

# The Horse in Victorian Culture



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# Horses were Ubiquitous



A typical working day in Oxford Street at the end of the 19th century, looking east, with New Bond Street off to the right. We can see omnibuses, hansom cabs, and delivery carts.

(Stone)

# The Different Types of Horses in Victorian England

- Carriage horses
  - For the wealthy
    - Kept their own or hired vehicles and drivers
    - The beauty of the horse was a status symbol
      - Grey horses for weddings, black horses for funerals, etc.
  - Major horse owners bought almost all their horses first-hand, usually at five years old. When their horses became lame or lost their strength, they were sold, generally at auction (Turvey)
  - Duchess's advice to young Beauty: "I hope you will grow up to be gentle and good, and never learn bad ways; do your work with a good will, lift your feet up well when you trot, and never bite or kick even in play" (Sewell 14).
- Cab horses
  - Usually owned by the driver
  - Not always taken care of
  - Healthier horses got better tips

# The Different Types of Horses in Victorian England

- Omnibus and tram horses
  - Had to be strong, but did not have to be handsome.
  - Formed a major proportion of omnibus company assets, and were treated accordingly (Turvey)
- Cart horses/transport horses
  - Usually larger - Clydesdales and Shires
  - 1862 - City of London opened Smithfield Meat Market
    - Transport between the Caledonian Market and Smithfield, and from there to individual butchers,
    - Horse-drawn carts and, eventually, trains (Stone)



“The experience of the horse was both persistently visible and invisible (especially as pain is invisible): seen and felt, and yet ultimately inaccessible. Empathy requires the embrace of all of these binaries in accordance with the struggle to represent the possibility of the interior life. Victorians were encouraged to try to understand what they could never really know by the movement away from a strict empiricism based exclusively upon data gathered by the senses, toward an epistemology more accepting of the role of the imagination in the production of knowledge, even (and perhaps especially) in science. Unbridled by the behaviorism that would encourage the dismissal of anecdotal evidence as sentimental folly for the greater part of the next century, Victorians took seriously the attempt to express the inexpressible as a means of encouraging others to consider what steps might be taken to ameliorate suffering” (Miele 138).

# The Influence of the Horse on Victorian Culture

- Animal Rights
  - “A horse was regarded by many as no different from any inanimate piece of capital equipment” (Tuvey 41)
  - Activists critiqued the practices primarily of drivers over owners - more visible (Miele 134)
  - The bearing rein
    - Elevated the horse’s head
    - Painful
    - Many opposed (Miele 139)
  - Punishment from drivers - shame and pain - vocal pitch (Miele 132).
- Horses and People
  - Bearing rein - Victorian fashion
    - The corset
  - 1885 - The Cart Horse Parade was established (Stone)

# Works Cited

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