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Nineteenth century pamphlets online

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Barbara Humphries

Nineteenth-century pamphlets online

The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of ephemera is 'collectable items that were originally expected to have only short-term usefulness or popularity'. Does the pamphlet fit into this category? They were written for a contemporary audience, in order to change opinions and to gain publicity for a cause, or an author. They may have had a practical use, for instance, a railway timetable, or report of a meeting. In some cases they were published to raise funds. They did not have commercial value. However, for centuries these publications have survived on a large scale and are a resource for historical research.

By the nineteenth century, the concept of the printed pamphlet was not new – pamphlets had been around for centuries. But the importance of the political pamphlets included in the Research Libraries UK (RLUK) nineteenth-century pamphlets project can be seen in their historical context. The nineteenth century saw the growth of densely populated industrial cities, the growing importance of travel and communications, such as the railways. It also saw political upheaval and discontent, and the growth of empires and inter-national conflict. The Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884 had extended the right to vote to the middle class, and a small section of the working class. This enlargement of the electorate over the course of the century in the UK meant that politicians had to account for themselves to a larger number of people. Although the majority of the population still did not have the vote, this increase in voter numbers could have accounted for the many political pamphlets in circulation.

Many nineteenth-century pamphlets have survived, as they were collected and donated to university libraries, in many cases by political and social reformers, such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb at the London School of Economics (LSE) and Joseph Cowen MP in Newcastle. Others were donated by political and colonial families, such as the Earl Grey collection at Durham University, or a government office – the Foreign and Commonwealth Office collection at John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester.

The full texts of 25,000 pamphlets which give an insight into British politics in the nineteenth century have been made available online by the RLUK nineteenth-century pamphlets project and can be found on the JSTOR web site. Selected by seven research librar-

ies in the UK, these pamphlets represent the theme of 'pamphlets in support of parliamentary papers'. They represent less than a tenth of the surviving pamphlets published in the nineteenth century, and held in university libraries in the UK. There are many others on subjects not related to this project including science, philosophy, religion, and medicine. There are probably others not held by university libraries but by specialist libraries – those of banks for example. There were hundreds of pamphlets published on banking in the nineteenth century. Countless other pamphlets may have been lost completely – as had been intended when they had outlived their usefulness for the day. They would have perished when their owners died and their homes were cleared out.

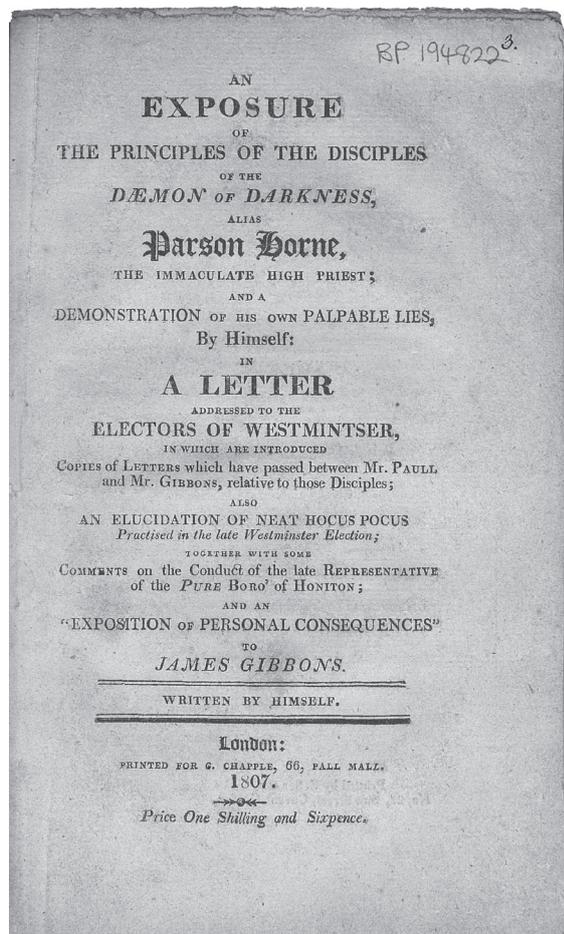
However, I suspect that the Victorians were not as reckless as our generation in discarding information of this type. Today's equivalent, published only on the internet, is easily lost.

THE CONTENTS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY PAMPHLETS

What sort of publications were the pamphlets included in the collection? They are very diverse, some were short – leaflets for distribution – others were almost book length, and considered important enough to be sold.

MPs regularly published their speeches. There are dozens of published speeches from politicians, such as William Gladstone, on a diverse range of subjects. These included tariff reform and free trade, home rule for Ireland, and foreign and colonial policy. Speeches might have been delivered in the House of Commons, or to political gatherings at election time. The speech of John Stuart Mill on 'admission of women to the electoral franchise' given in the House of Commons, on 20 May 1867, was published as a pamphlet. This was the first time that the case for votes for women had been raised in Parliament, proposed as a one-word amendment to the 1867 Reform Bill. The collection also includes election speeches of Samuel Smith MP delivered in Liverpool in 1882.

It was not only politicians that printed their speeches. The address of Fred Hammill to the first annual conference of the National Vehicle Traffic Workers Union, was published in 1892. These pamphlets are invaluable for researchers interested in



the living and working conditions of the day. *A word to the white horse men* was published by a magistrate during the Captain Swing riots in the 1830s, when starving farm workers in the south of England burnt crops and machinery in protest. The magistrates warned of the danger of unemployment and asserted that it was not in the interests of farm workers to burn crops and machinery.

Some pamphlets did not have a recorded price and there is no indication of how widely they were circulated, but in some cases there is evidence of extensive circulation. The speeches of a Mr P.A. Taylor on the Game Laws in the House of Commons, were reprinted by the Anti-Game Law League and sold for two pennies, or nine shillings for a hundred, indicating that this was intended for extensive distribution. The Game Laws were very controversial; they could lead to hanging or transportation for someone caught poaching a deer.

Election manifestos, compulsory for elections come the twentieth century made their appearance in the nineteenth. *The Tamworth manifesto* of 1834, associated with Robert Peel and thought to be the first ever election manifesto in the UK, is held in print in

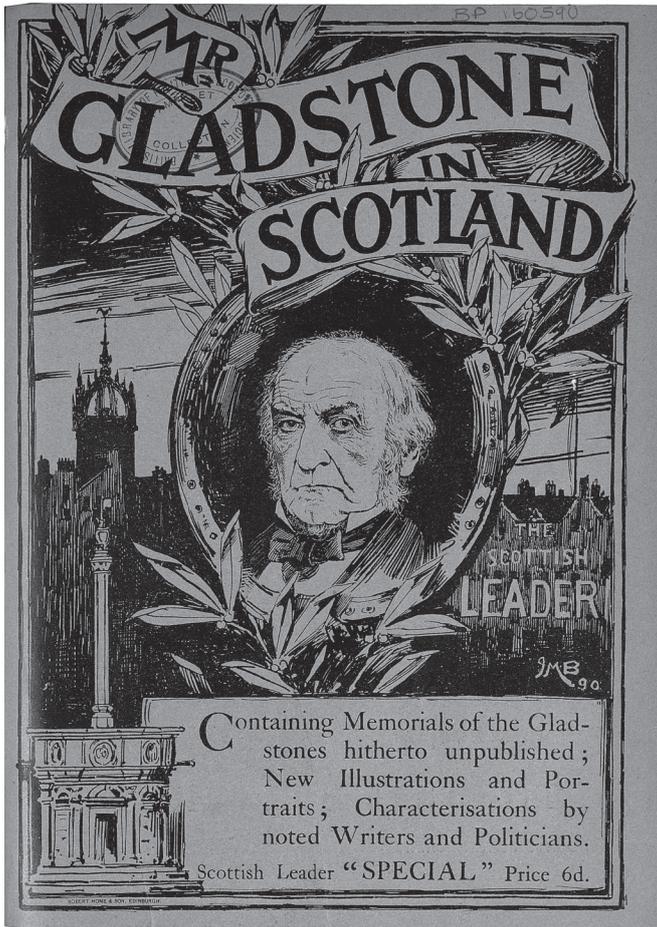
the LSE Library, but unfortunately is not in the JSTOR collection. But other famous manifestos are there – for instance Gladstone's Liberal Mid-Lothian manifesto in 1885. This was contributed to the project by Bristol University Library, which holds a large collection of Liberal Party pamphlets and leaflets. *The Tory way of facing the music* was one of the many Liberal Party leaflets contributed to the project by Bristol University Library. They were sold at a price of three shillings for a thousand.

Reports of political meetings were also issued as pamphlets. These reports would have been longer than if they had been published in a newspaper. There was the advantage that they could be partisan and anonymous. Reports of meetings were fairly common by a whole range of organizations, for instance, the London Ratepayers Defence League published a report of its inaugural meeting, held in the Guildhall in 1891. Publications such as these were generally distributed without charge.

Reports were given of election and by-election campaigns. One of the most eccentric, and perhaps the longest titled of any pamphlet in the collection, was *An exposure of the disciples of the dæmon of darkness, alias Parson Horne; in which are introduced copies of letters ... between Mr Paul and Mr Gibbons; also an elucidation of the neat hocus pocus practiced in the late Westminster election etc* [1]. The publication of letters, though not as common as speeches, was widely practiced. This could be on-going correspondence between individuals, or letters written to newspapers, which had failed to get published. Mr A.C. Morant of the Independent Labour Party published as a pamphlet *The ILP and the Liberals: a letter which, was promised to appear (but did not) in the London Daily Chronicle, 1895*.

Satire was widespread in the nineteenth-century pamphlet. Perhaps this was to protect the authors, but some of it was fairly subtle. One, for instance, was entitled *Political achievements of the Earl of Dalkeith, carefully compiled from trustworthy sources*. It was anonymously published in Edinburgh in 1880 and consisted entirely of 32 deliberately blank pages. More hard hitting and political is *John Bull's constitutional apple pie and the vermin of corruption*. Published in 1820, it was part of a campaign for political reform.

Cartoons were prevalent, especially of two of the most prominent politicians of the nineteenth century – William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli. These include *The meed-Lothian manifesto* written by Andrew Lyall, and the *Grand Old Man* published by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, both aimed at poking fun at



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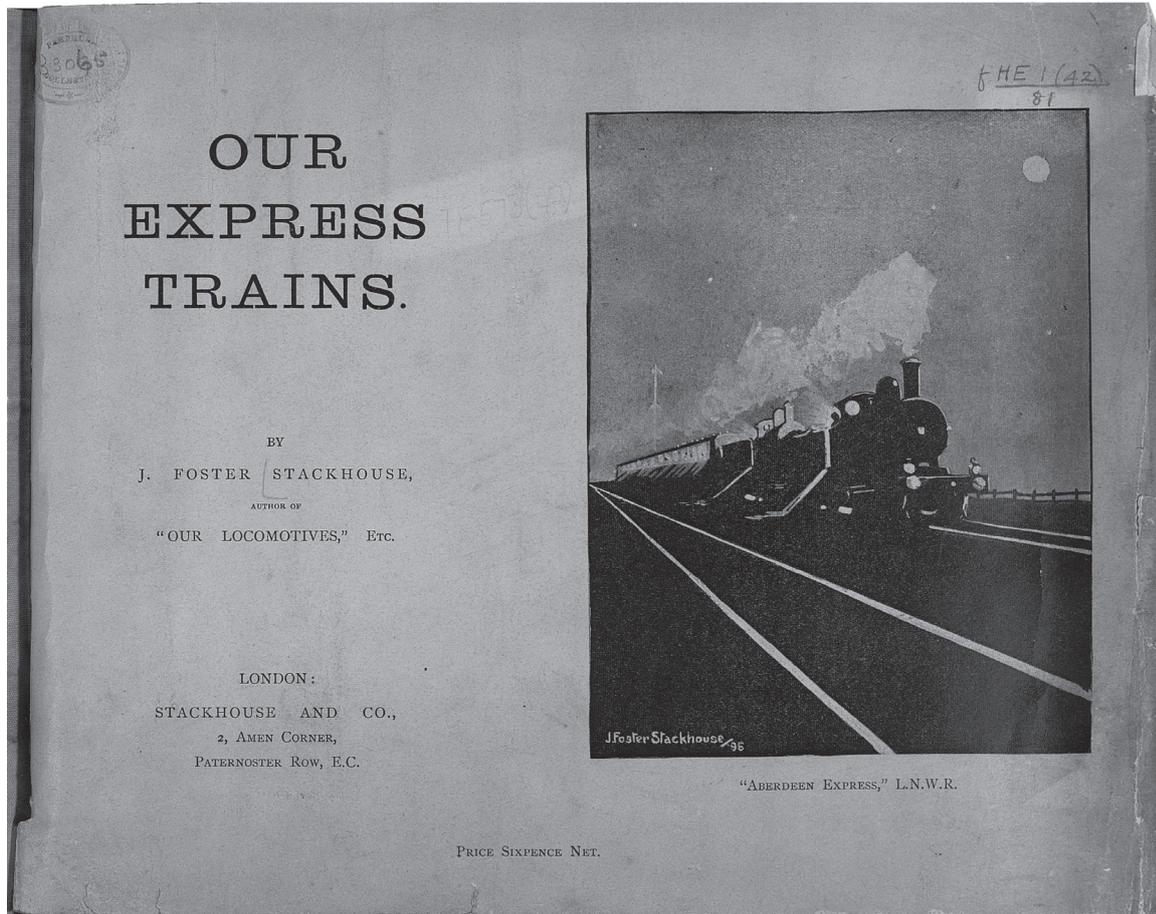
Gladstone. In some cases the meaning of the satire is now lost and titles such as *The row in Mrs Britain's kitchen as seen by a spider from its web* need more interpretation.

Political rhymes and songs are an important part of the collection. These were published by all of the main political parties, each of whom had their own songs, as did organizations such as the co-operative movement. 'Radical rhythms for true blue times' was an example of a song published by the Conservative Party in 1880. There were quite a few socialist songs too; *Chants for socialists* was written by William Morris, and included titles such as 'The march of the workers' and 'All for the cause'. Published by the Socialist League, of which Morris was a member, it was sold for a penny. 'Rally round the old flag: a loyal song', was a rallying cry for patriots, probably a defence against the claims of Irish and Scottish nationalists.

Tyneside songs by Edward Corvan, G. Ridley etc ... from the Cowen collection has some intriguing titles – 'Black pudding bet', 'Cat Gut Jim the fiddler', and 'Culler Coats fish lash'. The pamphlet, published by Thomas Allan, is beautifully illustrated with drawings of building and monuments in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

ADVERTISING AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Within the pamphlets themselves there are adverts, which surely have additional interest for ephemerists. What was being advertised? In one pamphlet there are adverts for typewriters for purchase or hire, elastic stockings to cure varicose veins, pills to cure headaches and constipation, boots, and a folding bath cabinet that allowed home steamed baths. These baths were advertised as a cure for flu, colds, pneumonia, gout and nervous diseases. Some of the railway pamphlets had adverts for coffee houses, wine and beer, and of course for the railway company itself, as providing the best route between destinations. Advertising must have helped the financing of pamphlets. For instance one pamphlet entitled *Mr Gladstone in Scotland: a report on the Mid Lothian campaign* contained numerous adverts for M'Cræ's silk hats – 'the best, competition defied', an advert for the Cockburn Hotel near Waverley Station in Edinburgh which had a 'situation for business or pleasure unrivalled' and added 'no intoxicating drink – tariff on application' [2–3]. It also contained adverts for 'unrivalled' Scotch shortbread, buns and cakes. The pamphlet was published by the *Scottish Leader* and sold for six pence.



Compared to popular publications in this day and age, nineteenth-century pamphlets are not in the main very visual – they are quite solid text. When illustrations were used they were mainly wood engravings, with some photographic images towards the end of the century [4]. Some of the best illustrations are in the transport pamphlets which have sketches of trains and landscapes. Many of the transport pamphlets are held in the LSE Library, donated by a lecturer in the early twentieth century, and been included in the JSTOR project. The timetables of railway companies are in this collection, giving illuminating comparisons with travelling times today. There are also excursion brochures published by the railway companies to encourage travel for pleasure. Amongst the transport pamphlets there are souvenirs to commemorate the opening of railway lines. One of these is the *Illustrated description of the Great Central Railway, prepared in connection with the inaugural opening of the new extension line to London, on March 9th, 1899, by the Right Hon. C. T. Ritchie, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.*

You can also find the odd travel guide – for instance *The Richmond and Hampton-Court Guide*, published for travelers by rail and coach [5].

Although nineteenth-century pamphlets are described as ephemera, by today's standards many were fairly substantial. Leaflets such as those published by the Liberal Party are one page sheets but the average length of a pamphlet is around 20–30 pages and also included in the collection are some 50–100 page documents – part of the Foreign and Commonwealth pamphlets, held in their original format at John Rylands University Library in Manchester. There is for instance a 70-page document on the supply of cotton from the Ottoman Empire.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY POLITICS

What were the political issues of the nineteenth century? It is interesting (and perhaps depressing) that they were not unlike today. There are many pamphlets on home rule for Ireland and the political schisms that this caused, free trade and protection, temperance, and aspects of social policy – how to deal with poverty, unemployment, and old age, under what existed in the nineteenth century – the Poor Law, which predated the welfare state. There are also many pamphlets on the banks and causes of banking crises, which occurred frequently in the nineteenth century. So these pamphlets

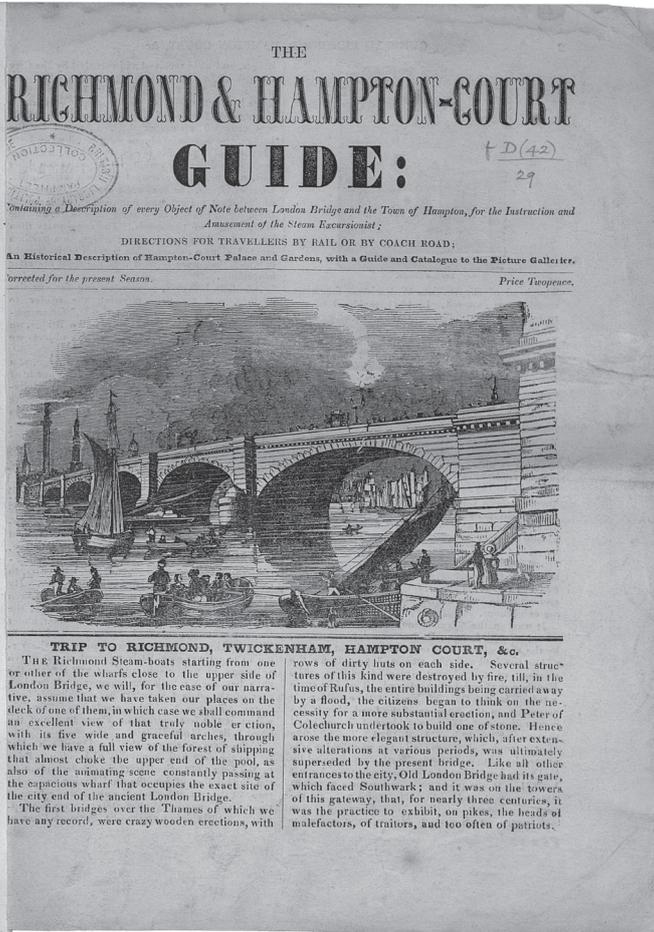
HOW TO FIND THESE PAMPHLETS AND USE THEM AS A HISTORICAL RESOURCE

Collections of this material, held in university libraries for decades, have been very difficult to find. It was not until the late 1990s that this material started getting records on computerized library catalogues, available on the internet. It became possible to find locations for these pamphlets by keyword searching. Previously, where authors and publishers were uncertain, browsing through a card catalogue would not have been an option. Funding from the Higher Education Funding Council made available catalogue records for 200,000 nineteenth-century pamphlets in the major research libraries in the UK. Digitization of 25,000 of these was funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee along with other key digitization projects in 2006. Pamphlets can be accessed from JSTOR, which is free to educational institutions in the UK. The collections from seven research libraries can be searched by subject and author with links to the full text. This has made this material fully accessible to researchers for the first time.

The content of these pamphlets can be searched across the whole text, not just by title. This adds to their usefulness. For instance you can key in a name and topic, and this will produce not just whole pamphlets but pages from the pamphlets. The collection can be used as a source for local history – try keying in the name of your town and you may find references to local government, schools, Poor Law Union, workhouse, or even mental asylum. Your local public library, is entitled to free access to these pamphlets, so get them to contact JSTOR for a password. Visit the website – <http://www.britishpamphlets.org.uk/> – for more information.

The availability of catalogue records and digitization has led to a remarkable increase in the use of the pamphlets. The JSTOR collection receives thousands of hits and is available world-wide on the internet. It is possible to view the most popular pamphlets in each of the seven research libraries collections. Currently the highest hits are for pamphlets on prohibition and the opium trade, but otherwise usage reflects the diverse subject range of this collection. For researchers and students in schools and universities the availability of nineteenth-century pamphlets online has opened up new avenues of research and discovery of historical material.

Barbara Humphries is an academic support librarian at LSE Library and a member of the Project Management Group for the RLUK nineteenth century pamphlets project



are not just of historical interest – they also have relevance to contemporary society.

Who published them? Many were published by individuals who wished to give their speeches an airing to all and sundry. They were published by political parties. In the nineteenth century this meant the Conservatives and the Liberals, but also the precursors of the Labour Party, such as the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation. There were also a number of campaigning bodies that published pamphlets – indicative of nineteenth-century life was the Society for Superseding the Necessity of Climbing Boys. There were many women's suffrage organizations, for instance, the London and National Society for Women's Service, which published accounts of women's suffrage meetings. Other causes of the nineteenth century such as opposition to the slave trade and home rule for Ireland led to a plethora of societies, which published campaigning material in pamphlet form.