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 **The 1851 Great Exhibition in London**

Organized by Prince Albert, the 1851 Great Exhibition flaunted the Empire’s trade wins and industrial marvels.

An international showcase of spectacular scale, the Great Exhibition displayed produce from around the world, from great woven textiles to the most intricate embellished golds. With over 6 million visitors – including Queen Victoria herself – the event was phenomenally successful.

Housed in a purpose-built giant glasshouse (which came to be nicknamed the Crystal Palace), the Exhibition was based on a French equivalent held several years previously, known as the Industrial Exposition of 1844. While the government was initially uninterested, the concept aroused public support as well as that of Prince Albert. After increasing pressure, the government were swayed and a competition was organised to design a building that could house such an event. The Crystal Palace design won and was soon erected in Hyde Park.

Taking less than a year to build, the Crystal Palace marked some serious advances in architecture and industry. Considered one of the first pre-fabricated buildings, the glass was created in advance, meaning it simply slotted into the iron skeleton when the sheets arrived. The Exhibition was a roaring success for Britain, providing an unrivalled sense of national pride, as well as asserting Britain’s dominance over the rest of the world. It was also an incredible employment opportunity, with over 2,000 men working on it in December 1851.

Only around 50 per cent of the exhibits were from Britain, with the remainder brought in from around the world. India sent emeralds and rubies, as well as an ornate howdah and trappings for elephantsб, while France sent tapestries and silks, as well as the machines that weaved the fabrics. Russia sent furs, Switzerland sent watches, and Chile sent a giant lump of gold.

Originally costing £3 for a man to visit, and £2 for a woman, the cost of entering the Exhibition was eventually driven down to simply a shilling a head from 24 May 1851.

After this reduction, it became the biggest attraction in the country. Thomas Cook, a travel agent, even organised special excursions for reasonable prices. After the Exhibition closed in October, the incredibly vast glass building was moved from Hyde Park in London to Sydenham, where it was once again reopened by Queen Victoria in 1854.