



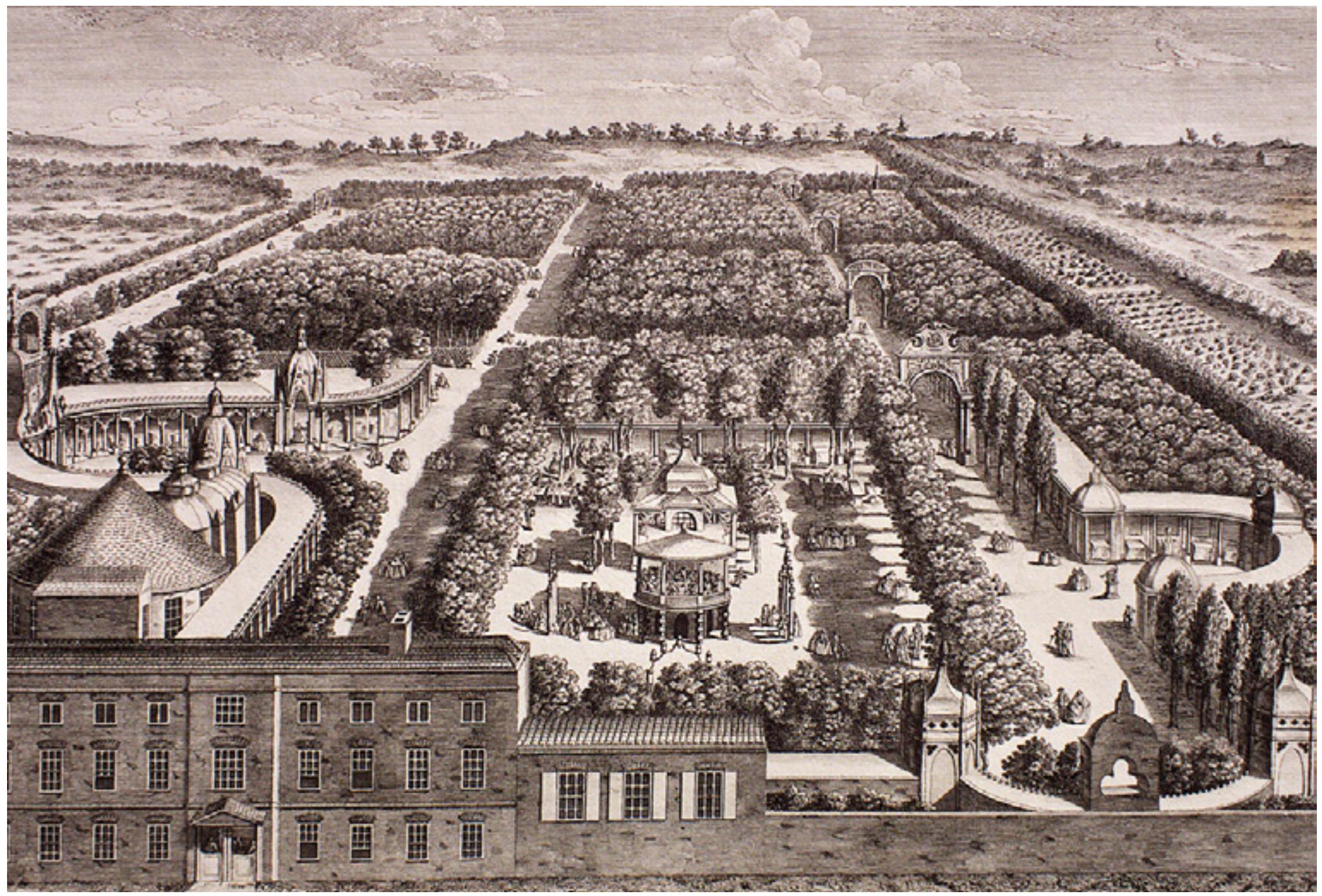
VAUXHALL'S ILLUSTRIOUS PAST

A CONDENSED HISTORY OF
THE FAMOUS VAUXHALL
PLEASURE GARDENS

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Vauxhall
LONDON





WELCOME TO VAUXHALL

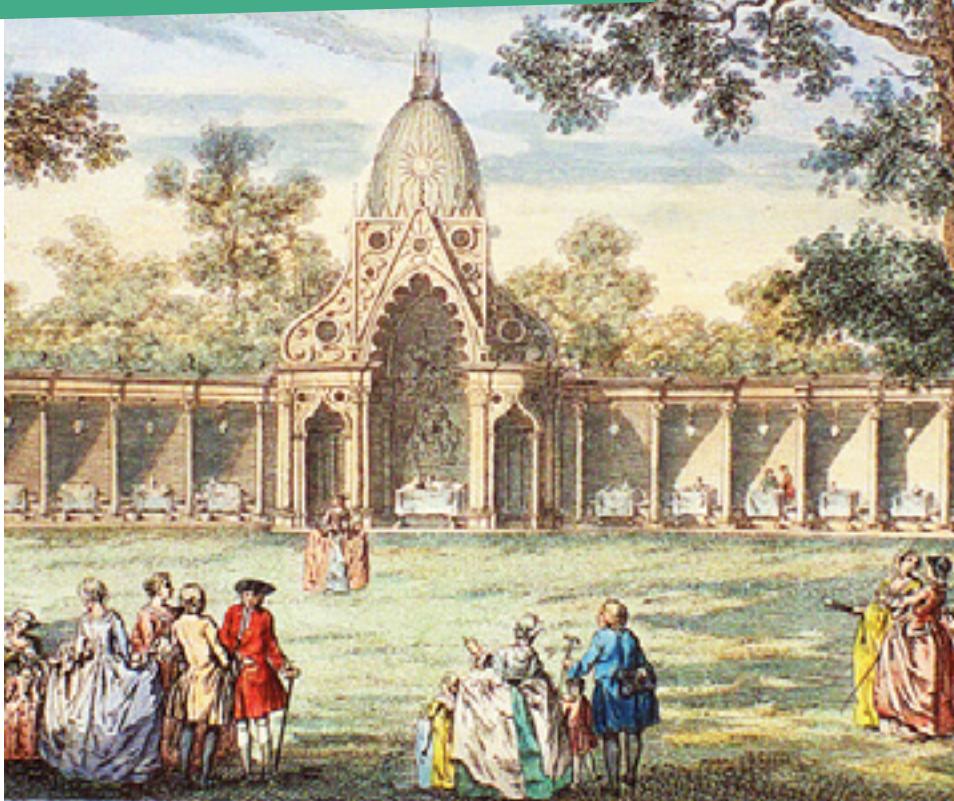
VAUXHALL IS A PLACE WITH AN INTRIGUING SOCIAL HISTORY AND DIVERSE COMMUNITIES.

In the 1700s the area was renowned across Europe for its culture, fashion and entertainment. Visitors would come to indulge their senses, to enjoy operas and orchestras, be wowed by acrobats, performers and fireworks while quaffing champagne or glugging ales.

Today, Vauxhall still has a unique spirit with its offbeat mix of things to do and people to meet. It is still a place to enjoy yourself, whatever you're into. Bouldering, gyms and crossfit. Craft beer, a gallery district, independent eateries and gastro pubs. Theatre, drag and electronic music. Green spaces and a city farm. Late nights, early mornings, weekdays or weekends; there's always something happening.



THE VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS; THE BIRTHPLACE OF OUTDOOR ENTERTAINMENT



Stroll through the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens now and you'll be treated to a tranquil city retreat with wide-open green spaces, basketball courts and a city farm.

But travel back to the 18th or 19th century, and you would find a huge cast of characters made up of dancers, singers, musicians, orchestras and artists that seduced the crowds nightly during the season. Handel was a big star at the Gardens, they were frequented by royalty, Canaletto painted them and Samuel Pepys was a fan. Famous for their fireworks displays and innovations in outdoor lighting, they were also hung with paintings by Hogarth and Hayman.

The impressive buildings were first Palladian and then Gothic.

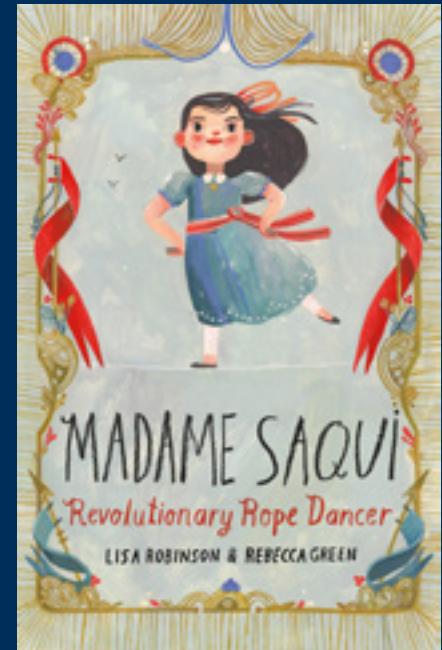
Among the many things that made the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens so lively was their openness to people of all ages, backgrounds and classes. High society would mix with commoners, families would attend with young children in tow, and London's prostitutes would scour for wealthy customers. These were the early days of leisure time and people travelled from afar to get a taste of this entirely new entertainment concept, rooted in pleasure-seeking. But it was the performers that became the soul of the Pleasure Gardens, and their legend lives on today.



WHO WERE THE CHARACTERS OF THE GARDENS' HEYDAY?

18TH AND 19TH CENTURY VAUXHALL HELPED MANY ECCENTRIC CHARACTERS BECOME FAMOUS, PLENTY OF WHOM ARE STILL KNOWN TODAY, HAVING BEEN IMMORTALISED IN COUNTLESS WORKS OF ART AND LITERATURE.

Depictions of C.H. Simpson, the Gardens' Master of Ceremonies, can be found in the British Museum, an oil painting of Isaac Van Amburgh commissioned by Queen Victoria lives in the Royal Collection Trust, while tightrope dancer Madame Saqui even has a children's book dedicated to her. But the character who has travelled to almost every corner of the globe is C.H. Simpson himself; a depiction of him inspired the iconic Johnnie Walker brand character developed in the 1930s.



Royal Collection Trust © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020

JONATHAN TYERS

The Pleasure Gardens would never have existed without the dedication and vision of young Jonathan Tyers, who received the sublet from the Duchy estate in 1729. Believed to have suffered from an undiagnosed psychological imbalance, it was his idealistic exhilaration mixed with depressive melancholy that saw him determined to bring entertainment to the masses. He was unable to accept that only the aristocratic and wealthy should have access to pleasure and culture.



MEET THE CHARACTERS



For C.H. Simpson, his role as the Gardens' Master of Ceremonies was more than just a job — for 34 years it was an entire way of life. He was famously dignified and instantly recognisable by his costume of black knee-high breeches, tailcoat and top hat. Whether bowing deeply to newcomers at the gates, tipping his brim to lords and ladies, or coolly expelling hooligans, this gentleman was always in character.



MEET THE CHARACTERS

MADAME SAQUI

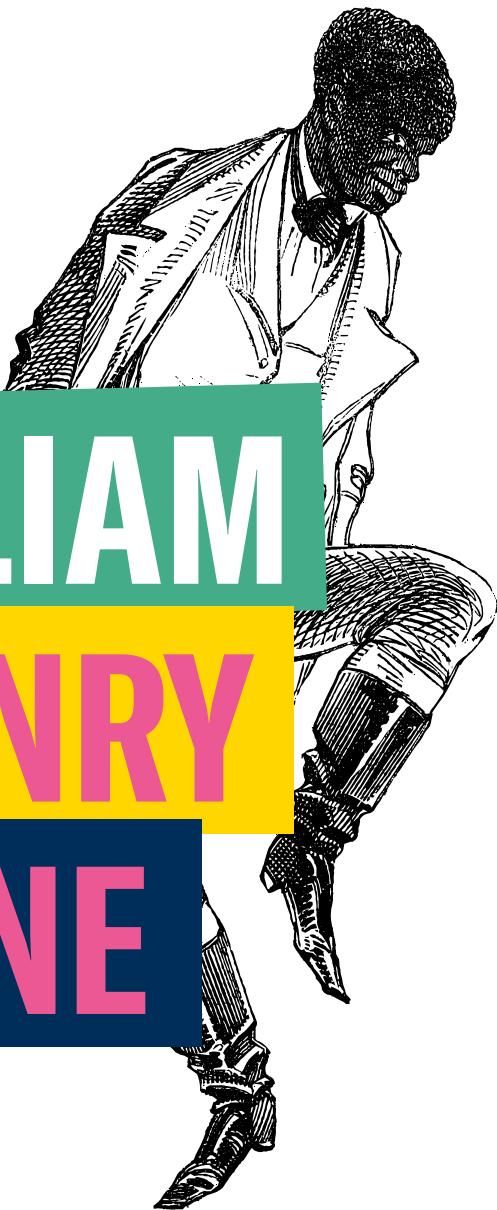


The legendary Madame Saqui was most often seen balancing precariously far above the heads of admiring crowds, demonstrating her mastery of the tightrope. She performed her celebrated 'rope dance' at the Pleasure Gardens, and continued to dazzle audiences with her circus talents until well into her seventies.



© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

WILLIAM HENRY LANE



William Henry Lane danced his way to international fame and is credited as the father of modern tap dancing. At a time when ethnic minorities were not permitted to perform, Lane got the top billing at an otherwise all-white minstrel company. In 1848, he performed at the Pleasure Gardens to great acclaim and then before Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace.





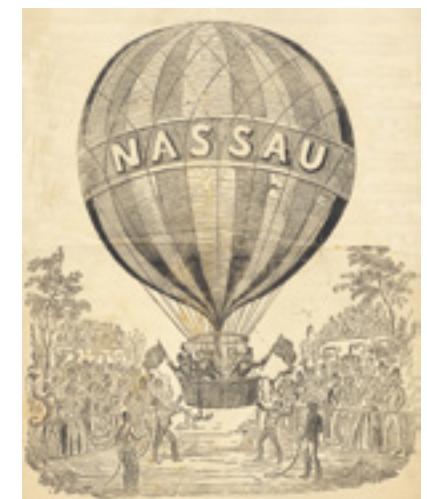
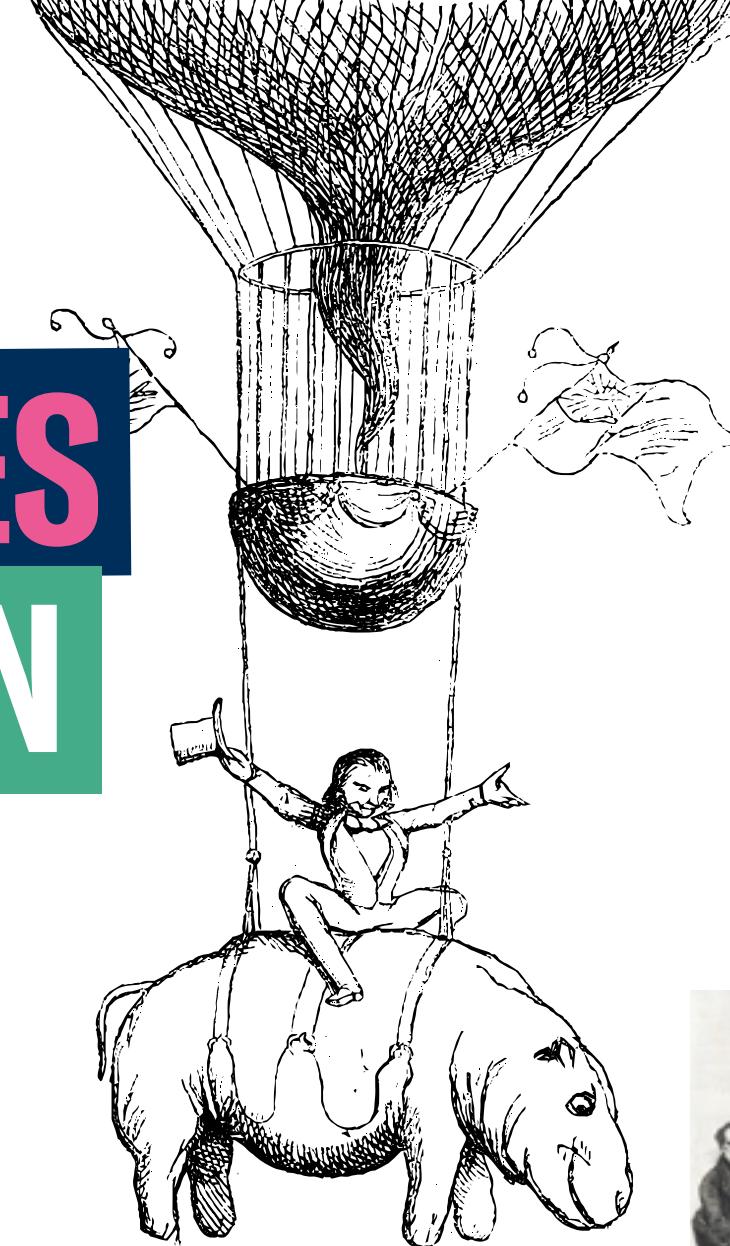
MADEMOISELLE CAROLINE

One of the greatest women in Vauxhall's history, famously graceful equestrienne Mademoiselle Caroline was an extraordinary horse trainer, celebrated across Europe for her talent. She specialised in coercing her horses into complete obedience, getting them to rear up delicately on their hind legs and even training them to pirouette with her in a waltz.



CHARLES GREEN

World-famous balloonist Charles Green is one of history's most remarkable aeronauts. Not only did he break a world record in 1836 by completing a 480-mile flight from Vauxhall Gardens to Weilburg, Germany — he was also known for his somewhat 'unusual' passengers. Animal welfare standards were not what they are today; after wowing crowds by ascending with a horse, and later a hippo, he announced he would take off with a Bengal tiger. The event was cancelled at the last minute because magistrates were worried for the crowd's safety should the tiger escape. He crossed the Atlantic and made more than 500 flights by the time he died in 1852.



ISAAC VAN AMBURGH



Animal trainer extraordinaire Isaac Van Amburgh performed at Vauxhall Gardens in 1848. He was one of the first lion tamers to ever place their bare arms — and head — inside the jaws of a wild cat. Van Amburgh and his troupe travelled across Europe and Queen Victoria was a notable fan. To this day, his legacy lives on in the circus world.



I. A. VAN AMBURGH.



ROBERT COCKING



Watercolourist Robert Cocking was in the crowd at England's first-ever parachute jump and he was inspired to devise his own parachute concept. He approached balloonist Charles Green to help him test it. Tragically, things didn't go according to plan — Cocking died on his debut attempt. He landed at the Tiger's Head pub on Lee Green where the enterprising landlord charged punters sixpence a go to see Cocking's mangled body.

A VERY POTTED HISTORY

FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS, VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS MEANT FASHION, MODERNITY AND THE CUTTING EDGE. FROM ITS DAZZLING DISPLAY OF UNIQUE OUTDOOR LIGHTING TO PREMIERES OF HANDEL'S NEWEST COMPOSITIONS AND THE UNVEILING OF LONDON'S FIRST IRON BRIDGE OVER THE THAMES, IT WAS A TRULY EXCITING PLACE.







FALKES DE BREAUTÉ SETTLES AT FALKES HALL

King John rewards his loyal soldier Falkes de Breauté with the hand of Margaret de Redvers. Falkes does particularly well out of this marriage - he gains swathes of land that include what is now known as Vauxhall (or 'Falkes Hall').

1216



JONATHAN TYERS TAKES THE REIGNS

Pioneer Jonathan Tyers becomes the visionary founder and promoter of the Pleasure Gardens, establishing their reputation across Europe. The Gardens are set to become one of the most profitable business ventures of 18th century Britain.

1729

1661



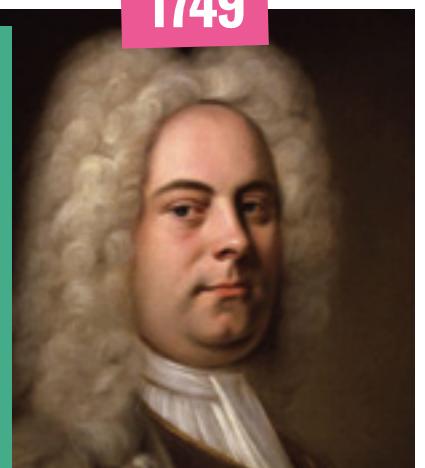
THE GARDENS OPEN AS 'NEW SPRING GARDENS'

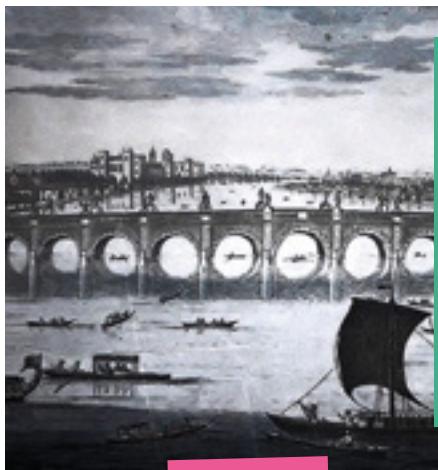
Public entertainment is once again fashionable under Charles II and the 'New Spring Gardens' open in Vauxhall. Samuel Pepys is one of the earliest visitors to record his visit and describes its charms the following year.

HANDEL PERFORMS TO 12,000 AND A NUDE DUCHESS CAUSES SCANDAL

Famed composer George Frideric Handel rehearses his music for the Royal Fireworks to a crowd of 12,000. In the same year, aristocrat Elizabeth Chudleigh arrives at a masked ball in costume as the classical figure Iphigenia, practically naked. Polite society is shocked.

1749





1750

WESTMINSTER BRIDGE OPENS

Westminster Bridge opens, delivering even more crowds to the Pleasure Gardens. Until then most visitors arrived by water on boats from Westminster or Whitehall. Vauxhall could now be accessed by road, and on the most popular nights, traffic jams were common.



1836

CHARLES GREEN MAKES AEROSPACE HISTORY

Charles Green sets a major long-distance record in his hot air balloon, the Royal Vauxhall. The 480-mile journey from the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens in London to Weilburg Duchy of Nassau takes 18 hours.

THE OPENING OF VAUXHALL BRIDGE AND VAUXHALL BRIDGE ROAD

London's first iron bridge opens and its name is quickly changed from Regent's Bridge to Vauxhall Bridge to reflect the popularity of the Pleasure Gardens. Tyers spots a unique business opportunity, using the bridge to advertise the convenience of its 24-hour accessibility for late-night revellers.



1816

THE FINAL CURTAIN FOR THE VAUXHALL PLEASURE GARDENS

Fans are invited to one last hurrah in the Gardens, as dwindling interest and the proprietor's bankruptcy leads to an announcement that the Gardens will "positively close forever". After a series of farewell concerts and a closing ceremony attended by 15,000, the doors shut for the last time on the 25th July 1859.



1859

THE SPIRIT OF VAUXHALL'S EXTRAORDINARY PAST LIVES ON IN MANY WAYS. THE GARDENS THEMSELVES ARE STILL A PLACE TO COME TOGETHER FOR RELAXATION AND ENJOYMENT WITH A PROGRAMME OF EVENTS IN THE SUMMER.

The area is known for its underground club and music scene, entertaining thousands every weekend and showcasing many alternative artists. LGBTQI+ nightlife and performance thrive and there's an array of art galleries all within walking distance of each other. There's a proud local community, and of course, it remains a welcoming place for people of all backgrounds and walks of life.

The Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens are often credited as the birthplace of large-scale outdoor entertainment and they were copied widely, all over the world.

If you'd like to celebrate the history of the Pleasure Gardens, get a date in your diary for the next Victorian Vauxhall event.

It's free to attend and should conjure up a hint of what it must have been like for the revellers who, all those years ago, disembarked on Vauxhall Embankment to indulge in pleasure-seeking at the legendary Pleasure Gardens.

Visit BEINVAUXHALL.COM for more information and to find out about everything else that's going on in Vauxhall.

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