at the

⁷⁷ Josephine Kane, “Mechanical Pleasures. The Appeal of the British Amusement Parks 1900-1914”, 31 – 56, Jason Wood, *The Amusement Park: History, Culture and the Heritage of Pleasure* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 48.

⁷⁸ *British Empire Exhibition 1924 – Handbook of General Information*, British Library, ref YD.2007.a.9700, 7.

⁷⁹ Stephen, *The Empire of Progress*, 3.

exhibition, or who wanted to choose their own route around the exhibition the guide did give details of each of the individual country's exhibits, picking out each exhibitor's highlights, as the organisers saw it. In addition, the *Wembley Guide* listed events and other spectacles taking place at the exhibition. For instance, the guide included a 'What's On' section that began:

What's On At Wembley – Spectacle of the Empire Exhibition

During 1924 the British Empire Exhibition is to be the hub of the world. In the first place, everyone will be there. Celebrities, royalty and distinguished visitors are seen frequently in the various palaces, and it has already become a meeting place for men and women from the four corners of the earth.⁸⁰

So begins Section VI – What's on at Wembley, followed by a list of events which would take place in the sports stadium leading up to 23 August when Liverpool played Everton in the Cup Final. Other events in the stadium after that date included a rodeo, an art exhibition and the Empire Pageant from 12 to 18 July. Section VII of the guide sets out the exhibits of other countries and other pavilions, and as an exhaustive list would have been far too long, the guide claimed that:

here it is possible to give some record of the arts, crafts and productions of the great family of the British Empire, to note individual triumphs and beauties, and to provide a concrete souvenir of what the world saw at Wembley.⁸¹

Before moving on to guidebooks of individual countries, the British Government Building requires a mention here. All sections of the Armed Forces were represented in its displays, models, plays and a water based mock battle. In this building there was an interactive display, the only one in the whole exhibition, where buttons could be pressed to move parts of the models and make them more lifelike.

⁸⁰ *Wembley Guide*, 39.

⁸¹ *Wembley Guide*, 43.

The final sections of the *Wembley Guide* provide information that was seen as pertinent to female visitors and to children. Within these sections women were guided towards galleries where they would find “endless varieties of embroideries and woven stuffs sufficient to stock a mind with ideas for design and furnishing for the whole of a normal life”.⁸² This demonstrates that the organisers recognised the importance of women as consumers and for those women who were mothers it was also important to cater for children and families. The exhibition was described as a “child’s paradise” and suggests that the Palace of Engineering will keep a child occupied all day.⁸³ The preceding fifty years had seen a shift in the definition of childhood.⁸⁴ Compulsory education meant that children were no longer full-time wage earners, and the dynamic of the family began to change. Educated children in 1924 had different needs to the uneducated children of 1851, and those needs were catered for at the British Empire Exhibition, as well as the guidebook dedicating two pages to information of interest to children.⁸⁵ The *Wembley Guide* was the largest guidebook published for the British Empire Exhibition but there were also guidebooks for each of the exhibitors and some of these are discussed next.

A handbook was printed for each of the exhibiting countries, providing an opportunity to highlight the geography, economy and interests of each of them. Unfortunately, many of the archived handbooks were destroyed in a fire during the Second World War, but those that are available at the British Library provide clear examples of the sort of information that was available to visitors. The exhibition handbook for Tanganyika, today Tanzania, survived the fire and shows that for the price of one shilling visitors were able to find out its history as well as information about the life of its inhabitants. The handbook was issued by the British Empire Exhibition Central Committee of Tanganyika, and it includes a map of the territory and a map showing the chief exporting districts. One of the intentions of the exhibition was to encourage emigration to other countries within

⁸² *Wembley Guide*, 76.

⁸³ *Wembley Guide*, 79.

⁸⁴ Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9.

⁸⁵ *Wembley Guide*, 79/80.

the empire and so the handbooks were also a way of selling the benefits of emigration to that country. With the educational programme provided through *The Weekly Bulletin of Empire*, and the information provided in the handbooks, emigration was being promoted to visitors of every age. Figure 5 shows the contents page of the handbook to demonstrate the information within it.

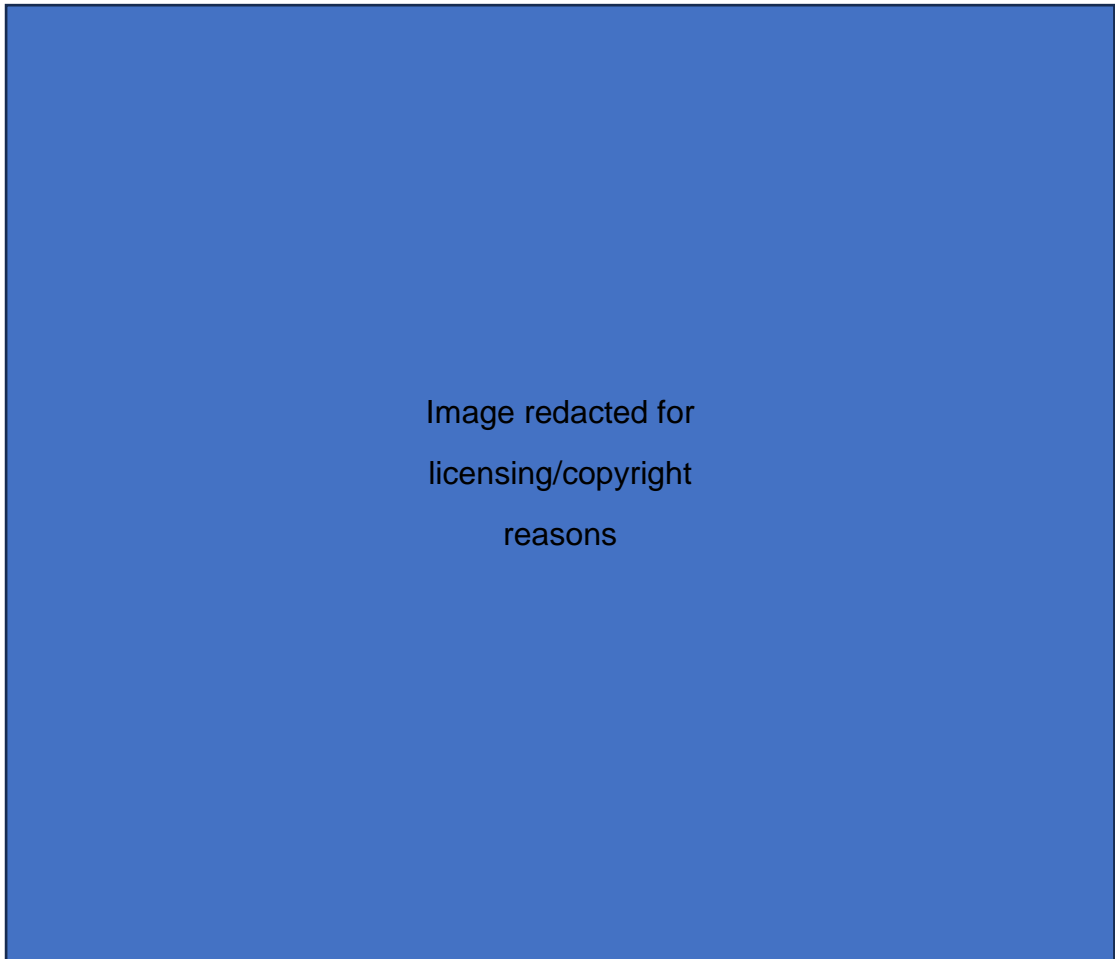


Figure 5 - Contents pages of the *Tanganyika Exhibition Handbook* located at the British Library, ref 7959.aa.29.

The difference between the presentation of guidebooks for the 1851 Great Exhibition and the 1924 British Empire Exhibition is striking. The information books which were created for the British Empire Exhibition were full of pictures and illustrations. By contrast, the handbooks and guidebooks which were printed for the Great Exhibition of 1851 were much more text heavy and the information provided pertained more to the interests of the middle and upper classes of Victorian society. Printed in 1851, *The Yorkshire Visitors Guide to the Great*

Exhibition, prepared by a reporter for the *Leeds Times*, was written after spending ten days at the Great Exhibition, and provided twenty-eight pages of text with just one page with a printed map.⁸⁶ Similarly, *The British Advertiser*, was a fifty-eight page booklet with just five pages of pictures to break up the text. First issued on 1 August 1851, just three months after the grand opening, it is full of factual information about the build up to the exhibition and those involved in it and is written in a very formal manner.⁸⁷ This demonstrates the changes in printing technology and what was possible in 1924, but it also suggests a move away from the more formal tone of 1851, by instead appealing to a wider and more diverse readership.

Maps

Another way in which the British Empire Exhibition utilised print media was in the provision of maps. As well as serving a practical purpose, maps and plans are collectible items and as such, they become part of the material culture of the era. In this chapter, however, it is the practical purpose that will be examined whilst the material aspect will be discussed in chapter three. Again, a comparison with the 1851 Great Exhibition is illustrative. The images below at figure 6 and figure 7 compare plans of the Great Exhibition and the British Empire Exhibition printed in the official catalogue and guidebook respectively. Immediately apparent is the difference in style between the two, as well as the information provided within each. Visually, the map for the British Empire Exhibition is far more appealing than that for the Great Exhibition. The Great Exhibition's floor plan was the only plan available to visitors, while many more were printed in relation to the British Empire Exhibition, including an additional seven in the *Wembley Guide* alone. The target audience and printing technology had changed dramatically in the intervening seventy years and the needs of visitors to the British Empire Exhibition are clearly demonstrated in the contents of the maps, from a map of road and train routes to the exhibition, to a map showing the many cafes and

⁸⁶ The Reporter for the *Leeds Times*, *The Yorkshire Visitors Guide to the Great Exhibition* (Leeds: Joseph Buckton, 1851).

⁸⁷ Jackson and Cooper, *The British Advertiser, an Illustrated Hand-Book of the Great Exhibition* (London: Jackson and Cooper, 1851).

restaurants available to visitors.⁸⁸ The map shown below clearly marks the amusement park, the lake, and the never stop railway, all of which emulated the leisure and entertainment culture of the era and suggest the exhibition would be a fun day out.



Figure 6 – Plan of the Great Exhibition reproduced in Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851 A Nation on Display*, p95.

⁸⁸ *Wembley Guide*, 10 and 64.




Image redacted for
licensing/copyright reasons

Figure 7 - Plan of the British Empire Exhibition from the *Wembley Guide*, p49.

Those guidebooks from other exhibitors at the British Empire Exhibition which are still accessible mostly contain a political map of the country. In the case of Tanganyika, there is also a map which indicated the chief exporting districts of the principal agricultural products, which included cotton, sisal, groundnuts, coffee, millet, sugar and beeswax, pointing back to one of the aims of the exhibition – to strengthen trade between the countries of the empire (see figures 8a and b).

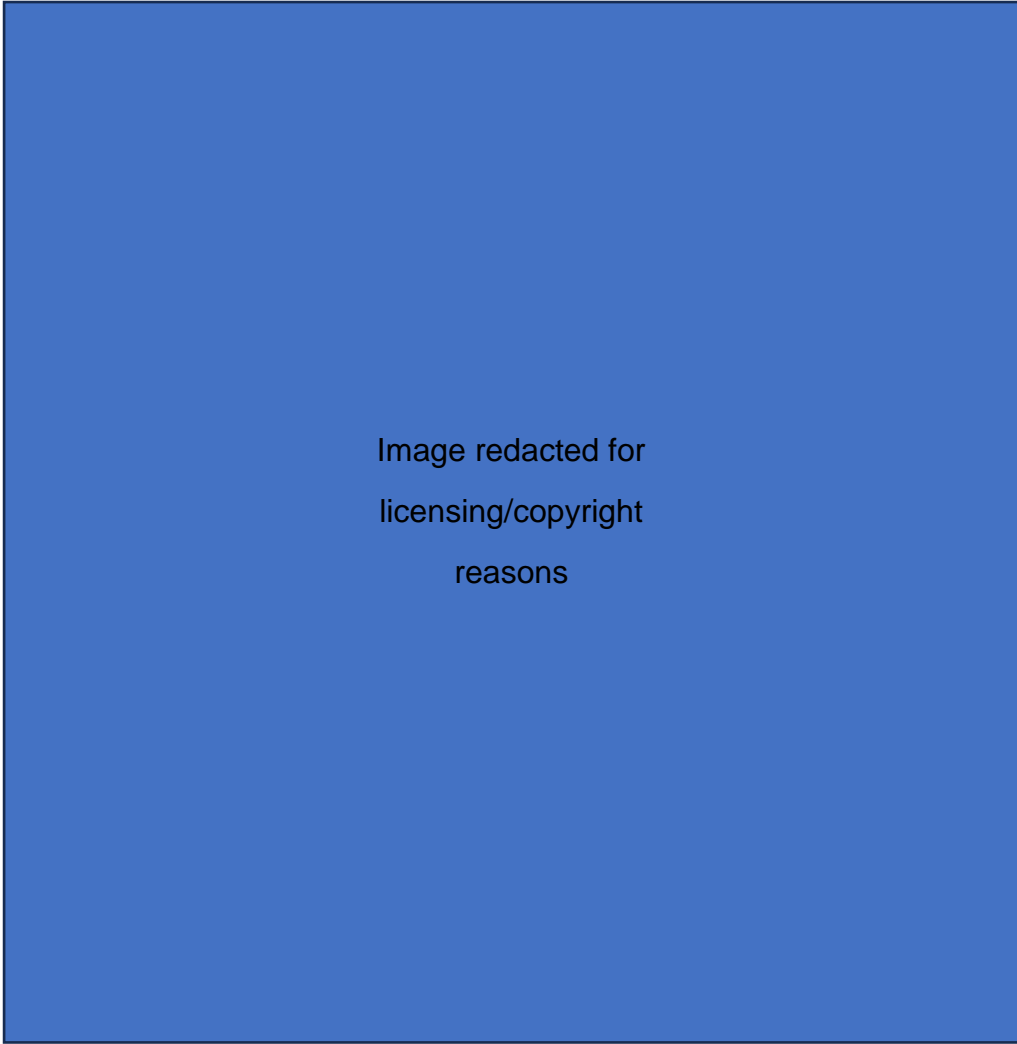


Image redacted for
licensing/copyright
reasons

Figure 8a - reproduced in the *Tanganyika Exhibition Handbook*, no page number. British Library. Ref 7959.aa.29.

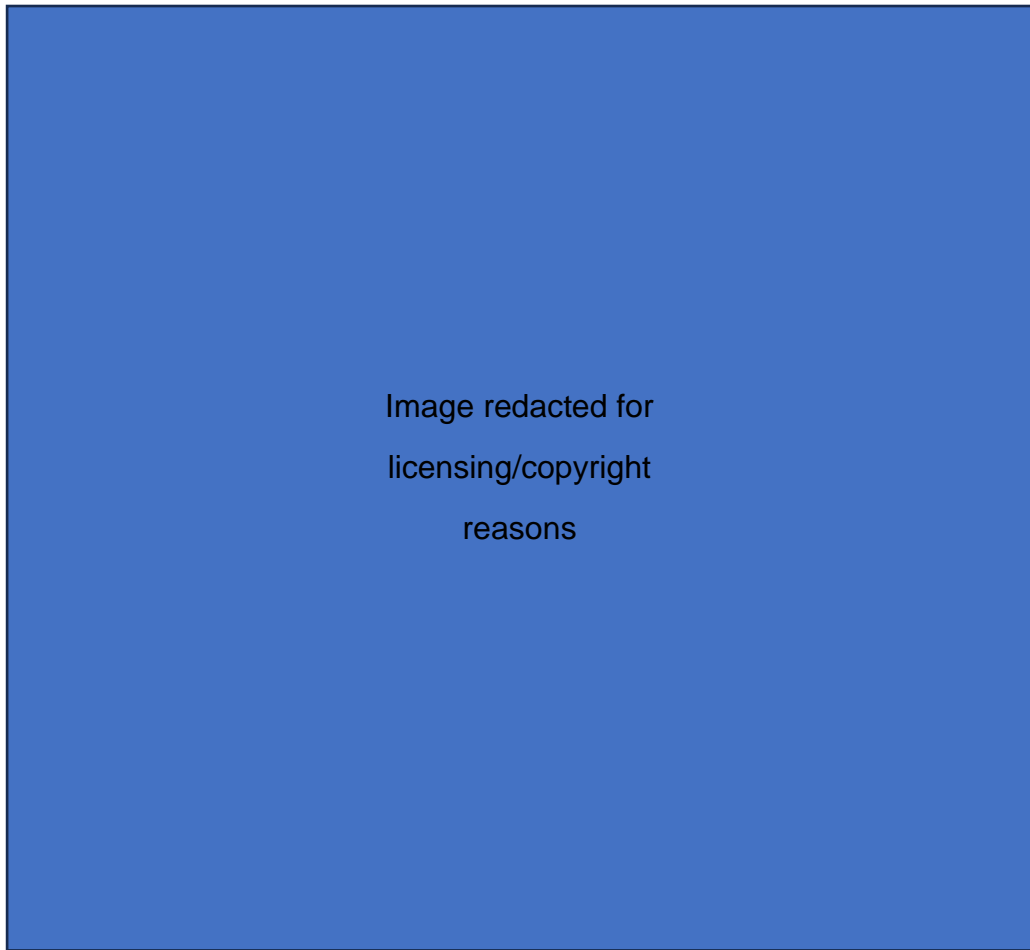


Figure 8b – reproduced in the *Tanganyika Exhibition Handbook*, no page number

The maps in the guidebooks of other countries provide a visual guide to parts of the empire which many visitors would otherwise not have access to and for those with an interest in the empire, or with any thoughts of emigrating, the maps were informative and collectable.


Photographs

By 1924 photography was an established form of communication in the advertising and publishing industries and it is therefore not surprising that it featured heavily in the printed material for the British Empire Exhibition. Photographs were widely used in the guidebooks, and they offered an immediate visual experience to visitors and potential visitors. In 1851 photography was in its infancy and the guidebooks which were printed for the Great Exhibition had very few illustrations and no photographs. By the time of the British Empire Exhibition in 1924 the process of both photography and printing had progressed

enormously and this, along with the larger and more diverse target audience, resulted in black and white photographs being included in the information guides, souvenir books and handbooks.

In the 81-page *Wembley Guide* there are ten pages of photographs, showing the facades of the enormous palaces of engineering and industry as well as the pavilions of some of the other exhibiting countries.⁸⁹ Some of these are shown in figure 9 below. The limitations of photographic technology of the time meant that nearly all of the photographs were taken outside and during daylight hours and each of the photographs feature visitors, which has the added effect of demonstrating the size of each of the buildings. In 1924 the Palace of Industry and the Palace of Engineering were the largest concrete buildings in the world and their magnitude is demonstrated against the people passing by in the photographs. The provision of the photographs of the larger pavilions in the guidebooks also acts as a point of reference to visitors at the exhibition, making them easier to locate and identify – another example of the use of media to enhance the visitor experience. For those who were unable to visit the exhibition, and for future generations studying the exhibition, the photographs provide an accurate visual representation of these and the other pavilions which housed the exhibits, which would otherwise be difficult to imagine.

⁸⁹ *Wembley Guide*



Images redacted for
licensing/copyright
reasons

Figure 9 – reproduced in the *Wembley Guide*. Various pages throughout the publication.

Conclusions

The introduction of compulsory education and the resulting increase in literacy created a market for more printed material as well as a new means by which to disseminate information to a mass audience. Newspapers and other publications were used to advertise the exhibition as widely as possible. The use of posters, guidebooks, handbooks, photography and maps, all helped to create a user-friendly visitor experience that also educated and informed people about the British Empire through the exhibition. The printed material also reveals how organisers aimed to create a visitor experience, akin to visiting an amusement park. At the same time, the analysis of the printed material gives an indication of how the organisers wanted the British Empire to be represented to visitors – something fun, modern and predominantly white. As well as the target audience increasing in volume, it also became more diverse. As shown above, that diversity attracted interest from a variety of industries, many of which advertised the exhibition within their own specialist publications. Mass circulation and the popular press had identified women as “commercially essential to widescale success” since their changing role meant that more women were in paid employment, taking them out of the domestic sphere more, and giving them more autonomy over economic decisions within the family.⁹⁰ This appears to have been borne in mind by the organisers of the British Empire Exhibition. The many guidebooks and handbooks reveal how certain groups such as women and children were specifically targeted. The less formal nature made the literature more appealing to the middle and working classes, and the inclusion of photographs and maps added to that appeal, while making the guidebooks more practical at the same time.

The connection between the exhibition and modernity, the monarchy and the British Empire was further demonstrated by the changing style of the advertising posters and the addition of photographs in the guidebooks. The names of the King, the Queen and the Prince of Wales featured frequently in the printed material, as did photographic images of them. The many different guidebooks included guidebooks for other countries of the Empire, and souvenir editions

⁹⁰ Conboy, *Journalism: A Critical History* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2004), 130.

catered to the consumer culture of the time as well as offering many collectables in line with the contemporary trend of collecting. While printing and photography were not in their infancy as forms of media, new media, particularly radio, played a key role at the British Empire Exhibition and its contribution to the exhibition is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Radio Broadcasting and Film

At the opening ceremony, Edward, the Prince of Wales, as president of the exhibition, took to the microphone first before introducing his father. The opening ceremony was broadcast live by the BBC to the British Empire and in his speech George V stated that:

If this Exhibition leads to a greater development of the material resources of the Empire, and to an expansion of its trade, it will at the same time be raising the economic life of the world from the disorganisation caused by the war.⁹¹

Simon Potter writes that British subjects who had emigrated to other countries within the empire were able to be kept abreast of news from home courtesy of Reuters news. However, local newspapers edited the material and news received via Reuters “did not speak with an unambiguous metropolitan voice”. In contrast, the BBC broadcasts were instant and relied on the human voice, that voice being a British one.⁹² This idea was further strengthened when it was the voice of the King that was heard on the radio. Another benefit of broadcasting, like gramophone records, was that it could be enjoyed in the domestic sphere, in the comfort of one’s own home.⁹³ This chapter firstly explores the relationship between the British Empire Exhibition and wireless broadcasting, cinema, and newsreels. Focus then turns to how radio broadcasting and newsreels were used to strengthen the relationship between the royal family and the people of the empire, by bringing their voices into the domestic sphere and showing members of the royal family at the exhibition. It will be seen that by combining audio and visual technology, visitors were presented with a multimedia experience for the first time.

⁹¹ *Wembley Guide*, 8.

⁹² Simon Potter, *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World, 1922-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press Inc, 2012), 11.

⁹³ Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1002), 5.

BBC Radio Broadcasting

The first ever broadcast by the BBC took place on 14 November 1922. Less than eighteen months later the BBC had the opportunity to demonstrate its potential by broadcasting the opening ceremony of the British Empire Exhibition live to the people of Britain and overseas. Unlike print media, broadcasting was live and immediate, enabling messages to be heard instantaneously, and it required little effort from the person receiving the message. As the BBC's first managing director, John Reith, wrote "Its message is instantaneous and direct" and, in comparing it to other methods of communication, "it surpasses all means of delivery".⁹⁴ Broadcasting was limitless and classless and was available to all.⁹⁵

The broadcast of the opening ceremony was advertised in national and regional newspapers, and regional newspapers promoted the public places which would be providing loudspeakers so that those people who did not own a wireless set would still have an opportunity to hear the broadcast. As discussed in the previous chapter, any advertising had a dual purpose, serving to promote the exhibition as well as the subject of the advertisement. In the same way, this advertising of the broadcast in public places served the purpose of self-promotion for the businesses and companies which provided that service, as well as promoting the exhibition and promoting the BBC broadcast.

In the earliest days the BBC was described as a "curious hybrid of commercial interest and government responsibility" but by the end of 1926 it became the British Broadcasting Corporation.⁹⁶ Simon Potter writes that broadcasting was a way to control the "potentially unstable democracy" that was emerging after the First World War and that the BBC "developed as a means to tame broadcasting in Britain". He continues that although decisions made regarding the BBC were made for domestic reasons, they could not help but have imperial

⁹⁴ John Reith, *Broadcast Over Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), 219.

⁹⁵ Reith, *Broadcast Over Britain*, 217.

⁹⁶ Seán Street, *A Concise History of British Radio 1922 – 2002* (Tiverton: Kelly Publications, 2005), 28.

consequences.⁹⁷ On 23 April 1924 the opening ceremony of the British Empire Exhibition was broadcast live by the BBC not only to the whole of Great Britain, but also to the overseas nations of the British Empire. This was the first occasion on which British subjects around the world were able to hear both the voice of George V and Edward, the Prince of Wales, broadcast live over wireless radio. George V and Queen Mary had recorded a radio message the previous year for Empire Day but the broadcast in 1924 was the first time the King's voice could be heard live on the radio. With each new form of mass media came new opportunities for the public to "consume" monarchy⁹⁸. At the same time, these new forms of media also established new ways for the monarchy to communicate with the people, and therefore make itself more relevant. During the reign of Queen Victoria photographs offered her subjects a way of feeling closer to royalty. Edward Owens writes that radio extended that consumption further and enabled "a more intimate identification with the House of Windsor".⁹⁹

For the recently formed BBC, this event provided an opportunity to reach into the lives of thousands of people and for the organisers of the exhibition, the broadcast enabled knowledge of the exhibition to reach around the globe. In 1923 the Post Office issued 80,000 wireless licences, but in 1924 the figure was one million.¹⁰⁰ These figures include commercial and private licences, and some people made their own sets and did not apply for a licence, but it gives a good indication of the increase in wireless set owners at the time. Although only a minority of households owned a wireless set, churches, department stores and other public buildings provided means by which members of the public could listen to the broadcast, making it available to even more people. It was estimated that the broadcast was heard by around ten million listeners.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, 5.

⁹⁸ Owens, *The Family Firm*, 103.

⁹⁹ Owens, *The Family Firm*, 103.

¹⁰⁰ Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, 22.

¹⁰¹ Scannell and Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting Volume One 1922-1939*, 281.

The first issue of *Radio Times* was available on 28 September 1923, just ten months after the first radio broadcast by the BBC, and it was intended that by reading the programme listings in the *Radio Times*, listeners will “never be late for your favourite wave-train”.¹⁰² It was an opportunity for the BBC to inform their listeners and promote upcoming events and broadcasts as well as updating listeners on the wonders of broadcasting. Issue 30 of *Radio Times* listed the programmes from Sunday 20 April - Saturday 26 April 1924 and includes the following listing for Wednesday 23 April: -

10:30 – 12:15 Opening Ceremony of the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley

11:30 Speech by His Majesty the King, preceded by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales¹⁰³

The BBC had broadcast outside programmes before the exhibition but not on the same scale. The planning and technical knowledge required for the broadcast was unprecedented. The *Radio Times* reported on some of the technical issues that had to be overcome to ensure a smooth broadcast, as well as details of how the broadcast would reach each of the stations.¹⁰⁴ The possibility of wet weather had to be considered and alternative arrangements put in place in case of that eventuality. Under the heading, ‘News and Views’, it was reported that tests have been carried out to ensure the broadcast of the opening speech will go smoothly. The report goes on to state that

Wherever one may be in the great exhibition on this significant occasion one will be able to hear the natural voice of His Majesty, without any suggestion of exaggeration or distortion, addressing his assembled subjects.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² *Radio Times*, 28 September 1923, 1.

¹⁰³ *Radio Times*, 18 April 1924, 140.

¹⁰⁴ Details of the arrangements made to broadcast the King’s speech can be found in *Radio Times*, 18 April 1924, 150.

¹⁰⁵ *Radio Times*, 18 April 1924, 131.

Although the report does not give any further details of how many speakers there were, or their exact locations, visitors to the exhibition were able to hear the opening ceremony over loudspeakers which had been set up to cover every one of the two hundred and sixteen acres of the exhibition ground. This added to the multimedia experience for visitors by enabling those who were not in the stadium to hear the opening ceremony in full.

The next issue of *Radio Times* was published two days after the opening ceremony of the exhibition but, because of time limitations it was not possible to have a report of the broadcast of the opening ceremony. Instead, John Reith, the General Manager of the BBC, writes about the possibilities, whilst being very careful not to tempt fate in any way. "I am chary of expatiating on the wonders of an event which by some unforeseen and tiny mishap may not come off."¹⁰⁶ While he is unable to report on the events, he is hopeful for what he describes as "one of the greatest ceremonials in Empire history".

Providence will surely have smiled on us on April 23rd. It is perhaps the biggest thing that has yet been planned. It will be history, wonderful and magnificent, if it succeeds, and abysmal disappointment if it is marred.¹⁰⁷

One can only imagine how frustrating it must have been for the general manager of the BBC to not be able to give a detailed report of how this magnificent event did take place. If he had, he could have written about the enormous achievement of the BBC in broadcasting the opening ceremony, including the King's speech, to the entire Empire. The Prince of Wales spoke first, then introduced his father to the microphone. King George V spoke slowly and clearly as he thanked everyone involved in the organisation of the exhibition and remarked on some of the problems which had to be overcome, including "unfavourable weather". He spoke of a "commonwealth of nations" while welcoming all the people who represented the overseas dominions. Harold Nicolson, George V's official biographer, described the King's voice in the following way – "...strong, emphatic,

¹⁰⁶ *Radio Times*, 25 April 1924, 173.

¹⁰⁷ *Radio Times*, 25 April 1924, 173.

vibrant, with undertones of sentiment, devoid of all condescension, artifice or pose. The effect was wide and deep.”¹⁰⁸ The speech lasted six minutes and was followed by applause and cheering from the people in the new Wembley Stadium.¹⁰⁹ The King ended the opening speech by saying:

No nation or group of nations can isolate itself from the mainstream of modern commerce, and if this Exhibition leads to a greater development of the material resources of the Empire, and to an expansion of its trade, it will at the same time be raising the economic life of the world from the disorganisation caused by the war. I declare the British Empire Exhibition open, and I pray that by the blessing of God it may conduce to the unity and prosperity of all my peoples and to the peace and well-being of the world.¹¹⁰

By the date of the next issue of *Radio Times* the opening of the exhibition was no longer news and there is no mention of the broadcast, presumably because the optimum moment had passed. During the second year of the exhibition the founder of Empire Day, the Earl of Meath, was invited to write a column in *Radio Times* to demonstrate how broadcasting could be a force for good in communicating to the empire. He wrote of the gratitude felt by the promoters of the Empire Day Movement to the inventors of radio, for their perseverance, as a result of which the means by which the “spread of knowledge and general diffusion of ideas” has been so vastly improved. Meath concluded that:

We moderns possess in broadcasting a power which may render it possible for a future Demosthenes to influence not a few hundred persons, but millions of the human race! What a responsibility, what a trust lie in the hands of those who control this marvellous instrument for communicating ideas to men, and thereby have it largely in their power to regulate the action of the world’s population.¹¹¹

While visitors to the exhibition were able to hear the opening ceremony over the loudspeakers throughout the grounds, others were able to listen to it on their own wireless sets at home, meaning that thousands of people could listen to King

¹⁰⁸ Harold Nicolson, *King George V His Life and Reign* (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1952), 526. The description was referring to the recording made by the King and Queen for Empire Day 1923.

¹⁰⁹ BBC recording of the King’s speech at the opening ceremony of the British Empire Exhibition.

¹¹⁰ The closing lines of the King’s speech at the opening ceremony, *Wembley Guide*, 8.

¹¹¹ *Radio Times*, 22 May 1925, 385.

George V's voice in the comfort of their own homes. The sale of wireless sets, aerials and components for home-made sets was stimulated by the desire to hear the broadcast of the King's voice. It was reported that some 636,000 broadcast licences and 56,000 experimental licences had been issued as of 11 April 1924.¹¹² For those who did not own a wireless set there were several ways in which they could still hear the broadcast. Many public buildings set up loudspeakers and invited people to listen to the ceremony: places such as churches and town halls. In addition, many larger stores offered customers the opportunity to listen to the ceremony. The *Hastings and St Leonards Observer* reported on 12 April 1924 that the Hastings Radio Society had applied to the Postmaster General for permission to broadcast the ceremony from the town's bandstand. They did not anticipate any difficulty with the permission but did comment that there may be some interference heard on the broadcast (figure 10). In an attempt to minimise atmospheric interference, the BBC and the Radio Society of Great Britain requested its members to "refrain from transmission or oscillation during the short period taken up by the speech" and the same request was also to be made of all amateur broadcasting enthusiasts.¹¹³

On 21 April 1924 the *Dundee Courier* contained an advertisement from Draffen's Department Store notifying their readers that the store would be relaying the King's speech on the wireless in their restaurant.

It is recommended that customers be in their places no later than 10:15. This will be the first occasion on which a speech by His Majesty is transmitted by wireless¹¹⁴

¹¹² "Radio Notes – News of the Wireless World", *Kensington News and West London Times*, 11 April 1924, 6.

¹¹³ "King's Speech to be Broadcast", *Kensington News and West London Times*, 11 April 1924 6.

¹¹⁴ "British Empire Exhibition", *Dundee Courier*, 21 April 1924, 8.



Figure 10 - "Broadcasting the King's Speech", *Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, 12 April 1924, p6.



Figure 11 - "British Empire Exhibition," *Dundee Courier*, 21 April 1924, p8.



Figure 12 - An example of a promotional advertisement using the company's link to the British Empire Exhibition, *Radio Times*, 24 May 1925 – 30 May 1925, <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/>, p431.

Free admission was offered by many picture theatres in London, with free entertainment as part of the build-up. Loudspeakers could be found at Lincoln's Inn Fields, Trafalgar Square, the Royal Albert Hall and the bandstand at Hyde Park. Further afield, around 5000 people listened at Whitefriargate in Hull, and

approximately 10,000 waited at Thomastown Park in Merthyr, South Wales, to hear the voice of King George V. The opportunity was not restricted to those on dry land. The White Star liner 'Olympic' was waiting to set sail from Southampton and hundreds of passengers, including many American passengers, listened to the broadcast before setting sail for New York.¹¹⁵

Following the broadcast of the opening ceremony, the details were reported in both national and regional newspapers. Describing it as "a conspicuous success" and "a great triumph for the BBC", the broadcast was praised as being "a milestone in the history of broadcasting".¹¹⁶ The *Oxford Times* dated 24 April 1924 declared that the broadcast demonstrated the "full force of the miracle of science".¹¹⁷ Despite this broadcast being such an auspicious event, very little is recorded in academic works on broadcasting.¹¹⁸ John Reith himself wrote only one sentence about it in his diary.

Opening of Wembley Exhibition. Everything went most successfully, including the broadcast which went out all over the country and was the biggest thing we have done yet.¹¹⁹

Despite the limited comments by John Reith, this event clearly held great importance for the BBC, not least of all because it gave the BBC a chance to show its potential. In addition, the extensive reach of the broadcast was a good way of promoting the exhibition further. The opening ceremony was recorded by His Master's Voice, who created a lasting record of the event. This is discussed further in chapter three.

¹¹⁵ Donald R. Knight and Alan D. Sabey, *The Lion Roars at Wembley – The British Empire Exhibition 1924-1925* (London: Barnard and Westwood Limited, 1984), 15.

¹¹⁶ *Yarmouth Independent*, 26 April 1924, 3.

¹¹⁷ *Oxford Times*, 24 April 1924, quoted in Scannell and Cardiff, *A Social History of Broadcasting*, 281.

¹¹⁸ Some of these are given at footnote 10 in the introduction.

¹¹⁹ Stuart, *The Reith Diaries*, 133.

Cinema and Newsreels

Radio provided an audio experience to visitors to the exhibition, as well as to listeners both at home and in public places, but images of the event were also captured. In the 1920s visits to the theatre and cinema were a regular leisure activity and places where newsreels were shown. British Pathé originated in France and in 1896 branched out into film, but it was not until 1910 that Charles Pathé came to London and Pathé newsreels began to be shown in British cinemas. By 1924 the name Pathé and the crowing cockerel logo were well known. Film and newsreels were used in three ways in relation to the British Empire Exhibition. Firstly, newsreels were shown in theatres leading up to the opening of the exhibition and these were a source of promotion of the exhibition. Secondly, film was used within the exhibition in some of the exhibits, showing films of their homelands, and thereby became an attraction in their own right. By 1924 cinemagoing was a leisure activity enjoyed by many people and the use of film in some of the exhibits created a sense of familiar entertainment for visitors while offering a visual experience. Thirdly, the opening ceremony of the exhibition was recorded by British Pathé, giving viewers the visual experience. Although the audience could not hear the speech, it gave further depth to the opening ceremony and the film, together with the radio broadcast, brought the ceremony to life both for others at the time, but also even now nearly one hundred years later.

'Film Weeks 1924' was celebrated in February and March immediately prior to the exhibition. It was hoped that the event would help to establish Britain and the dominions as a major contender in the film industry and create employment for thousands in the process. This event was patronised by the Prince of Wales, who himself "was the very symbol of a modern Britain: young, dynamic, handsome, forward looking, the future (at least at this time) of the British monarchy".¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Olly Gruner, "Good Business, Good Policy, Good Patriotism: The British Film Weeks of 1924", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 32 no1 (2012), 48, DOI: [10.1080/01439685.2012.648052](https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2012.648052)

The film of the opening ceremony was issued on 28 April, when people could see the moving images of the King and Queen, and the Prince of Wales arriving at Wembley, as well as some of the pageantry that surrounded the ceremony. Further films during 1924 and 1925 showed the King and Queen with various royal visitors to the exhibition and theatre audiences were able to see them enjoying a ride on the train in the funfair area.¹²¹ These films enabled the audience to get a feel of the exhibition in a way which was unique to film. In relation to the King and Queen, there is one example which shows them walking around the exhibition with the King and Queen of Romania. They visit the pavilions of Hong Kong and Burma and the British Government building. Another film shows the King and Queen with the King and Queen of Italy, looking at an exhibit in the African section.

Newsreels also captured the exhibition and its amusements, for example the Noah's Ark funfair. The Noah's Ark funfair attraction was popular in fairgrounds between 1919 and 1936. It was a walk-through fun house in the shape of an ark.¹²² As well as having the walk through attraction, Noah's Ark Funfair was also the name given to the area of the fairground at the British Empire Exhibition designed for younger visitors. Visitors could cross the Noah's Ark bridge to reach Treasure Island. It was advertised to viewers in a film showing some of the highlights, including the ride on train, a beach complete with sand and a Punch and Judy show, a helter-skelter, and reference to the 'biggest ever circus', although this is not shown.¹²³ The amusement park was designed to be the biggest and the best in the world. At forty seven acres, it was more than three

¹²¹ "Work starts on British Empire Exhibition, London", 30 March 1922, "Will it be ready in time?", 10 April 1924, "We want you to be ready for the King", 17 April 1924, "State opening of British Empire Exhibition, long version", 28 April 1924, "King and Queen show King and Queen of Italy around British Empire Exhibition", 2 June 1924, "King and Queen with royal guests spent day at British Empire Exhibition", 22 May 1924, British Pathé, www.britishpathe.com. Further films are available at British Pathé showing such things as sound rehearsals, the frame for the rollercoaster in the making, The Prince of Wales' visit before he left for a tour of Africa, and a packed Wembley on Whit Monday 1924 when over 300,000 people visited in one day. The newsreel narrative claims this number shatters all previous world's records. "Wondrous Wembley", 16 June 1924.

¹²² Joel Styler, *The Noah's Ark*, <https://laffinthedark.com/articles/noahsark/noah.htm>.

¹²³ "Noah's Ark Fun Fair – Wembley Exhibition 1924", 1924, British Pathé, www.britishpathe.com.

times the size of the biggest amusement park in the world at the time.¹²⁴ Instead of the usual piped music, the amusement park at the exhibition had live band music brought to it from bandstands in the park. A Western Electric Public Address System enabled loudspeakers to “throw the required volume of sound over the desired area”.¹²⁵ The park boasted an “original mountain water chute”, the likes of which had never been seen in Britain, and the largest scenic railway in the world, as well as over one thousand sideshows and stalls.¹²⁶ A replica of the tomb of Tut-ank-hamen was also built in the amusement park to satisfy people’s obsession, following Howard Carter’s discovery in 1922. It was proposed that the park would “represent the greatest aggregation of recreative novelties the world has even seen”.¹²⁷

Film was also used at the exhibition to show visitors landscapes and highlights of some of the countries exhibiting. Several of the pavilions included a cinema, including the British pavilions. The organisers advertised to contract a company that would have exclusive rights over the cinematography for the exhibition (figure 13). This contract was awarded to British Pathé which was then also able to promote the company through their link to the exhibition. Furthermore, the exhibition boasted the first theatre in Britain capable of showing a talking movie, and for a fee of sixpence visitors could experience the audio and visual at the same time.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ *British Empire Exhibition 1924 Handbook*, 35.

¹²⁵ *British Empire Exhibition 1924 Handbook*, 37.

¹²⁶ *British Empire Exhibition 1924 Handbook*, 36.

¹²⁷ *British Empire Exhibition 1924 Handbook*, 37.

¹²⁸ Wood, *The Miracle of the Movies*, 299.



Figure 13 - "Tender for Exclusive Cinematography Rights", *The Bioscope*, 21 February 1924.

Conclusions

Radio and film added to and enhanced the multimedia visitor experience, while at the same time, provided a link between the exhibition and the empire, the monarchy and modernity. It was the hope of the organisers that the exhibition would tighten the bond between all the people of the empire and the radio broadcast was another way of strengthening that bond while presenting the voice of the empire as a British voice. From its very creation, the BBC, under the management of John Reith, would not just entertain, it would also educate and inform the listeners, and was a way to "help restore national unity and social, cultural and political stability".¹²⁹ The broadcast of the opening ceremony of the British Empire Exhibition was the first time that people throughout the British Empire were able to hear the voice of King George V live over the airwaves, and the BBC would "seek actively to reinforce the bonds of empire".¹³⁰ This was further cemented in 1932 when the BBC's Empire Service began broadcasting and the first Christmas Day broadcast by the King was aired.

Furthermore, the relationship between the BBC and the monarchy was mutually beneficial – giving the young BBC a much-needed legitimacy while providing the monarchy with a means of continuing to improve its popularity with the new

¹²⁹ Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, 5.

¹³⁰ Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*, 5.

technology of radio broadcasting.¹³¹ Radio strengthened the relationship between the monarchy and the people by making it possible for people to feel part of “nationally shared experiences”.¹³²

In a similar way, the various newsreels brought the exhibition to life visually, and helped to promote the exhibition as a fun day out, as something modern and commercial, something for the whole family to enjoy – even royalty. The size of the pavilions and the grounds were better understood when seen on moving film than in still photography. Cinemagoing was a popular pastime in the 1920s and newsreels were a way of encouraging interest in the exhibition. By also including a cinematic experience within the exhibition, the organisers clearly saw the educational and entertainment value of including film within the exhibition itself. These audio visual experiences were immediate and short lived, but the material souvenirs which were created for the exhibition were a lasting reminder for people of their visit and this is discussed in the following chapter.

¹³¹ Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain 1922-1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 83.

¹³² Owens, *The Family Firm*, 32.

Chapter 3

Material Culture and Consumer Culture

The British Empire Exhibition took place at a time when Britain was in a period of economic turmoil but, as Peter Gurney writes, because working hours were decreasing and wages were increasing those people in employment not only had more leisure time and family time, but they also had money to spend on their homes.¹³³ Stalls, shops and booths at the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 offered visitors an enormous range of souvenirs, both from exhibiting nations and as souvenirs of the exhibition itself.

This chapter will explore some of the huge variety of souvenirs which were created for the British Empire Exhibition and the many ways in which material culture and consumer culture were used in advertising the British Empire Exhibition, both in the lead up to the opening ceremony and throughout 1924 and 1925, as well as some of the ways in which businesses and manufacturers used their association with the exhibition to promote their products and services. Commemorative stamps were used for a practical purpose as well as a commemorative one but became souvenirs themselves and this will be considered in more detail. Focus will then turn to Queen Mary's dolls' house which was presented to her when the exhibition opened and took pride of place in the Palace of Arts. The dolls' house was not originally intended for the exhibition, but it came to be described as the highlight of the exhibition, representing the highest quality of workmanship and home furnishings of the era.

Material Culture, Consumer Culture and the Exhibition

Since 1908 the *Daily Mail's* Ideal Home Exhibition had demonstrated domestic perfection to consumers. Homeowners and homemakers were more inclined to

¹³³ Gurney, *The Making of Consumer Culture in Modern Britain*, 144, accessed 11 September 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central.

furnish and decorate their homes according to the ideals which were on display.¹³⁴ After the war, consumers were keen for manufacturers to return to producing those items which had not been available while Britain was at war. This was not the first time visitors were able to buy items at an exhibition: the Great Exhibition of 1851 was a showcase of the material results of the recent industrial progress of all the nations which exhibited there, and visitors were able to buy some of the products displayed.¹³⁵ For events such as the British Empire Exhibition this was also an opportunity to offer a much wider choice of printed souvenirs than had previously been required, and the organisers made every attempt to maximise the range of material available to visitors. Much of the printed material was sold as souvenirs and even those which had a practical purpose could then still be kept as a souvenir. Stamps had been in circulation for a long time by 1924 but those issued for the British Empire Exhibition gave them a new use in creating a collectible version, as well as giving a modern slant to an older method of communication. The organisers of the British Empire Exhibition recognised that this change in consumer culture created an opportunity to produce souvenirs for the home. By tapping into the consumer trends in home furnishings and decorations, the organisers ensured that visitors were given a larger choice of souvenirs than ever before, and that many of those were goods for the home.

Souvenirs

As mentioned in chapter 1, the inter-war years have been described as a period when the popular press tended to cater to the needs of the 'modern woman', by making domesticity more appealing to the women who had recently enjoyed independence.¹³⁶ Adrian Bingham writes that the housewife of this period was recognised as being in charge of the household spending and was therefore an 'essential target' of advertising.¹³⁷ As will be discussed in this chapter, the exhibition organisers recognised this same target audience and ensured that

¹³⁴ Gurney, *The Making of Consumer Culture in Modern Britain*, 144.

¹³⁵ Auerbach writes that some exhibits were marked as 'disposed of', meaning that it had been sold. *The Great Exhibition of 1851, A Nation on Display*, 119.

¹³⁶ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, 105

¹³⁷ Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, 88.

women's needs and interests were considered at every opportunity. This thesis demonstrates how the organisers of the British Empire Exhibition applied that same logic to the variety of souvenirs, amenities and attractions which were available. By including items and attractions which would appeal to women, such as souvenirs for the home, childcare facilities, and exhibits of fabrics, they included that wider audience.

The first half of the 1920s was a period of prosperity in Britain. Peter Gurney writes that "female consumers bridged ideological and social spheres".¹³⁸ People had more leisure time and more money to spend on leisure and more women had their own income after the war years.¹³⁹ The souvenirs and memorabilia that were available at the exhibition represented some of the ways this new-found disposable income might be spent. Exhibition souvenirs ranged from coins to ashtrays to plates and were designed to appeal to people from all walks of life. As well as practical souvenirs such as maps and guidebooks, there was also a deluge of collectible souvenirs including household and novelty items. Visitors could buy lasting mementos of the exhibition in the form of clothing and accessories such as scarves and brooches, appealing to the female visitor, or in the form of decorative items for the home such as plates and vases, or useful items such as matchbooks, ashtrays or knick-knack boxes. Appendix One lists many of the souvenir items which were produced for the British Empire Exhibition. This list is extensive but not exhaustive. Affiliation with the British Empire Exhibition was a means by which manufacturers and service providers could benefit economically and associations with the exhibition were found in advertising such as Hall & Dixon Ltd, who in 1925 boasted that they "last year completely furnished the bijou theatre in the Canadian Pacific Railway Pavilion."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Gurney, *The Making of Consumer Culture in Modern Britain*, 144.

¹³⁹ Eric Hopkins, *Industrialisation and Society: A Social History, 1830-1951* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2000), 217, accessed 11 September 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴⁰ *The Cinema News and Property Gazette*, 28 May 1925, Media History Digital Library, <https://lantern.mediahist.org>.

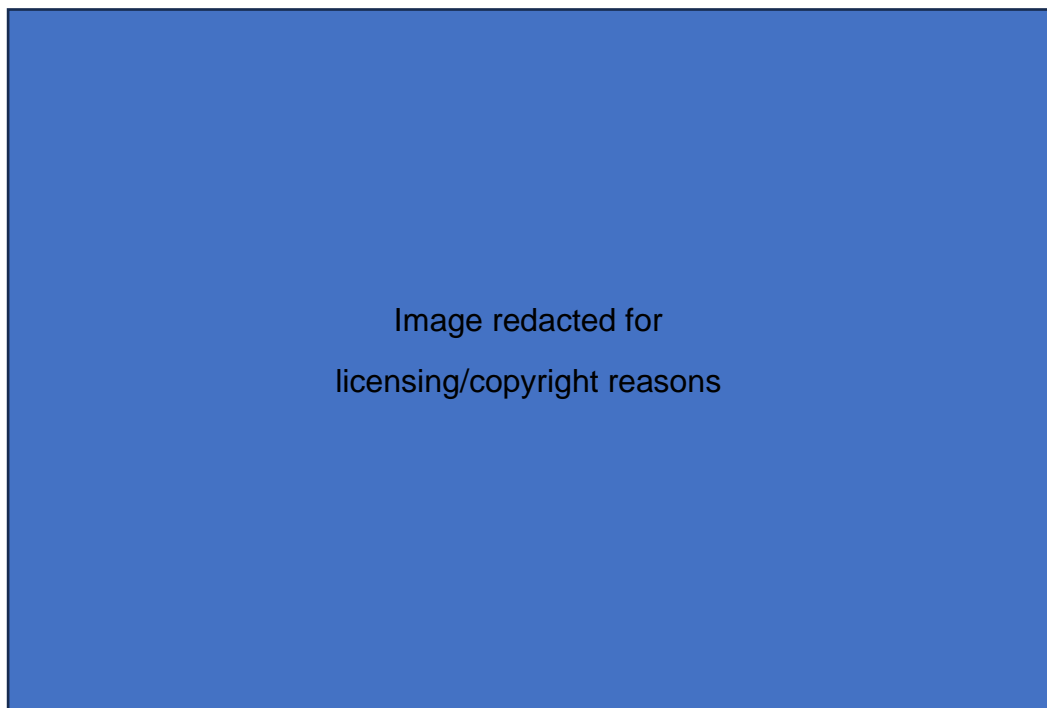
Special editions of guidebooks and handbooks were printed as 'souvenir editions'. Newspapers were also part of the souvenir offering. The *Daily News* and *The Star* had a stand in the Palace of Industry. This stand was clearly marked on the *Wembley Guide* map and the two newspapers in an advertisement in the *Wembley Guide* invited people to be included in a list of visitors to the exhibition in the newspaper, and to buy a souvenir copy to keep. (Figure 14)



Figure 14 from the *Wembley Guide*. Page not numbered.

Maps were also potential souvenirs and cartographers also used exhibitions to promote their own products. This was not unique to the British Empire Exhibition.

An example is Tallis' *Illustrated Plan of London and its Environs, in Commemoration of the Great Exhibition of Industry and Works of All Nations, 1851*. The map was published as part of an atlas of modern history in a series of maps published by John Tallis & Co, as well as a folded map available separately. The map of London is bordered by forty-nine colour pictures of principal buildings and includes the Crystal Palace (figure 15). However, guidebooks for the British Empire Exhibition provided more practical maps showing the layout of the exhibition and useful information such as restaurants and other facilities and there were also maps produced showing the exhibition in relation to train stations and other methods of public and private transport. The exhibition space lay between two train stations – Wembley Park and Wembley Hill – both of which were marked on the map. In addition, the map shows two areas marked 'motor park' for private motor cars, demonstrating the need to cater for visitors who would arrive by car, another modern invention (figure 16). Maps which related to specific interests such as transport or catering were more colourful which made them easy to navigate and potentially more attractive and more collectible.



Figures 15 - Map of London and the surrounding areas produced in commemoration of the Great Exhibition of 1851 accessed online <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/history-and-heritage/london-metropolitan-archives/collections/the-great-exhibition-of-1851-printed-items?msclkid=82c1f94dceaf11ec860ce982dfe1c959>



Figure 16 - British Empire Exhibition Map 1924 designed by Kennedy North, accessed online [British Empire Exhibition Map \(lassco.co.uk\)](http://lassco.co.uk)

In addition to handbooks and guidebooks, other souvenir publications were produced, including the *Pageant of British Empire – Souvenir Volume* (figure 17). Historical pageantry was popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Tom Hume writes that although early pageants had a commercial element, this aspect was ‘catalysed’ by the British Empire Exhibition with ‘municipally led civic weeks’ held at the exhibition. These pageants created a link between popular entertainment and ‘economic boosterism’.¹⁴¹ The Pageant of Empire ran during the summer, and it was intended to provide a spectacle “of our wonderful story” and to demonstrate the history of the British Empire in the form of music, poetry and drama.¹⁴² It required the assistance of members of not just India and the dominions, but also the colonies and protectorates of the empire, in order for the project to be successful, as each nation contributed. Sir Edward Elgar composed ‘The Empire March, 1924’ for the occasion of the pageant.¹⁴³ The souvenir publication is full of brightly coloured illustrations, intended to represent some of the history of the

¹⁴¹ Tom Hulme, “Historical Pageants, Neo-Romanticism and the City in Inter-War Britain”, In *Restaging the Past: Historical Pageants, Culture and Society in Modern Britain*, edited by Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Alexander Hutton, and Paul Readman, 158–79. UCL Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv13xprsc.12>.

¹⁴² For more information on the role of pageants in the early part of the twentieth century see Tom Hulme, “Historical Pageants, Neo-Romanticism and the City in Inter-War Britain”.

¹⁴³ *Pageant of British Empire Souvenir Volume* (London: Fleetway Press, 1924) preface.

British Empire including the day-to-day lives of people in the dominions, colonies and protectorates, as well as illustrated poems (figure 17). The publication begins with a foreword by the Prince of Wales in which he says that the Pageant is a commemoration of Britain's history of empire building and tells of his hopes that it may "kindle an equally noble inspiration in the hearts of those who are to make the Empire of the future".¹⁴⁴ The pageant is played out in music, poetry and drama and the souvenir publication includes some of the poetry and several brightly coloured illustrations representing important historical events and some of the nations of the empire. Specially produced exhibition souvenirs were not the only way the British Empire Exhibition was promoted and sold. Via newspapers and magazines, companies and organisations were able to promote their goods and services while also advertising the exhibition.

¹⁴⁴ *The Pageant of British Empire* (London: Fleetway Press Ltd, 1924), foreword.

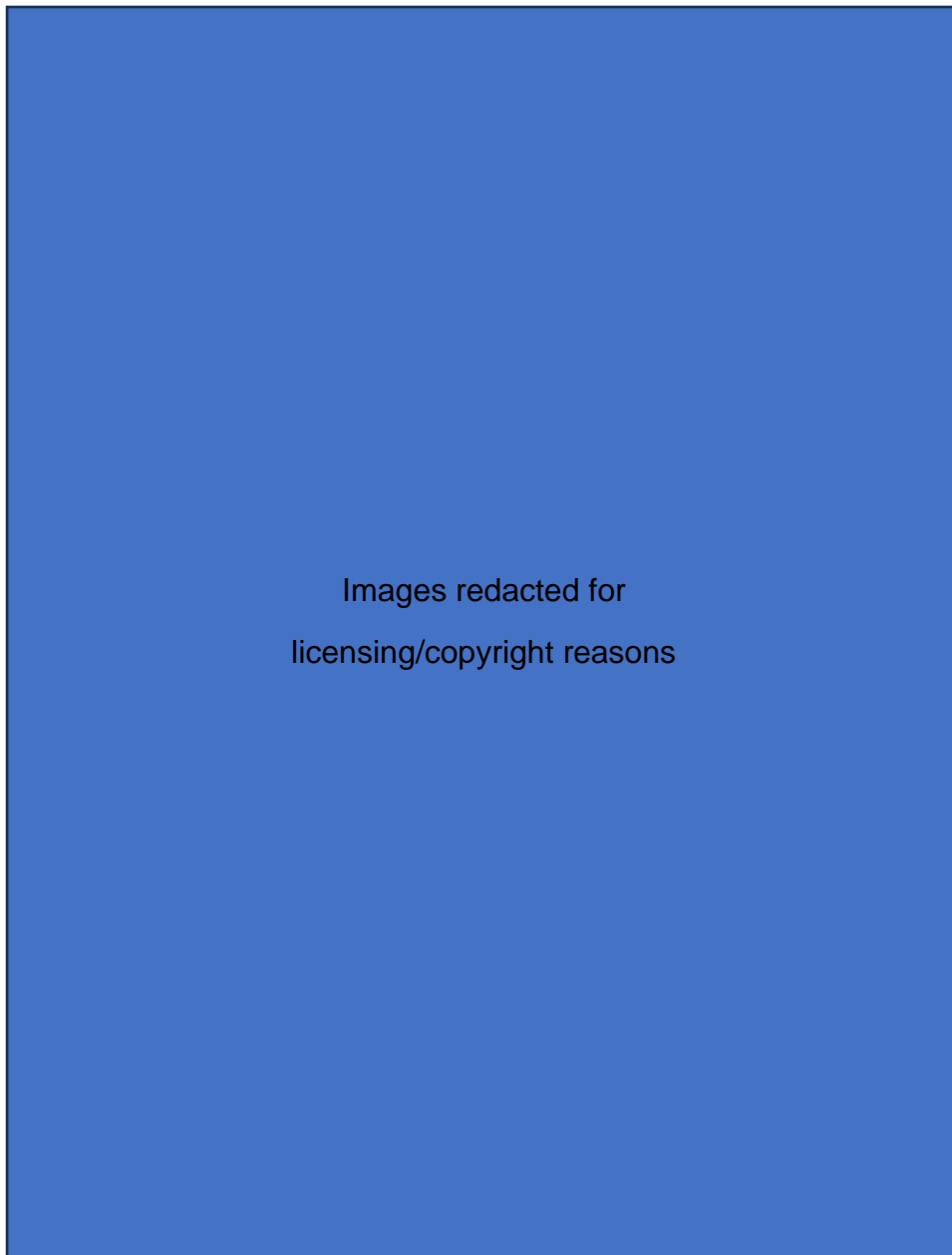


Figure 17

Pageant of British Empire – Souvenir Volume. British Library reference 1876.f.29.

Businesses and advertising

Newspapers and magazines were a source of widespread advertising for companies who were keen to make known their association with the British Empire Exhibition. This included businesses whose wares were used at the exhibition, businesses that were involved in building the pavilions, businesses that provided services and businesses that sold souvenirs. This was not the first

time businesses took advantage of an association with an exhibition. In 1851 Rowlands and Sons placed an advertisement in the *Derby Mercury* recommending their product as a memento of the Great Exhibition.

What better mark of esteem can be offered to friends on their return home as a memento of the Great Exhibition than a packet of Rowlands' Unique Discoveries: The Macassar Oil, Kalydor and Odonto.¹⁴⁵

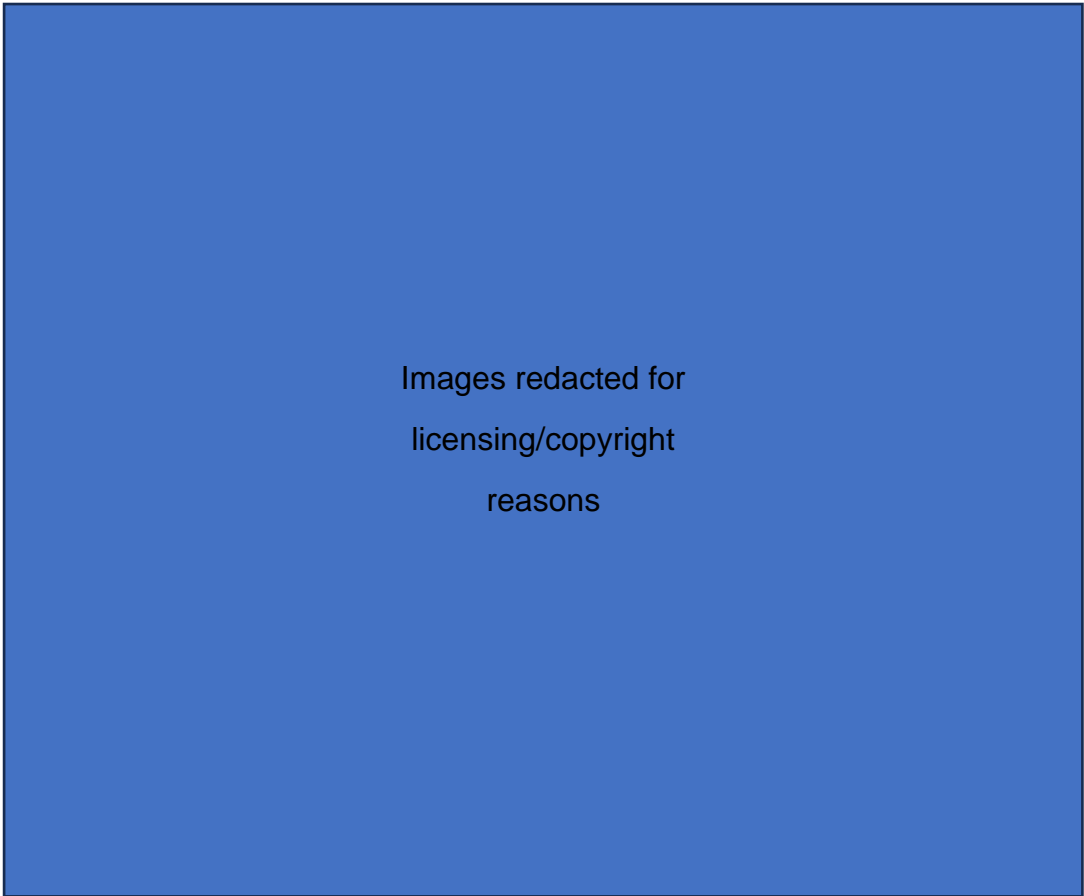
In 1924, J. Lyons & Co Ltd advertised their appointment as “caterers by appointment to the British Empire Exhibition” and Izal’s advertisement told that their product had been “officially adopted as the disinfectant for use” at the British Empire Exhibition (figure 18).¹⁴⁶ Advertising styles varied from having the exhibition as the headline to smaller, more subtle advertising. Dunlop tyres invited people to visit their stand in the Palace of Engineering, but this was a small addition, embedded within their usual advertisement (figure 19).



Figure 18 - “Izal, the Empire Germicide”, *South Yorkshire Times and Mexborough and Swinton Times*, 19th April 1924.

¹⁴⁵ “The Great Exhibition of 1851. Hints to Visitors”, *Derby Mercury*, 16 July 1851, 1.

¹⁴⁶ *British Empire Exhibition 1924, Handbook of General Information*, British Library reference YD.2007.a.9700, no page number and “Izal, the Empire Germicide”, *South Yorkshire Times and Mexborough and Swinton Times*, 19 April 1924, 1.



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Figure 19
“The Best Tyres in the World are British”,
Aberdeen Press and Journal,
22 April 1924, p7.

Figure 20
“British Empire Exhibition”, *West Middlesex
Gazette*, 19 April 1924, p1.

Even businesses which had no direct association with the exhibition found ways of mentioning it in their advertising. A Middlesex clothing store, Thompsons', offered a special display of seasonal clothing “to coincide with the opening of the Exhibition” and as an extra incentive they offered a free exhibition admission ticket to anyone spending over £1. They also advertised their wireless apparatus on the first floor which would enable people to listen to the opening speech of the King if they were unable to be at Wembley (figure 20). Many producers of consumables made special editions of their goods and included a reference to the exhibition on their packaging, examples of which are given below at figure 21. Some of these special editions were sold at the exhibition while others were simply produced in place of the normal product sold in stores, for the duration of the exhibition. Appendix One lists a few such companies.

Images redacted for
licensing/copyright reasons

Figure 21 Images of souvenir products. Accessed online.

[Old Shop Stuff | Old-tin-for-British-Commemorative-Empire-Exhibition-1924-Coffee-sample-tin-Kenya for sale \(7921\)](#)

[Vintage Sharp's Super-kreem Toffee 1924 Wembley Exhibition | Etsy UK | Commemorative stamps, Vintage tins, Vintage candy \(pinterest.co.uk\)](#)

Peter Gurney writes that whilst “heightened domesticity” clearly contributed to increased consumption, it could not be forgotten that the British Empire had its own appeal “as a means of selling goods”. Goods which featured the Union Jack, Britannia or the monarchy all had a “patriotic appeal” which would only add to their saleability.¹⁴⁷ Both the souvenirs produced for the exhibition and the souvenir editions of goods made by other companies ensured there was something for everybody, no matter what their budget. The souvenirs helped to promote the exhibition while also connecting people to the empire. Through everyday objects and household items, the memory of the exhibition and the reminder of empire was longer lasting.

Commemorative stamps

With the introduction of the uniform Penny Post in January 1840, the first sender-paid stamp, the Penny Black, was issued, replacing the previous recipient-paid system.¹⁴⁸ The stamp bore the bust of Queen Victoria and all future stamps have borne the bust of the current monarch. Great Britain was the first country to issue pre-paid postage stamps and they are the only stamps which do not have the

¹⁴⁷ Gurney, *The Making of Consumer Culture in Modern Britain*, 148.

¹⁴⁸ Catherine J Golden, “Rowland Hill (1795—1879)”, *Victorian Review* 37, no. 1 (2011), 10. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41413865>.

issuing country printed on them. By 1924 the postal service was the largest means of indirect communication between people, and it reached every corner of Great Britain and much of the British Empire.

In commemoration of the British Empire Exhibition, the Post Office issued two special stamps, a one penny one, and a one and a half penny one (figure 22).¹⁴⁹ Designs were submitted by eight artists and the winning one, designed by Harold Nelson and featuring the Wembley lion, was chosen by a committee before finally being approved by the King. 'Branding' was an important part of promoting the British Empire Exhibition. A 'Wembley Lion' logo appeared on the majority of merchandise and printed material, as well as official souvenirs such as those made by Ashtead Pottery, Paragon China, Savoy China and Wedgwood Jasperware. Designed by Frederick Charles Herrick, whose previous work included posters for London Transport, the lion logo for the exhibition built on the association of the lion as a symbol of the British Empire. This was the first time the Post Office issued commemorative stamps. The first set was released on 23 April 1924, the opening day of the exhibition, and a second set was released for the 1925 exhibition, with just the year changed in this design. They were slightly larger than an ordinary postage stamp and were only available to purchase in a collectible form at the exhibition where stamped envelopes, postcards and letter cards could be bought. Over 15 million stamps were produced by Waterlow and Sons in the weeks leading up to the opening ceremony, and news of the stamps was reported in local and national newspapers, ensuring there would be a market for them at the exhibition.¹⁵⁰

The stamps were also used by the Post Office for general use on letters and postage and there are more used stamps available today than unused ones. This is because many visitors kept their unstamped ones as souvenirs. A set of all four

¹⁴⁹ 1924-25 British Empire Exhibition 'Wembleys' Stamp Collection, Harrington & Byrne Philatelic Experts, <https://harringtonstamps.co.uk/search/1924-25-british-empire-exhibition-wembleys-stamp-collection>

¹⁵⁰ Examples of newspaper reports include *Berks and Oxon Advertiser*, 17 April 1924, *Dundee Courier*, 9 April 1924 and *West Bridgford Advertiser*, 19 April 1924.

used stamps could be bought for £99 in 2015.¹⁵¹ The issuing of commemorative stamps was considered such a success that the Post Office released more commemorative stamps on the event of the silver jubilee in 1935 and the coronation of George VI in 1937.¹⁵² Celebratory stamps were also issued for events such as the Olympic Games in 1948 and have continued to this day, with the recent production of commemorative stamps issued for Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee stamps in 2022. Michael Billig explains that in established nations there is a continual 'flagging' or reminding of nationhood. He writes that citizens are reminded of their national place by means of repeated small acts which he likens to the waving of a flag.¹⁵³ Postage stamps were in daily use and were therefore an ingenious way of advertising the British Empire Exhibition to millions of people and could be said to be one of the flags of which Billig writes.



Figure 22 Commemorative stamps accessed online. <https://harringtonstamps.co.uk/search/1924-25-british-empire-exhibition-wembleys-stamp-collection>

The Queen's Dolls' House

Besides a range of souvenirs, and the use of postage stamps, a key attraction at the exhibition was the Queen's dolls' house. Designed and constructed in the

¹⁵¹ 1924-25 British Empire Exhibition 'Wembleys' Stamp Collection, Harrington & Byrne Philatelic Experts, <https://harringtonstamps.co.uk/search/1924-25-british-empire-exhibition-wembleys-stamp-collection>

¹⁵² The British Postal Museum and Archive, [Coronation | British Postal Museum & Archive](#).

¹⁵³ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications Limited, 1995), 13.

early 1920s, the dolls' house was presented to Queen Mary at the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, where it remained on display for the duration of the exhibition that year and moved to the Ideal Home Exhibition in 1925. Viewing the dolls' house would cost the visitor an extra shilling (6d to enter the Palace of Arts and a further 6d to view the dolls' house). Mary Stewart-Wilson writes that the dolls' house "preserves for future generations not only information which is rarely found in history books, but outstanding examples of craftsmanship as well".¹⁵⁴ Jiyi Ryu has further suggested that the dolls' house demonstrated "Imperial Britishness, rather than an indigenous Englishness" and that it was a "physical representation of empire", epitomising the many cultures of the British Empire.¹⁵⁵ Ryu continues that "the English country house in general, and the Queen's dolls' house in particular represent an iconic image of national identity". The unveiling of the house at the British Empire Exhibition was another example of clever PR with both the dolls' house and the exhibition demonstrating Britishness and empire. The intention of the designer was that the dolls' house would illustrate how an upper class or royal family lived in 1924 and show some of the material possessions which would likely have been in such a home. In this way the dolls' house would have exhibited many examples of material culture of the 1920s, but it has itself become the example to later generations. Ryu continues that despite the grandeur of all the structures that were built for the exhibition, the dolls' house has survived while the others have long crumbled or been demolished.¹⁵⁶ Visitors to Windsor Castle today are still able to view Queen Mary's dolls' house.

The idea was first conceived by one of King George's cousins, Princess Marie Louise, as a gift for Queen Mary, due to the Queen's passion for collecting. Princess Marie was very well connected in the fields of art and literature and asked the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens to design the dolls' house. He realised that combining the dolls' house with the British Empire Exhibition would be an opportunity to "promote the names and products of the top British designers,

¹⁵⁴ Mary Stewart-Wilson, *Queen Mary's Dolls' House* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1988), 9.

¹⁵⁵ Ryu, "The Queen's Dolls' House", 471.

¹⁵⁶ Ryu, "The Queen's Dolls' House", 467-469.

craftsmen and artists of all time”.¹⁵⁷ Early plans were to show “what authors, artists and craftsmen of note there were” and a unique feature of the house is that almost every item within it was made especially for the house and was given as a part of the whole gift.¹⁵⁸

Many months before it was revealed to the press, the house was described as being designed to be something “which a hundred years hence will stand as a model of the art and craftsmanship of today”.¹⁵⁹ This was demonstrated through scrupulous attention to detail, including books on the library shelves. Princess Marie made a personal request to 171 authors to contribute to the library and all but one obliged her.¹⁶⁰ Some authors wrote new works specifically for the dolls’ house, gifting the copyright to Queen Mary. The miniature works are in manuscript form, many with illustrations by the author (figure 23). Appendix Two lists many of the books that are in the library, which includes a work entitled “*The Detail of Biography*”, by King George V’s official biographer, Harold Nicolson. This list demonstrates the variety of literature that might have been found in a library in a country house in 1924. Princess Marie made a similar request of seven hundred artists and was inundated with mini original works of paintings, etchings, lino prints and metal engravings.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Stewart-Wilson, *Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House*, 1988), 13.

¹⁵⁸ Stewart-Wilson, *Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House*, 14.

¹⁵⁹ “Queen’s Wonder Dolls’ House. Garage and Power Plant. Truly Works of Art and Grand Piano in Miniature”, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 21 May 1923, 8.

¹⁶⁰ George Bernard Shaw refused “in a very rude manner”, Mary Stewart-Wilson, *Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House*, 33.

¹⁶¹ Stewart-Wilson, *Queen Mary’s Dolls’ House*, 33.

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Figure 23 - Photographs of the original works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling and the ex libris plate designed by Ernest Shepard, Stewart-Wilson, *Queen Mary's Dolls' House*, p41.

When the dolls' house was first displayed to the media in February 1924, both national and regional newspapers included articles about the curiosity that had been over two years in the making. *The Illustrated London News* printed a five page spread on the dolls' house with photographs and full descriptions.¹⁶² *The Daily News* reported on some of the finer detail of the house including the mechanical aspects.

Everything works. Electric light is installed, the cars in the garage are working models. Water pours from the taps, the clocks do their best to keep time, the lift is propelled by electricity, the grand piano in the great saloon can be played: even a gramophone four inches high in the nursery plays minute records – rather squeakily, it is true, but it does play.¹⁶³

Everything was made on a scale of 1:12 with no exception, even the toothbrushes and bath salts in the bathroom, and the stamps provided by Stanley Gibbons for the King's miniature stamp collection. The walls of the King's bathroom are adorned with framed cartoons from '*Punch*' and on display in the nursery is a

¹⁶² *Illustrated London News*, 9 February 1924, 13-17.

¹⁶³ "Queen's Dolls' House", *Daily News*, 8 February 1924, British Newspaper Archive, 5.

dolls' house – “a miniature reproduction of the dolls' house in which it is placed”.¹⁶⁴ This was not the only miniature version of the dolls' house. The collectible aspect was replicated by the company Cauldron Potteries in Stoke-on-Trent who were assigned the rights of reproduction by the trustees of the Queen's dolls' house and made “all kinds of models...in china, wood, cardboard and metal, and in all sizes, so that every child will be able to obtain one”.¹⁶⁵

Other than a very few antique items everything was made by the most reputable companies and manufacturers of the day. Appendix Three lists some of the companies who contributed items to the dolls' house, including some of the artists who provided artwork for the walls. It must be borne in mind that these items of furniture and furnishings would have been made with the materials and manufacturing processes available in the 1920s, and many of the fabric items were hand woven, which makes the attention to detail all the more impressive. The firing mechanism of the guns worked, the ink pot on the desk contained a drop of ink, the gramophone could be fully wound and played ‘God Save the King’ or ‘Rule Britannia’, strengthening the link with monarchy and empire. The bottles of alcohol even contained a little of what was on the label. Some of the crockery was marked with a K or an N to indicate whether it belonged in the kitchen or the nursery.

Businesses were able to advertise their connection with the Queen's dolls' house as well as the British Empire Exhibition and in doing so, the exhibition was further advertised. Howard & Sons Ltd included the royal crest and the Wembley lion logo in their advertisements for interior decoration and furniture. They list the items they provided for the exhibition, including the “model easy chairs and sofas” for the dolls' house.¹⁶⁶ The producers of the salmon fishing rods made sure to let their connection be known too. “Hardy's made the miniature salmon rod for the Queen's Dolls' House”, was included in their advertising.¹⁶⁷ The gramophone

¹⁶⁴ “Queen's Dolls' House”, *Daily News*, 8 February 1924, British Newspaper Archive, 5.

¹⁶⁵ “Queen's Doll's House”, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 3 April 1924, 10.

¹⁶⁶ *The Graphic*, 24 May 1924, 50.

¹⁶⁷ *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 13 September 1924, 48.

in the dolls' house was made by His Master's Voice (HMV), who proudly announced their connection with the dolls' house and the exhibition. In fact, the text of the 'British Empire Exhibition' is in a much larger font size than the rest of the advertisement (figure 24).¹⁶⁸

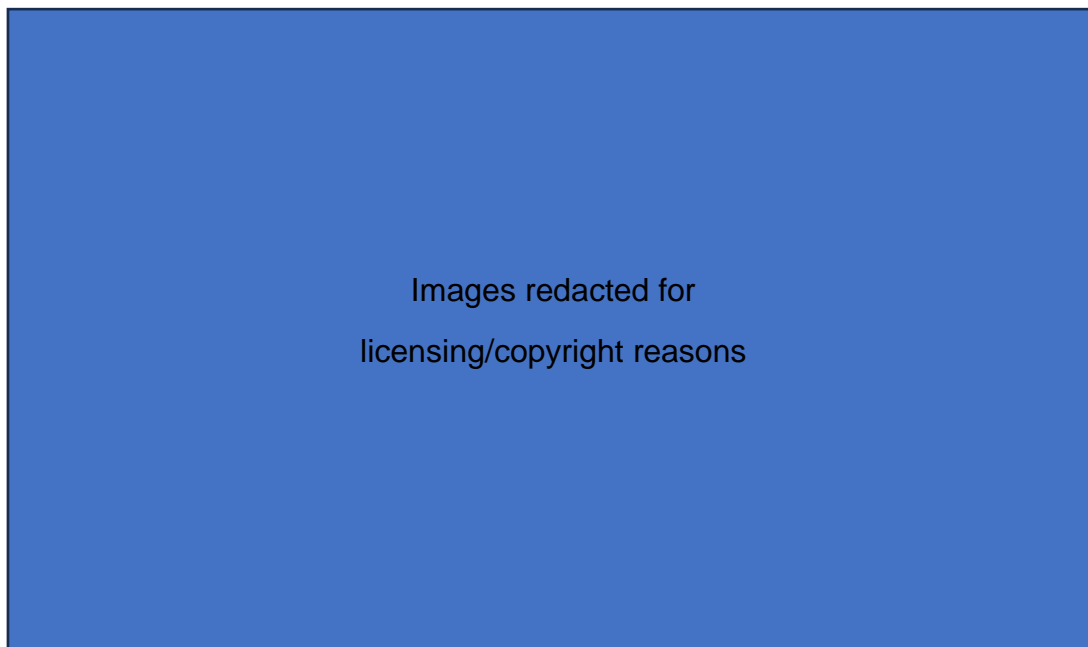


Figure 24 – companies using their association with the exhibition in their advertising. *The Graphic*, 24 May 1924, 50; *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 13 September 1924, 48; *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 May 1924, 6.

Having an HMV gramophone on display not only signalled the company's association with the dolls' house, but also signalled that the monarchy was in tune with current trends and enjoyed listening to gramophone records. At the beginning of the 1920s the gramophone was already recognised as a mass medium, enabling musicians and orators to reach an enormous audience.¹⁶⁹ It brought dancing into the domestic sphere, making it an activity people could enjoy at home with their families or at small social gatherings. As noted in a 1925 article in *The Musical Times*, "Here was something that could do for music what printing had done for literature."¹⁷⁰ By 1924 record sales had reached 22 million, and this rose to 50 million by 1928.¹⁷¹ In 1923 a journal entitled *The Gramophone* was

¹⁶⁸ *Hull Daily Mail*, 16 May 1924, 6.

¹⁶⁹ Mark Hustwitt, "Caught in a Whirlpool of Aching Sound: The Production of Dance Music in the 1920s", *Popular Music*, Volume 3 (1983): pp7-31, 18.

¹⁷⁰ *The Musical Times*, Vol 66, No 988, 1 June 1925, 547.

¹⁷¹ Hustwitt, "Caught in a Whirlpool of Aching Sound: The Production of Dance Music in the 1920s", 20.

created with the intention to “promote the gramophone as a means of musical education”. This journal was financially aided by the head of the education department of HMV, the company who also recorded the King’s speech at the opening ceremony of the exhibition.¹⁷² HMV, recorded the King’s speech at their studio at Hayes, Middlesex and they were able to produce a record within six hours, instead of the usual 36 hours. The speech was preserved on metal matrices which were later presented to the British Museum. King George V was also presented with two single-sided 12 inch records of the speech, in a leather bound album.¹⁷³ HMV had opened their first store in Oxford Street in 1921 and this connection to the exhibition was an opportunity for self-publicity. In addition, a commemorative medal was produced, creating a lasting material token of the connection (figure 25).



Figure 25 - Image of an HMV commemorative medal from the Exhibition, British Coin Forum, Predecimal.com.

Local and regional newspapers also took the opportunity to report on any and every link between their locality and the dolls’ house, including *The Rugby Advertiser* which was very proud to announce that it was one of only three regional papers invited to the press viewing and that a local business, Messrs J Parnell & Son, had carried out the construction of the dolls’ house. The article then reported on the detail of the house –

¹⁷² Hustwitt, “Caught in a Whirlpool of Aching Sound: The Production of Dance Music in the 1920s”, 19.

¹⁷³ Knight and Sabey, *The Lion Roars at Wembley – The British Empire Exhibition 1924-1925*, 16.

No item, however small, which goes to make an up-to-date luxurious home has been omitted, and tax one's brain as one may to think of the most unlikely articles, they are all to be found...¹⁷⁴

Other contributions to the dolls' house were reported in regional papers including the Jones Hatherley fire-tread steps, made in Gloucester, and kitchen utensils made by a man from Burton, which included a round copper kettle which was "fashioned in one piece from a penny".¹⁷⁵ The *Caerphilly Journal* reported on the contents of the dolls' house, including the miniature tin of Glaxo baby food and describes the detail given on these tiny items. The reporter noted, "The engraving on it is so exquisitely done that through a magnifying glass one can read every word quite distinctly."¹⁷⁶ Any link to the British Empire Exhibition or the Queen's dolls' house was advantageous as well as newsworthy.

The dolls' house was advertised as being 'the highlight of the exhibition' and, in itself, was a source of further collectible souvenirs. As well as the miniature copies made for children, a collection of picture postcards was commissioned by the Queen's Dolls' House Committee and Messrs Raphael Tuck & Sons were invited to create the exclusive collection, which consisted of "forty eight in number, representative of the principal rooms and the most noteworthy contents...". They also offered a specially designed postcard album which could be purchased for 10s 6d (approximately £20 in today's money).¹⁷⁷

Everybody who contributed an item to the dolls' house was thanked personally by Queen Mary, and in doing so she referred to the display of the dolls' house at the British Empire Exhibition as a means of raising funds for the various charities she supported. A copy of her letter was printed in several newspapers-

¹⁷⁴ "The Queen's Dolls' House – Rugby's Contribution to Great Work of Art", *Rugby Advertiser*, 8 February 1924, 5.

¹⁷⁵ "The Queen's Dolls' House – A Gloucester Contribution", *Gloucester Journal*, 19 July 1924, 17 and "Miniature Utensils of the Queen's Dolls' House", *Burton Observer and Chronicle*, 24 July 1924, 9.

¹⁷⁶ "Baby's Domain in the Queen's Dolls' House", *Caerphilly Journal*, 10 May 1924, 2.

¹⁷⁷ "The Queen's Dolls' House", *Western Morning News*, 9 June 1924, 4.

It is with the greatest pleasure that I say “thank you” to all the very kind people who have helped to make the dolls’ house the most perfect present that anyone could receive; and I hope through showing it at the British Empire Exhibition, that it will be the means of raising funds for the many charitable schemes that I have at heart. Mary R¹⁷⁸

The dolls’ house made many of the same representations that the exhibition itself made. It included all things modern such as electric lighting, cars in the garage and the gramophone; the link with monarchy was prevalent throughout the house and the interior of the house represented the empire, with designs and materials from around the empire. These include coloured marble sent as a gift by the Indian government and used around the house, Chinese and Persian rugs, Ganesha statues, a Siamese tobacco jar and a Chinese lacquer cabinet. In addition, some of the walls were decorated with a lotus flower pattern and other motifs from Asia. Manufacturers who had provided items for the dolls’ house used their links with the dolls’ house and the exhibition in their advertising, which also furthered the advertising of the exhibition both in the national press and in specialist publications.

Conclusions

This chapter explores how the exhibition organisers utilised the consumer trends and material culture of the early 1920s to represent the links between the exhibition and the monarchy, the empire and modernity, as well as ensuring that the choice and variety of souvenirs would offer something for everyone. The royal bust on the commemorative stamps is an obvious link but, more subtle, is the inclusion of the Queen’s dolls house in the exhibition, particularly as that was not the original intention. Those new inventions that featured in the dolls’ house strengthened the link to modernity and suggested that a royal household would also have such items in their home. Further, this chapter demonstrates some of the ways in which consumer and material culture of the 1920s was presented at

¹⁷⁸ “The Queen’s Dolls’ House”, *Yarmouth Independent*, 21 June 1924, 2.

the British Empire Exhibition and how the use of mass media enabled manufacturers and service providers to reach a nationwide audience with news of their commodities and services as well as their link to the exhibition. Individual businesses' advertising also had the added element of further advertising the British Empire Exhibition. As well as buying souvenirs made specifically for the exhibition, visitors were able to adorn their homes with souvenirs from countries they may never have heard of otherwise and may never have the chance to visit. The exhibition organisers capitalised on people's interest in the British Empire Exhibition by creating souvenirs which would appeal to all classes and included specialist items which would appeal to many of the popular interests of the time, for instance smoking paraphernalia. Although the British Empire Exhibition was not the first time that memorabilia were available to visitors, the variety and choice of souvenirs and the scale on which they were produced was higher than had even been seen before. Manufacturers of everyday consumables took the opportunity to create new packaging for the duration of the exhibition, making sure to include the exhibition in the printed text on the goods. The Queen's dolls' house was a material representation of the highest quality home furnishings that could be owned in 1924, in the same way the exhibition displayed the best of the British Empire, and one newspaper reported it would "stand as a model of the art and craftsmanship of today" in one hundred years from 1924.¹⁷⁹ Today, nearly one hundred years later, the dolls' house attracts visitors daily to its permanent display in Windsor Castle.

¹⁷⁹ "Queen's Wonder Dolls' House. Garage and Power Plant. Truly Works of Art and Grand Piano in Miniature", *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 21 May 1923, 8.

Conclusion

The British Empire Exhibition was a showcase for a modern post-war Britain and British Empire; a place where new media technology was demonstrated and the biggest and best of everything could be seen. The organisers of the exhibition took advantage of recent changes in education, methods of mass communication and in leisure activities that came about in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, to create a new visitor experience and to further promote and sell the exhibition and the idea of the British Empire. Visitors to the exhibition were offered a multimedia experience which included printed material, radio broadcasts, and visual media. In addition, new and exciting leisure activities were represented in the amusement park and the post-war consumer trends were demonstrated through the souvenirs and memorabilia made available at and in relation to the exhibition. There are therefore several key observations that can be made.

First, by utilising both older and newer forms of mass media, the organisers of the exhibition were able to promote the exhibition through print by means of posters, articles and advertisements in newspapers and journals. Promotion of the exhibition also took place in cinemas where newsreels were shown, as well as BBC radio broadcasts and the *Radio Times* which advertised the upcoming live broadcast of the opening ceremony. But media was not only used to promote the exhibition, old and new media also featured within the exhibition itself, adding to the visitor experience. Once at the exhibition, the audio and visual experiences available to visitors were many and varied. The use of guidebooks and maps was an opportunity to suggest the best way to spend time at the exhibition and in this way the organisers could promote specific exhibits and attractions. The Top Ten Highlights in the *Wembley Guide* is an example of this.¹⁸⁰ The organisers took further cues from commercial culture and popular entertainment by incorporating cinema, a fun fair, live music, and other visitor attractions. In keeping with the desire to provide the biggest and best of everything, the Pavilion of Industry and the Pavilion of Arts were the largest concrete buildings in the world at that time.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ *Wembley Guide*, p32

¹⁸¹ Geppert, "Wembley 1924-1925", p233.

By embracing these methods of mass communication and media the organisers ensured that the post-war feeling of modernity was promoted at the exhibition and that, in turn, represented the empire in a modern light, moving forward after the destruction of the war years.

Secondly, the analysis further reveals how the exhibition tried to cater for specific groups and a wider audience. The inclusion of maps and photographs and the vast amount of printed material surrounding the exhibition catered for a wider readership, compared for example to the target audience for the Great Exhibition. The changes in education, and the introduction of compulsory education for all children in 1880 created a literate nation and the wide-ranging interests of that literate nation had to be considered within the printed material for the exhibition. Consumerism after the First World War was representative of the deprivation people had felt during the war years. The consumer market was flooded with items for the home and items which had previously been considered too luxurious, and this desire for home items and knick-knacks was represented in the souvenirs and memorabilia available at the exhibition. Many souvenirs were items for the home, targeting the female consumer, but there were also others which would have appealed to people with a variety of hobbies and interests. The Queen's dolls' house was considered by the organisers to be the highlight of the exhibition and it was a representation of the best of everything for the home. Although the items within the dolls' house were made especially for it and were not available to buy, mini decorative versions of the dolls' house were sold as souvenirs.

Additionally, a third observation can be made. The British Empire Exhibition further strengthened the connection between media, the monarchy and the empire. It had many links to the monarchy, both directly and indirectly. With the King as the patron and the Prince of Wales as the president the approval of the monarchy was obvious from the outset, but what made this exhibition stand out over any earlier events or visits made by the King and Queen, was the live radio broadcast of the King's speech at the opening ceremony. In the twenty-first

century when royalty is visible and audible at the touch of a button, it is extremely hard to imagine what a wonder it would have been to hear the King's voice, in a live broadcast, over the radio for the first time. The King made several other radio broadcasts between 1924 and the first Christmas Day message in 1932, which became a tradition continued to this day. In 1953 Queen Elizabeth II's coronation was televised in full, allowing people all over the world to feel like they were part of the celebrations, and this was another landmark in the history of the monarchy and media. Following the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022 the news was announced on the radio and television, and the BBC and other major television channels had a constant flow of programmes about her for the entire period between her death and her funeral. On the day of her funeral people around the world watched the ceremony from dawn to dusk. The entire journey of the funeral party was televised as well as the whole service in Westminster Abbey and later in St George's Chapel at Windsor. Nothing was kept from the viewing public. In the same way loudspeakers were set up in public places to hear King George V's speech in 1924, so giant screens were set up for people to watch the entire funeral of his granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth II nearly one hundred years later. (figure 26)



Figure 26 - Giant screens enabled people to watch the funeral in Bournemouth Gardens. Author's own photograph.

In 1924, the use of the new medium of radio broadcasting was mutually beneficial to the BBC and the organisers of the exhibition. Once King George V agreed to his speech being broadcast live a unique selling point had been created, the first of its kind. The BBC benefited from an increase in wireless ownership. Advertising of the radio broadcast doubled as advertising for the exhibition, and every time a business advertised its link with the exhibition it was further free advertising for the exhibition. The same can be said of Pathé newsreels, shown in cinemas and theatre halls. Every viewing of their newsreels was advertising for the exhibition, as well as bolstering the importance of Pathé as a source of news.

Finally, the aim of the British Empire Exhibition was to improve inter-imperial trade and relations and it was an event which was of great importance in several fields, and which held a different meaning for each of them. State interest, commercial interest, public interest, and royal interest were each significant to the planning process. The public relations and marketing campaign had to consider each of these interests to ensure they were all represented and the use of mass media and methods of mass communication for promotion and exhibits was a clever PR approach, ensuring promotion was wide-reaching, while also giving a feeling of modernity, even at the early planning stages. This PR approach can be seen as a trial for the campaign used shortly after by Stephen Tallents for the Empire Marketing Board.¹⁸² Newspapers and journals were reaching further than ever before, and their readers crossed all class borders. Movie theatres and dance halls allowed people to enjoy film and music, and the gramophone had brought recorded sound into the domestic sphere, enabling people to listen to records at home alone or with friends. The introduction of radio took the audio experience even further and with the creation of the BBC and the monopoly of the British airwaves, it was inevitable that the relationship between the exhibition and the BBC would be extremely beneficial to both. Through these methods, the advertising campaign reached far and wide to men and women of all ages and social classes. Media and communication were not the only ways in which modernity was represented at the exhibition. Post-war consumer trends were

¹⁸² Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain*.

demonstrated through the souvenirs and memorabilia made available at and in relation to the exhibition. The Queen's dolls' house was a display of the best home furnishings available at the time, but seeing inside a royal residence, albeit a miniature one, evoked a feeling of normality, by placing the royal family in a domestic sphere.

This work set out to map together themes which arise in each of the interests represented and media used, and in doing so it has demonstrated that while each of the media discussed can work independently, when they are used together such as at the British Empire Exhibition, they can create a multi-layered, audio visual experience which made the exhibition more inclusive than any previous similar event.

Legacy

While some of the attractions and ideas were not new, the British Empire Exhibition offered a bigger, better or newer version of them. Some of the pavilions were the largest concrete buildings in the world and the amusement park was three times bigger than any other before. Existing methods of communication were modernised with the introduction of commemorative stamps, which became collectible souvenirs. Before this, people would not have bought stamps for any purpose other than to send a letter. Mass circulation of newspapers brought with it a different style of print, and advertising of the exhibition was mutually beneficial to several parties – the advertiser, the owners of the newspaper and the exhibition organisers. The British Empire Exhibition played a significant role in the post-war economic recovery of many British industries and smaller businesses and the material aspects of the exhibition were repeated in Glasgow in 1938 at the Empire Exhibition, Scotland when it was hoped that such an exhibition would help in the recovery from the economic depression of the 1930s. A vast array of souvenirs and memorabilia was available at the Glasgow Empire Exhibition including postcards, matchbooks, jigsaws, enamel badges, spoons, plates, leather goods, handkerchiefs and photograph collections, to name a few and, like the British Empire Exhibition, a lion logo appeared on the official souvenirs, albeit a red

tartan lion in a different pose (figure 27). Similar to the Queen's dolls' house, the centrepiece of the Glasgow Empire Exhibition in 1938, the Tait Tower or the Tower of Empire, was also available in various miniature forms.

The British Empire Exhibition was a pioneer for the use of especially produced souvenir merchandise. It has become routine for exhibitions and commemorative events to have a logo for official merchandise, which is representative of the subject of the event and the variety of souvenirs increases with each event. Every possible need and interest can be catered for in the memorabilia which is produced. The most recent example is the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The V & A Museum ran a 'Platinum Jubilee Emblem competition' and invited entries from any interested parties. The winning emblem was designed by Edward Roberts, a Nottinghamshire design student, and it appeared on all official merchandise (figure 28). The digital age has brought with it a new and immediate means of mass media and for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee anybody in the world can view and purchase souvenirs at the click of a button. The Post Office issued commemorative stamps for the Platinum Jubilee, consisting of a set of eight pictorial stamps, with images of Queen Elizabeth II during her 70 year reign (figure 29).



Figure 27

Glasgow Empire Exhibition logo

Figure 28

Platinum Jubilee logo



Figure 29 Platinum Jubilee stamps

The British Empire Exhibition was a springboard for future events and today, nearly one hundred years later, those innovations which were first presented at the exhibition are found at the majority of public events as well as in people's daily lives. Radio programmes are now broadcast twenty-four hours a day through many stations, and live broadcasts are commonplace; commemorative and pictorial stamps are issued on a regular basis; films with sound and interactive exhibits are now a popular feature of public exhibitions.

Appendix One

List of some of the British Empire Exhibition souvenirs

Flower vase	Card tray	Leather coin purse
Bud vases (pair)	China ornamental man in stocks	Glass trinket box with silver plated top
Serviette rings (several variations of the logo appeared on these)	China ornamental hand holding a pig's trotter	Spill vase
Miniature bucket	Miniature vase	Brass pin dish
Matchbox holder	Miniature cauldron	Medallions
Ash trays	Miniature jug	Souvenir coin
Pipe tamper from Gold Coast	Miniature trophy	Jigsaw puzzle
Brass tray	Brass tea caddy (Lipton Tea)	Compact mirror
Handheld mirror	Brooch	Lapel badge
Pin badge	Scent bottle	Trinket box
Fabric flag	Miniature horseshoe dish	China boat
Model of the Queen's Dolls' House in china, wood, cardboard and metal	Pottery lion	Cruet set
Tea pot	Butter dish	Egg cup
Spirit measure	Spoons	Cheese knife
Sugar sifting spoon	Saucer	Ceramic bowl
Plate	Silver plated egg cup	Glass cup
Milk jug	Salt cellar	Bon bon dish
Cheese wedge dish	Scarf	Tablecloth

Printed Souvenirs

Pageant of British Empire Souvenir Volume

Catalogue of the Palace of Arts

Illustrated Souvenir of the Palace of Arts

India: Souvenir of the Indian Pavilion and its Exhibits: Souvenir of Wembley 1924

The British Empire Exhibition, 1924. Official Guide

The Marlborough Pocket Guide to the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, 1924

Companies who produced special editions of their goods or packaging to celebrate the British Empire Exhibition

Playing Cards – State Express Cigarettes

Toffee tin – Sharps

Toffee tin – Thornes

Souvenir book – Great Western Railway

Chocolate tin - Rowntree

Playing cards - Chas Goodall and Son

Tea – Liptons Tea

Appendix Two

List of some of the books in the library of the Queen's Dolls' House

Books	
J.M Barrie	Autobiography
Max Beerbohm	Meditations of a Refugee
Hilaire Belloc	Peter and Paul: A Moral Tale
Algernon Blackwood	The Vision of the Wind
Edmund Blunden	Poems
Robert Bridges	Poems
John Buchan	The Battle of the Somme
G.K Chesterton	The Battle of Three Horns
Joseph Conrad	The Nursery of the Craft
Walter De La Mare	The Poems and the Riddle
Ethel M. Dell	The Knave of Diamonds and Others
Arthur Conan Doyle	How Watson Learned the Trick
John Galsworthy	Memories
Edmund Gosse	A French Dolls' House
Robert Graves	Poems Abridged for Dolls and Princes
H. Rider Haggard	From a Farmer's Year
Thomas Hardy	Poems
Anthony Hope	A Tragedy in Outline
A.E Housman	From a Shropshire Lad
Aldous Huxley	Poems
W.W Jacobs	From Salthaven
M.R James	The Haunted Dolls' House
Gertrude Jekyll	The Garden
Rudyard Kipling	Verses
E.V Lucas	The Whole Duty of Dolls
Rose Macaulay	The Alien
Compton Mackenzie	Richard Gunstone
A.A Milne	Vespers
Sir Henry Newbolt	Poems
Harold Nicolson	The Detail of Biography
Alfred Noyes	Poems
Siegfried Sassoon	Everyone Sang
J.C. Squire	Acrostic
Frank Swinnerton	The Boys
Hugh Walpole	The House in the Lonely Wood

Appendix Three

List of manufacturers and suppliers of some of the items in the Queen's Dolls' House

Hardy Brothers Limited	Split bamboo salmon fly rod
J Parnell & Son	The structure of the house
Muntzer & Son	External and internal painting
Cartier Ltd Designed by Lutyens	Grandfather clock, other clocks and barometers Decorative screen
John Wisden & Co Ltd	Cricket bat
J.T Gowdie & Co	Golf clubs and bag
Purdey's	Shot guns, leather gun case, cleaning rod, tow and oil. A shooting stick, a magazine holding 100 cartridges and a cartridge bag.
Sangorski & Sutcliff	One of seven book-binders
Dunhill	Cigars, cigarettes and tobacco
Bryant and May	Matches
Cartier	Desk clock
Swan	Fountain pen
Stephen's	Ink on the desk
Ernest Shepard	Ex Libris plate in library books
Stanley Gibbons	Stamp album and stamps
Twining Model Co	Mincer, weighing machine and coffee grinder
Doulton	Nursery and kitchen china
Cauldron Potteries	Dinner service and breakfast service
Ewbank	Carpet sweeper
Lifebuoy	Soap
Colman's	Mustard
Garrard & Co Ltd	Abercorn kettle and tea set on a silver tray
Webb's Crystal Glass Co	Glass tableware
Price's	Candles
Brigg Umbrellas	Walking sticks and shooting sticks Umbrellas
Addis	Toothbrushes and nail brushes
J & E Atkinson Ltd	Toilet requisites
Chubb & Sons Lock & Safe Co Ltd	Jewel safe
John Broadwood & Sons Ltd	The grand piano
Waring & Gillow	Various practical pieces for the staff bedrooms
Huntley & Palmer	Biscuits
McVite & Price	Biscuits
Tiptree	Jams
Clarke's	Stranded cotton
Singer	Sewing machine
Waygood Otis Ltd	Working lifts
Fry's	Breakfast cocoa and chocolate
Pascall's	Lemon barley sugar

Rowntree's	Toffee and clear gums
Whitefriars Glass Co	Bottles
Lea & Perrins	Worcester sauce
Shippam's	Paste
Jackson's	Vinegar
Daimler	Car in the garage
Lanchaster	Car in the garage
Rolls-Royce	Car in the garage
Sunbeam	Car in the garage
Vauxhall	Car in the garage
Rudge	Motorcycle in the garage
Shell	Motor oil
Atco	Motor lawn mower
Gainsborough Silk Weaving Co	Silk hangings, rugs and carpets

List of some of the artwork adorning the walls of the Queen's Dolls' House

Art		
D.Y Cameron	Windsor Castle	Entrance hall
William Nicholson	Queen Elizabeth I	Library
Alfred Munnings	Three paintings in the dining room	Dining room
W B E Ranken	Still life oil painting	Dining room
Professor Gerald Moira	Ceiling	Dining room
Ambrose McEvoy	The Princess Royal	King's Suite
George Plank	Ceiling	King's Suite
Maurice Greiffenhagen	Ceiling	Queen's bathroom
A S Cope	Electress Sophia of Hanover	Saloon
Charles Sims	The Children of Rumour and her Hundred Tongues	Saloon

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