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# 'The Immortal Periodical': *Punch* in the Nineteenth Century

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Various source media, *Punch* Historical Archive 1841-1992



## Introduction

In the long and lively history of publishing, there has never been anything quite like *Punch*. With its eclectic mix of jokes, puns, parodies, cartoons and social and political commentary, the threepenny weekly quickly insinuated itself into the texture and rhythm of British middle-class life. *Punch* was not yet three years old when one writer hailed its 'permanent existence and extensive success', and in 1858 a writer in the *Atlantic Monthly* called it 'an institution and power of the age, no more to be overlooked among the forces of the nineteenth century than is the steam-engine or the magnetic telegraph'. Having acquired the *Punch* habit in the 1840s, the British reading public clung to that habit for generations. So much a part of the cultural landscape had *Punch* become that forty years later John Ruskin called it, simply, 'the immortal periodical', while American dramatist Brander Matthews declared, '*Punch* is not a mere comic weekly; it is a British institution as solidly established as The London Times or the Bank of England or the Established Church or the Crown itself. ...It has been accepted as an integral and essential part of the British constitution'. To explore the back files of *Punch* is to listen in on a unique kind of national conversation taking place week after week for over 150 years, a conversation shaped equally by events and by the changing contingent of editors, writers, artists, engravers and proprietors whose tastes and abilities went to make up each weekly issue.

Yet in London in the summer of 1841, the prospects for a new comic magazine looked very uncertain. The idea of a cheap comic paper built around wood-engravings, and modelled on popular Parisian papers, had been circulating all through the 1830s, and lots of them had

come and gone. The most successful of these, the penny weekly *Figaro* in London, had folded a couple of years before, and nothing since had caught the public fancy. Not that there was any shortage of available talent. Scores of young artists and writers haunted Fleet Street, most of them living hand to mouth, contributing to this or that paper or pamphlet or theatre as the opportunity arose, meeting one another in taverns between commissions, and keeping a lookout for paid work. [1]

## Beginnings

It was in this bibulous and convivial, yet intensely competitive atmosphere, in the dense warren of streets adjoining the Strand, that *Punch* was born. Innovative engraver Ebenezer Landells, determined to succeed where *Figaro* in London had failed, enlisted the aid of printer Joseph Last as well as that of a man who would prove to be one of the most remarkable and versatile literary journalists who has ever lived: Henry Mayhew. Mayhew, for his part, at once consulted his friend Mark Lemon, who was then writing short pieces for the stage while presiding over the Shakespeare's Head tavern in Wych Street. With Lemon's help, a preliminary staff was assembled that included writers Douglas Jerrold, Gilbert Abbot à Beckett, Stirling Coyne, W. H. Wills and artist Archibald Henning. At a series of meetings in Landell's house and in such taverns as the "Edinburgh Castle" in the Strand and the "Crown Inn" in Vinegar Yard, the name "*Punch*" was settled upon, a prospectus was drawn up, and the financial details were worked out. Unable to find a publisher willing to serve as proprietor—the traditional model for starting a periodical—the original projectors decided to share the costs and profits among them. Mayhew, Lemon and

Coyne were to share the editorial responsibilities in exchange for a one-third share of the enterprise; Landells, with another third, was to engrave all the woodcuts; and Last, also a third-part proprietor, would print the magazine at his premises in Crane Court. In effect, therefore, the magazine was to dispense with a single proprietor and instead be a collective effort in which all would share.

In the weeks before *Punch* made its debut the projectors spent lavishly on advertising, including 100,000 copies of the prospectus and 6,000 handbills. On July 17, 1841, the first issue appeared, and over the following weeks *Punch* began to make its way toward a modest degree of public recognition, but at a high and growing cost. The initial flurry of interest quickly receded and, as month followed month, sales sagged. By September, with debts mounting, Joseph Last, the printer, wanted out of the enterprise altogether. Landells acquired Last's share, giving him ownership of two-thirds of the magazine. That autumn, Mayhew and his friend H. P. Grattan (at that time imprisoned for debt), plunged into the work of creating a *Punch* Almanack. Coming out just in time for the Christmas season, it proved a runaway success, selling some 90,000 copies in one week. By the end of the year, through an agreement guaranteeing the *Punch* printing account to the firm in exchange for a loan of £150, the firm of William Bradbury and Frederick Evans became *Punch*'s exclusive printers, a fact first announced in the January, 1842 number that began Volume Two.

### New proprietors: Bradbury & Evans

Bradbury & Evans would have seemed a natural choice as permanent replacement for Joseph Last as printers, and ultimately as co-proprietors as well. No other printing business in London had so deliberately and successfully combined two elements that would be necessary for a successful comic journal, elements that had long been assumed to be incompatible: extensive woodblock illustration and high volume, high speed production. This was crucial. In addition to their long experience at printing illustrated serials such as Paxton's Magazine of Botany, they had also been associated with the Comic Annual. Perhaps most importantly, they had been the printers for Chapman and Hall's innovative and highly successful experiments with Charles Dickens's illustrated monthly serials, beginning with the spectacular sales of *Pickwick Papers* in 1836-37 and continuing with *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39). By December of 1841 they had just completed the demanding task of printing a weekly serial (*Master Humphrey's Clock*) identical in price and format to what *Punch* would require—a sixteen-page, threepenny weekly, lavishly supplied with woodcuts—and in considerably greater quantities. The new printers, combined with the success of the Almanack, made it possible to cut back on the pages of advertisements to make room for more, and better, woodcut illustrations.

But neither the Almanack's success nor *Punch*'s change in printers served to address two problems that had afflicted the magazine from the outset: a lack of capital and a lack of effective distribution. As the financial situation worsened—a situation signalled by the scarcity of expensive full-page cartoons in the second

half of 1842-Landells sought, without success, to persuade other contributors, such as artist H. G. Hine, to purchase shares in the paper. The older *Punch* men retained a vivid memory from this period of Gilbert à Beckett leaning out of the window of the editorial office and roaring to passersby, "We must have cash!" This same downward spiral had spelled the early demise of many periodicals of the time: a circulation too small to cover costs, leading to a debt burden that placed speculative expansion of the print run, with the hope of achieving a sustaining level of circulation, further and further out of reach. At some point in the first months of 1842, Lemon and Douglas Jerrold again sought out Bradbury and Evans, this time to offer to sell them the editors' one-third share in *Punch*. Ebenezer Landells, without whom *Punch* would never have begun, violently opposed any such transfer, and threatened legal action. After a protracted series of negotiations that stretched from April to December of that year, Landells sold the remaining shares to the firm for £350, a figure representing little more than the magazine's debts. Landells himself, who originally retained the business of engraving all of *Punch's* woodcuts, was soon squeezed out altogether, and Bradbury and Evans, with their extraordinary resources, assumed complete control.

### Hitting Its Stride

Within two or three years, the magazine had arrived at a winning formula that it would retain, through various refinements, well into the twentieth century. As scholar Richard Altick has observed, *Punch* succeeded at first not because of what it was, but because of what it was not. Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, London's satirical papers had an unsavoury reputation for extreme

political partisanship, open obscenity, salacious scandal and gross personal attacks on well-known individuals; such papers as Barnard Gregory's *The Satirist*, Charles Malloy Westmacott's *The Age*, and Renton Nicholson's *The Town* were particularly notorious, and also associated with blackmail. In the eyes of the early Victorians, *Punch's* great accomplishment was to offer wholesome comicalities, leavened with satirical commentary, that could safely be read and passed around within the family circle of even the most fastidious household. Indeed, in sharp contrast to the scandal sheets, much of that humour was itself drawn from a domestic setting, featuring wives, husbands, children and servants; even the political cartoons frequently represented public figures as children, at school or on the street or in the nursery. One of the earliest reviews of the magazine, in *The Times*, noted approvingly 'the total exclusion from its pages of all that is gross, low, or coarsely personal', and such approval was a constant refrain in testimonials to the magazine over the years. Much of this tasteful restraint would come to be attributed to the careful oversight of Mark Lemon, who as co-founder and co-editor (with Henry Mayhew) and then sole editor from 1845 until his death in 1870, was renowned for keeping a strict eye upon the contents.

Equally characteristic was the magazine's intensive pursuit of up-to-the-minute topicality. The *Punch* staff ransacked classical mythology, current novels and poems, talked-about paintings, popular catch-phrases, advertising, folk customs, gossip, fashions and the periodical's own back issues for comic parallels to people and events in the news. John Leech's funny captioned illustrations, drawn from the myriad of

'types' inhabiting the passing London scene, proved wildly popular. Douglas Jerrold, the best-known writer on the early staff, brought a keen intelligence and biting wit to relentless radical critiques of such figures as the hard-hearted Poor Law commissioner, the game-preserving landowner, and the tyrannical sweatshop manager. The writers for *Punch* introduced for the first time into satirical magazines the comic series, a vastly popular and widely imitated feature of the magazine. Douglas Jerrold's 'Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures' (January to November, 1845), which portrayed a meek husband enduring his wife's nightly criticism, and W. M. Thackeray's 'Snobs of England' (February 1846 to February 1847), which introduced the word 'snob' to the language, were such runaway hits that their portrayals became as much a part of the mid-Victorian mental universe as the popular characters of Dickens's novels. This phenomenon, in which an artist's or writer's creation would, through the sheer vividness of its comedy, come to colonise the imaginations of countless readers, happened again and again over the decades. *Punch's* full-page political cartoon, or 'Large Cut' [2] (as it was known within the magazine), drawn most often by Leech in the early years and later by John Tenniel, likewise refashioned political iconography for an age grown wary of the sexual and scatological grossness of an earlier tradition of political caricature. Time and again, a Large Cut so vividly captured an event (the Indian Mutiny, the Second Reform Bill, the fall of Paris, the retirement of Bismarck) that the image has remained indelibly associated with that event forever after. Often keyed to a topic raised by a Times editorial or article for that week, *Punch's* Large Cut intensified, extended and shared in a complex reflective and enabling relationship between the nation's most powerful and influential newspaper and the

conversational lives of the Victorian middle classes. The magazine's organising conceit, which accorded the traditional figure of 'Mister Punch' -from the perennial 'Punch and Judy' shows-the role of *Punch's* conductor, author and representative, proved a stroke of genius, drawing upon many readers' nostalgia and affection for a popular folk icon that was still delighting children and adults alike in London's streets. So powerful has that conceit remained that many readers ever since have continued to think and write of the magazine as having been the creation of an ageless 'Mister Punch', a habit encouraged by the long-held custom of anonymous authorship in the British periodical press. Much of that anonymity was transparent to contemporary readers, however- Jerrold's authorship of 'Caudle', for instance, was an open secret-and we can now understand a great more about the material we encounter in our explorations of the magazine owing to the splendid recent efforts that have opened up *Punch's* own records for study, and thereby unveiled the details of each writer's contributions [3].

The shift to single proprietorship at the end of 1842 marked the turning-point in the young magazine's prospects and in the evolution of an internal culture in which the weekly dinner meeting assumed even greater importance. The new owners did two things that profoundly changed the nature of the meeting: limiting it to staff members alone, and moving it to their business premises. Familiar with the idea of retaining specially skilled workers in their printing works, Bradbury and Evans fully supported the notion of a small staff of contributors, retained on a weekly salary, in preference to relying largely on outside contributions. The weekly meeting, like the staff itself,

became an exclusive affair, a catered dinner attended by invitation only and hosted by the proprietors themselves in their premises in Bouverie Street, where the *Punch* staff gathered around an oval deal table that would soon become legendary as "The *Punch* Table," in which contributors carved their initials. Attendance became both a privilege and a responsibility, one that over time and with the growth of *Punch* to the status of a national institution enormously increased the staff's sense of itself as a select group with a shared mission—in short, a literary brotherhood. Before long the meeting was moved from Saturdays (publishing day) to Wednesday evenings, and its purpose narrowed to a discussion settling the subject, form and legend for the Large Cut, the full-page political cartoon that had become the magazine's most influential weekly feature.

### The Founding Generation

The staff itself was streamlined over the next few years, as well. Stirling Coyne was one of the first to go; having proved of little use either as co-editor or as contributor, he was summarily discharged when Lemon found that he had plagiarised a contribution from a Dublin paper. Another early casualty was Albert Smith, a friend of John Leech (and, like him, a former medical student) who had contributed such popular series as 'The Physiology of Evening Parties' during *Punch*'s first two years and was generally regarded outside the magazine as an up-and-coming young writer. Smith had an outgoing, informal manner that many people found appealing but that struck others as bumptious and vulgar. Jerrold, who could not abide Smith, made him the constant butt of derogatory jokes, but it may have been his attachment to the magazine's freewheeling early days that roused Lemon's ire: specifically, Smith's

habit of showing his *Punch* proofs to all and sundry at the Cheshire Cheese pub. Other contributors were dismissed or left to work at other papers or projects during this period, including artists H. G. Hine, Archibald Henning, Kenny Meadows and writer W. H. Wills.

A more significant loss was **Henry Mayhew**—the originator, with Landells, of the whole enterprise—whose passion and inventiveness had played such a key role in keeping the magazine lively in its first few years. As co-editor with Lemon, Mayhew's strength lay in coming up with ideas for others to execute, particularly for the innumerable small woodcuts that went to make up each number. Mayhew himself described his role at *Punch* some years later as that of 'suggesting or pointing out to the Contributors and Artists the subjects for treatment in the next week's number'. The record of the Large Cut suggestions that survives from this period appears to back up this claim. Essentially a monologist, Mayhew, as one observer recalled, 'would talk like a book on any subject for hours together...[and] sit up till any hour as long as anyone would stay and listen to him'. As Mayhew did not himself do much in the way of writing for the magazine—from this time forward, members of the staff who excelled at being 'suggestors' also contributed a substantial portion of writing—his suggestive flow of talk may also have seemed to the proprietors dearly bought at an editor's salary of £200 a year. Mayhew's later career would include the pioneering survey, *London Labour and the London Poor*, in which he memorably chronicled the forgotten working poor of London in books that historians consult to this day.

With Mayhew's departure in April of 1846, Mark Lemon remained as sole editor, overseeing a staff whose contributions would enliven *Punch* for many years to come. At the centre of that staff was artist **John Leech**, whose work had quickly come to define the look and tone of the magazine. For many readers, Leech was *Punch*, his cartoons its chief glory; the magazine was simply inconceivable without him. Handsome, fastidious, highly-strung and hard-working, he boasted a comic gift for gentle ridicule of passing fads, fashions and foibles that was unmatched by any other artist of his time. Victorian readers adored Leech's drawings, and particularly the perennially wide-eyed "Leech girl," with an intensity that is difficult either to exaggerate or to recapture, while his *Punch* comrades felt an affectionate respect for him that would be undimmed by his growing irritability in later years. From his satirical drawings of the crinoline craze to his funny depictions of portly Mr. Briggs, the hapless sportsman, Leech reflected back to his readers a host of instantly recognisable details of London middle-class life that endeared him to them for the rest of their lives. The precocious artist Richard Doyle, not yet out of his teens when he came to work for *Punch* at the end of 1843, shared the main illustrative duties with Leech.

**Gilbert Abbott à Beckett**, a thirty-year-old barrister, had been one of the first writers asked by Lemon and Mayhew to join the fledgling magazine; they were mindful of his long experience as editor and writer with a succession of lively comic papers, the most successful having been *Figaro* in London in the early 1830s. After a brief absence during 1842, 'Gil' à Beckett returned to *Punch* and became by far the most reliably prolific contributor, turning out as many as one

hundred columns of prose and verse per half-yearly volume. A barrister who later became a Poor Law Commissioner and police magistrate, à Beckett brought his legal experience to bear in *The Comic Blackstone* as well as in recounting the adventures of 'Mr Briefless', a hapless barrister who became one of *Punch's* most popular recurring characters. A mild-mannered and rather shy man, he took an active part in the Large Cut discussions but otherwise left most of the talk to others.

**Horace Mayhew**, Henry's younger brother, acted as Lemon's sub-editor for a time, but for some reason this caused 'rows' and Lemon took over those duties himself, while Horace-nicknamed 'Ponny'-stayed on the staff as a miscellaneous contributor. After his brother's departure, Horace Mayhew was Jerrold's main political ally in *Punch's* early 'radical' support for improvement in the lot of workingmen.

Another early, and staunch, contributor was **Percival Leigh**. Nicknamed 'the Professor' because of his learning and his solemn, donnish manner, Leigh had become friends with Leech and Albert Smith when all three were young medical students at St Bartholomew's Hospital, and had collaborated with Leech on several comic pieces before they both became early recruits to the staff. A dab hand at versifying, and particularly at the mock-classical verses that were a staple feature of the 1840s *Punch*, Leigh had his greatest success with the brightly satirical parody of Samuel Pepys's diary accompanying artist Richard Doyle's delightful cartoons of 'Ye Manners and Customs of Ye English in 1849'. Perhaps the least well-known of

the *Punch* circle, in his own time and since, Leigh nevertheless proved a steady if unspectacular contributor to the magazine for decades and a valued authority and storyteller at the Table, on which he was the first of the staff to carve his initials.

**Tom Taylor** was called to the *Punch* Table after Henry Mayhew left, having served two years of apprenticeship as an outside contributor. A distinguished academic (he had held a Cambridge fellowship) Taylor was a versatile writer whose work for *Punch* was one of several careers that included those of barrister, civil servant, Times art critic, professor of English Literature and successful playwright. Briskly earnest and rather irascible, nominally a Liberal in politics but with a deep suspicion of any further widening of the suffrage, Taylor brought to the talk of the Table and to *Punch*'s pages a certain intellectual seriousness and the sense of responsibility of a government insider. He would end his days as editor of the magazine (1874-1880).

The most influential and powerful voice at the Table, and in the magazine, during these years belonged to **Douglas Jerrold**. Just as John Leech established the distinctive visual character and tone of *Punch*'s more harmless comicalities, Jerrold supplied its satirical edge and political seriousness. Renowned for his verbal quickness and caustic wit, he was accounted by all who knew him a formidable antagonist in conversation, and specimens of his wittily contemptuous insults directed at friends and foes alike circulated widely during his lifetime and for years after his death. The 'radical' politics of the early years of *Punch*, which mainly consisted of attacks on the rich and powerful in the

name of the poor at a time of widespread economic distress, were primarily a creation of Jerrold and Lemon. The latter insisted on publishing Thomas Hood's Song of the Shirt, a heart-wrenching protest against the exploitation of needlewomen, in December of 1843, creating a sensation throughout the country. Although he was the most powerful figure on *Punch* after its editor, Jerrold faced some stiff opposition. John Leech, to whose drawings the paper owed much of its popularity, was a vocal Tory who openly despised working people; many of his Large Cuts of the 1840s, with subjects and treatment suggested by Jerrold, must therefore have been drawn under fierce protest. Other staffers, including Albert Smith and à Beckett, felt that *Punch* should stick to jokes and forswear serious commentary on politics or current affairs.

But the strongest voice in opposition to Jerrold was the magazine's second most popular writer, **William Makepeace Thackeray**, the Cambridge-educated scion of a well-to-do Anglo-Indian family who had lost his fortune and turned to writing out of necessity in the 1830s, and who joined the staff after Smith's departure. Though sympathetic to radical politics in his youth, Thackeray's instinctive conservatism surfaced as he grew older and more successful, and combined with his competitive nature to make him a natural antagonist to what he considered Jerrold's undignified rabble-raising and irreverent sneering at authority. Ultimately, a changing political climate after the collapse of Chartism in 1848-49, the growing influence of Thackeray and his allies at *Punch*, and the lure of other projects such as the editorship of Lloyd's Weekly, attenuated the influence of Jerrold's style of overtly

radical politics at the magazine. Already by the end of 1846, in writing to his old friend, Charles Dickens, Jerrold complained of what he saw as *Punch's* new want of seriousness, its willingness to make a joke of anything: 'I am convinced', he wrote, 'that the world will get tired (at least I hope so) of this eternal guffaw at all things. After all life has something serious in it. It cannot be all a comic history of humanity'. By the mid 1850s, although he still wrote somewhat regularly for *Punch* and attended the dinners, the focus of his attentions had moved elsewhere.

The 1850s marked other sea-changes at the magazine. In 1850, Doyle resigned his position in protest against the magazine's fierce 'no-Popery' campaign of personal invective against Cardinal John Wiseman and Pope Pius IX, waged by Lemon, Jerrold and Leech - in opposition to Thackeray and Leigh - in reaction to the attempt to reinstate the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England. Charles Keene, one of the finest draughtsmen of the Victorian period, began his long career with *Punch* shortly thereafter, although he did not join the Table until 1860. A long anticipated blow was the loss of Thackeray. Already restive at *Punch* because of his clashes with Jerrold, Thackeray had enjoyed enormous success and worldwide fame with *Vanity Fair*. Continued success with *Pendennis* left Thackeray feeling constrained by the demands and low status of anonymous comic journalism and dissatisfied with its relatively meagre rate of pay. He had, he felt, outgrown *Punch*; as he later told Evans, 'I fancied myself too big to pull in the boat; and it wasn't in the nature of things that Lemon and Jerrold should like me'. Thackeray continued to drop by the weekly dinners from time to time, however, and so remained in close

contact with members of the *Punch* circle, who prided themselves on their association with such a widely acclaimed writer.

The most important result of Thackeray's defection was his replacement: **Shirley Brooks**, whom historian Marion Spielmann would later call 'perhaps the most brilliant and useful all-round man who ever wrote for *Punch*'. A veteran journalist who had done both travel and Parliamentary reporting for the *Morning Chronicle* during the heyday of its influence in the 1840s, Brooks had moved into comic writing as a mainstay of *The Man in the Moon*, a monthly begun by ex-staffer Albert Smith in explicit competition with *Punch*. Lemon so admired Brooks's clever, good-natured abuse at *Punch's* expense that he was soon recruited as a contributor, and in 1852 joined the staff. Brooks's conservative politics, outstanding abilities and aggressive conversational style would in time make a significant change in the oral culture of the *Punch* Table, an arena that he would come to dominate almost as completely as Jerrold had done years before. Many of the most famous Large Cuts that appeared at this period originated from Shirley Brooks's suggestions, while his series, *Essence of Parliament*, pioneered an astringently witty approach to Parliamentary politics that proved vastly popular for many years. Much of the shift to a more conservative political tone that historians have noted in the *Punch* of the 1850s and 1860s can be traced to Brooks's growing influence.

Brooks joined another newcomer, **John Tenniel**, a classically-trained painter and book illustrator who had

been brought in at Jerrold's suggestion the year before to fill the gap left by the resignation of Richard Doyle. Best known today for his illustrations to Alice in Wonderland, Tenniel soon took over from Leech the execution of the Large Cut, and entirely made it his own with a gift for memorable iconic representations (John Bull, the British Lion, Britannia, the Fenian menace) and portraits of public figures (Disraeli, Bismarck), that has never been surpassed.

The last of the changes of the mid-1850s were the most profound: the sudden deaths, within a year of each other, of old comrades Gilbert à Beckett and Douglas Jerrold. À Beckett, on holiday with his family in Boulogne, was carried off by diphtheria on August 30, 1856, at the age of 45. Jerrold wrote a tender obituary in *Punch* commemorating his colleague's fifteen years of service to the magazine and his 'genial, manly spirit', a tribute that would furnish the inscription on à Beckett's tombstone in Highgate cemetery. Less than a year later, on the 8th of June, 1857, Jerrold himself died, the oldest member of the staff at 54. On his deathbed he gave Horace Mayhew a message to deliver to his friends at the *Punch* Table: 'Tell the dear boys that if I've ever wounded any of them, I've always loved them'. (A quietly productive but unexciting writer, Henry Silver, would be brought in to fill Jerrold's place. Although his own work was of little note, the diary Silver kept of the talk at the *Punch* Table has proven a rich source of information about the magazine.) The deaths of à Beckett and Jerrold left Mark Lemon, John Leech and Horace Mayhew as the only survivors at the Table of *Punch*'s founding generation. Yet the system they had helped to create, with the shrewd support and

encouragement of Bradbury and Evans, would guide *Punch* for generations to come.

### Triumphs and Transitions

*Punch* was never without rivals, and some of its most active ones emerged in the 1860s: Judy, Tomahawk, and, especially, Fun. The rivalry sharpened the magazine's satire, and even added to its contributors: just as *Man in the Moon* had supplied Shirley Brooks, so Fun yielded Francis Burnand, who joined *Punch* in 1863. A Cambridge man of immense energy, Burnand proved a master of burlesque and an inveterate punster. (He would live to become editor of the magazine from 1880 to 1906.) The death of John Leech in 1864, at the early age of 47, precipitated a crisis, with some readers and even some members of the staff concerned that the magazine could not be carried on without him. In the wake of that loss, George Du Maurier was brought in as an illustrator, later joining Charles Keene in doing the 'social cuts' for which Leech had been famous. Du Maurier's elegantly attired men and women took Leech's comedy of manners to a more refined, but no less ridiculous, social level; later, his pointed satires of the aesthetes of the 1880s fixed an indelible image of their affectations in the mind of many readers. Along with John Tenniel, whose mastery of the art of the political cartoon would be fully established in the public mind by such memorable cuts as 'The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger' (1857) and 'A Leap in the Dark' (1867), Burnand and Du Maurier, the rising stars of the 1860s, would largely come to define the tone and look of *Punch* in the remaining decades of the nineteenth century.

The proprietorship of the magazine also shifted with the times, while retaining strong ties to the past. In 1865 William Bradbury and Frederick Evans retired in favour of their sons. From that time forward, the well-established firm of art dealers, Thomas Agnew and Sons of Manchester, played a larger and larger role, the younger Bradbury having married Thomas's daughter, Laura. In 1872 the younger Evans was forced out, and William Hardwick Bradbury assumed management of Bradbury, Agnew & Co., with assistance from his able brother-in-law, William Agnew. The latter's Liberal opinions and more sophisticated understanding of the current art scene both had an impact on discussions around the *Punch* Table, and left their mark on the magazine. In 1890 the firm became a limited company, with William Agnew, already an M.P. and soon to be a baronet, as its chairman.

The long service of so many members of the staff of *Punch* made for considerable continuity. Shirley Brooks had acted as Mark Lemon's right hand for so long that at Lemon's death in 1870, the transition to Brooks's editorship was seamless. Among the achievements of that editorship was Brooks's encouragement of artist Linley Sambourne, who drew the decorative initials for the *Essence of Parliament* series. Sambourne would work on the magazine for the next forty years. When Brooks died suddenly in 1874, Tom Taylor succeeded him; not a man of lively fancy, Taylor relied on the effusions of Burnand and Du Maurier and others to carry the magazine forward. Under Burnand's quarter-century as editor, many of the more rambunctious traces of the old magazine's roots in tavern life were at last left behind; the staff

meetings were quieter, more orderly and perhaps more productive. The pen-portraits of Henry Lucy, who took over the Parliamentary beat that had been Brooks's specialty, were admirably illustrated by artist Harry Furniss, whose work had been rejected by Taylor but whom Burnand was quick to welcome to the magazine in 1880. Over his fourteen years of work for *Punch*, Furniss's drawings of politicians, including the elderly W. E. Gladstone, became enormously popular. Other contributors like F. Anstey, author of *Vice Versa*, added to the sprightliness that Burnand strove to revive. That undoubted comic masterpiece of late Victorian literature, *Diary of a Nobody*, by George and Weedon Grossmith, appeared as a serial in the magazine in 1888-89, and has never been out of print since. If the nineteenth century was the golden age of *Punch*, the twentieth century brought astonishing new talents and energies to the magazine, ranging from P. G. Wodehouse to Ronald Searle, and from A. A. Milne to Sir John Betjeman. To even begin to do justice to the life of the magazine in the modern era would require at least one more essay like this one.

### Conclusion

The letterpress of the magazine is a delightful and instructive resource whose enormous riches have always been comparatively neglected in favour of the illustrations; today, at last, both text and image are thoroughly explorable. To browse or search through the nineteenth century volumes of *Punch*, as we can now so readily do, is to be constantly called outward from its pages in a thousand directions, plunged into the dense and often puzzling detail of everyday middle-class cultural and political life in Victorian England as reflected in the distorting comic imaginations

of *Punch*'s writers and artists. From dustmen to bishops to policemen, from impertinent servant-girls to parliamentary windbags to simianised Irish radicals, *Punch* takes us to scenes of that life - the streets, the racetrack, the parlour, the schoolroom, the seaside - to witness a constantly shifting parade of distinctive figures interacting with one another. So, too, did the interaction of contributors and readers shape both the magazine and the ways in which its readers viewed and pondered the world around them.

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## Notes

[1] For further information about *Punch*'s competitors and comic art in the nineteenth century, see Brian Maidment, "Pencilings, Cuts and Cartoons: Punch and Early Victorian Comic Illustration", available elsewhere on this site.

[2] This is also referred to as the Big Cut by a number of scholars and academics

[3] The *Punch* office kept editorial ledgers that recorded who contributed to each issue. The author data from these ledgers is included in the *Punch Historical Archive*, allowing users to see for the first time who contributed specific pieces to the magazine.

# CITATION

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